

Simple and Effective Tips for Leading Change

Accelerate Achievement of Desired Results

Simple does not equal easy. If successfully leading change were easy the 75% to 80% of all change efforts that fail, or at best produce only mediocre results, would be much lower. In years past, to grow and capture market share, the big would eat the small. In today's 'commoditization economy' the game has changed significantly. Customers have more choices than ever. The battle to differentiate and stand out from the competition will only escalate. We are in a brawl with no rules, where the fast, flexible and agile will eat and spit out the slow, over-thinking and complacent. So, what are the keys to developing an agile organization that adapts to, embraces and institutes lasting key change strategies? Lessons learned over twenty five years point to five simple and effective change leadership principles.

Accelerated achievement of desired results can be accomplished through consistent focused attention over time on a few practical, pragmatic and memorable principles. However, it is a process and as such requires constant practice and application. The good news is these principles and skills can be learned, refined and perfected.

Intentional focus on these principles will ignite extraordinary results within your organization. Decades of research have identified five principles and practices that propel organizations forward to blast through the common barriers, obstacles, challenges and inertia that derail most change efforts. These principles are not complicated—they don't require an advanced degree or any specialized training. They are straightforward and accelerate achievement of desired change – to help you achieve what matters most. They are:

"The problem with common sense is that it is not that common."

-Mark Twain

- 1. Leadership and Management – The Correct Ratio is Crucial**
- 2. Becoming a Change Leader – Internalize versus Externalize**
- 3. True Urgency – Engage a Critical Mass**
- 4. The Power of Volunteerism**
- 5. Creating a Winnable Game**

Frequency and consistency with these practices is the key – not how well or skilled a leader may be with each of these. As leaders become deliberate and focused with these principles they strengthen their ability to lead and sustain crucial change efforts.

Leadership and Management – The Correct Ratio is Crucial

The term 'change-management' is more commonly used than 'change-leadership' and for good reason. The origin of the term change-management stems from the manner in which most change efforts have historically been 'project-managed' throughout the years. Management is a fundamental and needed element to achieve successful and lasting change. However, leadership is demonstrably more important. Dr. John Kotter (author of 18 best-selling books, including *Leading Change*) has spent decades researching transformational change. The data reveals a major contributing factor why a majority of large-scale transformational change efforts fail, or produce only mediocre results. The culprit? Managing, instead of leading change. Successful and lasting change initiatives require a heavy dose of leadership – 75% according to Kotter's research. Managing the change is a necessary component as well, but the ration proven to produce successful change is 75% leading and 25% managing. **Inspiring, motivating, engaging, encouraging, energizing, galvanizing, aligning and cultivating ownership and accountability result from leadership.** Without these critical beliefs, behaviors and attitudes, successful lasting change is nearly impossible to accomplish.

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The term 'change-management' itself is an oxymoron. Management is about the known (budgets, planning, problem solving, organizing, staffing, schedules, etc.) and change is about the unknown. The unknown cannot be managed. You manage what you know; you lead where you want to go. Top leaders understand that leadership is about inspiring, motivating, aligning, rewarding, recognizing and most importantly establishing a vision.



Change Task Force



Change Team

Change that will require shifts in the way that employees think, act and behave cannot be delegated to a task force or change-team. Senior leadership must be involved throughout the entire effort. Employees will tolerate what their leaders say; they will ultimately act on what they see their leaders do. When senior leadership communicates a new vision or desired change, and then delegates that effort to a change team, the message sent to the rest of the organization is 'this is not very important.' The notion of senior leaders delegating change, not playing an active daily role and expecting desired results evokes one of my favorite factoids – *the human being is the only living creature with the capacity and propensity for self-deception*. Stop kidding yourselves. Task forces are typically ignored and change teams have little to no impact without senior leaders taking an active role throughout the change effort. When senior leaders are not involved change efforts nearly always fail.

A strong focus on 'leading change' is pivotal to achieving successful and lasting change. Leaders must paint a clear picture of the future for all stakeholders. A picture of success centered on the opportunities and possibilities that will benefit everyone. Only strong leadership can blast through the inertia that exists in many organizations. The whitewaters of change are here to stay. In today's competitive landscape we have moved beyond the period of episodic change and are now and forever forward will be faced with continuous change. Organizations that will thrive in this new world of work will be those that are able to achieve big bold change. Incremental nudgings and coaxings – or *managing change* – will never engage a critical mass. Bold action is required. To engage that critical mass, to achieve what matters most, requires *leadership*.

Change requires much more than execution (or managing) of the strategy. Gaining, ownership, alignment, accountability and voluntary contributions of discretionary performance from employees demands more than a project plan. Project management is an important element in the change process, but truly transforming entails more.

Becoming a Change Leader – Internalize versus Externalize

Leadership is a choice. Leadership is not about your title, how many people report to you, the size of your office or what is on your business card. Leadership is the congruency between what you say and what you do. It is about how you live your life and go about your job. Leadership is modeling the way and walking the talk. Being fully cognizant that your every movement, every word, and every action is being thoroughly scrutinized. Understanding that the way others view you – your 'brand' – is a by-product of the experiences you have created for those around you. Every action you take is an experience for those watching you. More importantly, those experiences are developing beliefs about you. As a leader, are you developing beliefs within your employees that will move your organization forward, or are you fostering beliefs that will impede progress?

How are you viewed in the eyes of your colleagues?

How are you viewed in the eyes of your boss?

How do your employees see you?

Change begins one leader at a time, and leaders exist at every level. It is essential for leaders to model the change and the behaviors desired from the rest of the organization. It is silly to think that others will change if you are unwilling to do so yourself. Tolstoy stated, "Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself." Do not expect others to change unless you do so first. Or as Gandhi so eloquently stated, "Be the change you wish to see in the world."

It is imperative to model the behaviors you wish to see in others. You cannot 'make' someone change. However, you can model the way and encourage others to 'choose' to change.

True Urgency – Engage a Critical Mass

Human beings are 'wired' to cling to what is familiar and comfortable. Yet change is inherently about the unknown and requires shifts in behaviors (and often habit). At the same time, large-scale change sends about 80% of your employees into some degree of discomfort, unease, anxiety, stress, fear, pain or denial. This poses a significant challenge for leaders.

A heightened sense of urgency among a critical mass of employees around a common opportunity or objective is vital prior to any attempt to implement change. When change is 'pushed' out on employees, most often they will push back. That is human nature. When employees do not see the reason or need for change, or understand the compelling business case, they often fear or resent change. Even worse, they may deliberately sabotage or derail change efforts.

Often senior leaders identify a new opportunity, goal or strategy that will propel the organization to the next level of greatness. As leaders, this opportunity and the compelling business case as to why becomes crystal clear. Once this direction or strategy is identified, in most cases mid level managers and supervisors are tasked with making the change a reality. These managers begin to implement tactics and strategies to advance progress toward the desired outcomes. What they typically discover is push back, cynicism, apathy and lack of engagement from those they lead.

In order to break through this resistance consider this one simple proven notion. Opportunity before strategy. By first creating urgency and alignment around the opportunity or possibilities, leaders will find they are able to connect to not only the head (logic) of those they lead, but more importantly to the heart (passion). Tactics and strategies will never engage the heart. Lack of creating urgency is another major de-railer of change efforts. It is vital that leaders gain buy-in and engagement. That is only achieved by engaging the heart. This results in voluntary contributions of discretionary performance. Employees will tap into their full potential and go above and beyond when they are fully engaged.

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When we speak of creating urgency among a critical mass, we are not suggesting to spending an inordinate amount of time gaining consensus amongst everyone. Leaders must leverage those that 'see what we see' as leaders (the opportunity and the possibilities) to encourage others to join us. In other words, develop and foster a 'want-to' culture versus a 'have-to' culture. **(See graphic to right)**

A great example of this is Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. That speech created true urgency and engaged a critical mass. The civil rights legislation that followed a few years later provided the strategy and the tactics to accomplish the opportunity. Do you feel things may have been different the day of the speech if Dr. King spent the time assigning tasks, assembling change teams, and introducing flow charts and processes for change? That speech focused on the opportunity. It was the vision of a better tomorrow.

Getting a critical mass to see the opportunity that you see is not easy. But there are a few key practices that can help. The first – you can never ever over communicate the opportunity or vision. The second is, you can never ever over communicate the opportunity or vision. You must resist the temptation to jump into execution of strategy before you have created true urgency.

Take a look and read the paragraph in the blue box to the right. Now go back to it and quickly (20 seconds or less) without using a pen or touching the paper count the number of letter F's you see. Having facilitated this simple exercise hundreds of times with groups ranging from ten to two-thousand, the result is that most often, one quarter of the group counts 3, one quarter counts 4, one quarter counts 5 and one quarter counts 6. By the way, there are six. What are the learnings here?

FINISHED FILES ARE THE RESULT OF YEARS OF SCIENTIFIC STUDY COMBINED WITH THE EXPERIENCE OF MANY YEARS.

The first learning is that human beings will cling on to their truths. It is difficult for people to let go of what they believe to be true in their mind. In other words, if you initially counted 4 F's, it is very difficult for your brain to allow you to see anything other than 4. Four has become your truth – your reality – and you will cling to it. Think about that as it relates to the key point above regarding communicating change. Employees will cling to what they know – their realities. If the 'truth' or 'reality' for your employees is that there is no need to change, what impact will that have on your efforts? Simply communicating your change vision or picture of success to launch and effort will not provide the thrust needed to engage a critical mass or create enough urgency to assure success. The message must be communicated and reinforced often and through a variety of channels.

The Power of Volunteerism



Change requires a large and diverse number of committed personnel and is not achieved by appointing members to a change team or task force. Inclusion, trust and empowerment are essential. Change occurs best when powered by passion and intrinsic motivation. Change is sustained when people volunteer to help. A "want-to" culture trumps a "have-to" culture. By engaging both the head and the heart, employees begin to see how the change can help them, their team, their department and the organization. They quickly move from understanding, to believing, to buying in and most importantly engaging.

These volunteers begin to identify the top opportunities and projects that will advance the change effort. Teams begin to form naturally and choose to focus on a variety of efforts to accelerate the desired change. Once these teams complete a project or break down a barrier, they select the next most important project to accelerate the change. Employees from the pool of volunteers select the projects and initiatives they have most passion for, or where they believe that can add value. Nobody is being told that they have to do anything. This process ultimately creates a highly adaptable organization that complements the existing hierarchical structure

This process must begin with leaders creating a vivid picture of opportunities ahead that connect to the head and the heart. Exemplary leadership is critical.

Creating a Winnable Game

Driving a strategy that requires change in human behavior is the most difficult challenge a leader will ever face. Flawless execution of behavioral change strategies requires Focus, Leverage, Employee Engagement and Accountability. Most leaders understand these elements are necessary, yet 80% of all strategies that require change in human behavior fail -- or at best, produce only mediocre results.

Frank and Ernest



Employees are at their best, and most engaged in their work when they believe they are playing a winnable game. A very simple premise, but yet so often overlooked by leaders. The highest standard a leader can aspire to is, "am I creating a winnable game for those I lead?" Are your folks playing to win, or playing not to lose? This is not a subtle issue. Are employees coming to work every day trying to keep their heads above water or are they focused on what matters most? Do they know the rules to the game (how to win and what success looks like) or is it cloudy and vague?

Communication and clarity is just one of the key reasons execution of strategy often breaks down and why a winnable game is not created. Lack of clarity creates confusion, misunderstandings, anxiety, lack of alignment, inability to take accountability, frustration, stress, and much more. Data collected over the past 20 plus years reveals that 90% of employees are not crystal clear on what is expected of them, or of the most important goals for their team or organization. That gives rise to an important question. How can anyone choose to take accountability to help your team or organization achieve a result they did not know existed?

If you were to ask a random group of 100 people in your organization to state the 'must-achieve desired results' your team or organization must realize, what percentage would be able to recite them exactly? What percentage would know how you are measuring them? What percentage would know where you stand today in relation to the desired metric (end result)? How many would be able to make the link between what they 'do' and how it impacts the desired results? Experience points to fewer than 10% would be able to answer those questions with precision. Employees cannot 'take' accountability to achieve what is not clear, unknown or vague.

One of the primary obstacles that impedes achievement of desired results and flawless execution of vital and important strategies is the day job. That is, the tsunami of daily activity that must be addressed in order to keep the business operating. That tsunami is urgent and must be acted upon now. Most often, the new strategies

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and goals are important, but often get suffocated by the daily work. When urgency meets importance, urgency almost always wins. One simple way to help improve focus on the desired results and the new and important goals is to create a mindset that the achievement of the desired results 'is your job.' Often employees limit what they do based upon their 'job description.' Doing only what was written in their job description or orally explained by their manager. The reality is that we only hire employees to help the company achieve its desired results - not just to focus on daily activity. So, their 'job' is 'achieving the desired results.' It creates a mindset that 'my job is broader than what is on my job description.'

Grandiose ideas, intoxicating possibilities and big opportunities draw out passion, engagement, creativity and morale. Employees are most engaged in their work when they are involved in meaningful work and believe they are playing a winnable game. How effective is your leadership team at creating that winnable game?

In Summary - The Focus Must Be:

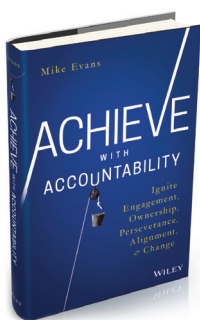
More

- Opportunity Focus
- Develop a Want To Mindset
- Cultivate a Pull and Desire
- Urgency – Choose to Engage
- Solutions Focus
- Commitment
- Focus on Results
- Keep Moving Mentality

Less

- Tactics Focus
- Force, or a Have To Mindset
- Pushing Out or Thrust Upon
- Just Do It - Demand
- Problems Focus
- Compliance
- Focus on my Job
- Stop or Wait Mindset

About The Author:



Mike Evans is a best-selling author/speaker and Managing Partner of QuestMark, and has developed a unique perspective from 20+ years of working alongside a star studded list of world-renowned thought leaders, including: Dr. John Kotter, Dr. Stephen Covey, Tom Peters, Jim Kouzes, Hyrum Smith, Steve Farber and Chris McChesney. Mike served in senior leadership and consulting roles with Kotter International, FranklinCovey, and Tom Peters Company.

In addition to being a leading authority on ***Unleashing Personal and Organizational Accountability, clients rely upon Mike's solutions to; Accelerate Change, Shape Their Optimal Culture, Flawlessly Execute Key Strategies, Ignite Leadership Capacity at all Levels, Amplify Employee Engagement and Cultivate Peak Performance.***

31 of Fortune 50 are clients. Mike works with organizations around the globe and in virtually every arena, from the tech sector to financial services, manufacturing, health care, hospitality, entertainment, retail, and the US Government. Clients include: Intel, Capital One, Apple, PNC Bank, Pfizer, The United States Navy, Fidelity Investments, Johnson & Johnson, Symantec, Cigna Corporation, BNY Mellon, Oracle, Astra Zeneca, Baxter International Inc., Shell Oil, Cargill, American Airlines, DuPont USA, and NASA.