"Will you discuss with our team when to make a change or pivot? Can you help us determine if we should move on from a current strategy?"

To be certain that I understood Maureen's question, I asked, "You want to know if during the keynote if I can discuss with the team when to make a change or pivot?" Maureen quickly replied with an emphatic "yes."

My immediate inclination was to respond in turn with a confident, "yes." However, my mind was quickly flooded with questions and a need to learn a lot more to make certain my interpretation of the question was accurate. What initially seemed to be an undemanding question, was swiftly becoming more complex. To answer Maureen's question precisely, I had to know oodles more:

- Was the question related to a change effort that has already been made, one that is underway, and may not be producing desired results? Perhaps the 'strategy' (or change effort) was not the right one and the question is more about when and if they should change direction?
- Was the question about a change effort that is underway, but there is resistance among supporters, sponsors and/or employees?
- Was the question pertaining to determining if a new change should be adopted, even though the 'current state' is producing results (financial, operational, employee, customer, etc.) that are acceptable, but they may want to get ahead of the competition?
- Was the question instead how to decide upon a new change effort and create alignment, ownership, engagement and accountability at all levels prior to launch?
- Was the question regarding a 'behavioral change strategy' that would require employees at all levels to voluntarily change behavior, thinking, beliefs and/or habits (ex: move from a transactional salesforce to a consultative salesforce, improved customer service, increase quality, engagement, etc.)?
- Was the question regarding a 'stroke of the pen change strategy' (ex: new hours, new healthcare, new marketing efforts, new parking assignments, etc.) that most often only require someone with authority and with the budget to implement?
- Was there a desire to avoid the death-knell of complacency (Think - Kodak, Blockbuster, Nokia, Blackberry, K-Mart...)?

With some additional probing and data collection we were able to identify exactly what Maureen and her team wanted to accomplish. We all learned that what seemed like a simple question assumed understood by all on the conference call was in fact not. Gaining clarity allowed for a custom solution for Maureen's team designed for their unique situation and needs.

SOME ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS ON CHANGE

Driving a strategy that requires change in human behavior may be the most difficult challenge a leader can face. What do top leaders do to gain voluntary contributions of discretionary performance from those they lead? How do they create alignment, ownership and accountability for desired results at every level of an organization? How do they ensure that key strategies are not slowly suffocated, but instead produce extraordinary results? *In this 'new world of work' (The Age of Disruption) leveraging ideas, speed, talent, distinction and leadership will separate top performing companies from the laggards*.

When it comes to implementation of new technologies, change efforts or critical strategies, accessing these pivotal factors, as well as rapidly engaging a critical mass by creating **engagement, focus, accountability and unleashing innovation and creativity** is essential to success and sustained impact.

A Critical Key to Success: Moving The Middle

No matter the strategy or initiative, no matter how critical or mundane, there will always be employees that fall into one of three categories:

- **Resisters/Nevers** (Will never jump on board. Either they can't or they won't)
- **Potentials/Maybes** (Too busy with the day-to-day work to help. Caught up in the minutiae of the day to day tsunami of work)
- **Models** (Will walk on broken glass for you)

One of the keys to accelerating flawless execution of strategy is to move as many 'potentials' (see diagram) further to the right into the 'model' category.
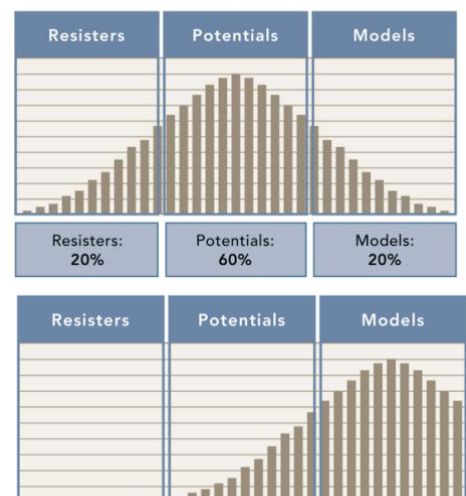
The greatest opportunity is with the potentials. The resisters never come along or jump on board. In fact, that is the group that often heavily recruits the 'potentials' to join them. When leadership can move the 'bell' righter and tighter, achievement of desired results accelerates.

Simply 'telling' people to change without engaging them yields poor results. Both the hearts and minds of employees must be engaged, and people need to feel that they are playing a winnable game. Data collected over the past 25 years indicates that employees are '*most engaged in their work*' when they believe they are playing a game they can win.

They need the rules of the game:

- Where are we going and why?
- What are the outcomes that, when achieved, would scream out, "We did it!"
- Where do we stand against those desired outcomes as of today?
- When do we need to get to where we must be?

Deprived of the information above, employees cannot make a conscious decision as to what they can do today to help move the needle in the right direction. Lacking this information, most employees default to a focus on **'their job' (activity)** rather than a focus on helping achieve the results that matter most to the organization. In short, compliance versus commitment.

Stop Burning Out Top Performers and Rewarding the Resisters:

When you have something that **must** be done, think back to the 'Bell Shaped Curve', to which group do you hand the ball? Most often it is the 'Models' – your top performers. What happens to a winner when you put them in an unwinnable game? Often, many leave, give up or burnout. If you are a winner and the best you can expect is to tread water or simply survive, how does that impact your mindset and level of engagement?

5 STAGES OF BEHAVIOR-BASED STRATEGIES

RESULTS

5 Habits
4 Individual Ownership
3 Team Accountability
Leadership Emphasis
2 Drive to Improve
1

The following model **(see diagram to the right)** depicts how organizations have achieved exceptional results. Once a leadership team has decided upon a high priority desired result they wish to focus to achieve, it then becomes the focus of leadership.

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However, nothing happens until leadership engages a team, or several teams, to take accountability to achieve that desired result.

Those teams most often must do something different (think, act, behave, believe). They must create shifts in the way people think, act and behave in order to realize the desired result. What is the definition of insanity? When striving for a different or loftier result, will that desired outcome be realized if we continue thinking, acting and doing things the way we always have?

When team members move from team/group accountability to taking individual accountability and ownership that is when organizations realize and exponential spike in results. Through repetition these behaviors become habits **(top of model).**

Creating a *culture of accountability and flawless execution* is all about creating shifts in the way your employees think and act. The way your employees think and act is your culture. That culture is producing all of your business results (Financial, Operational, Employee, Customer).

SHAPING AND CREATING YOUR OPTIMAL CULTURE BEGINS WITH:

1) The senior leadership team creating clarity on the top two to four most important results (goals) that the organization must achieve in the next 12-24 months. These desired results must meet three criteria: *meaningful*, *measurable*, and *memorable*.

2) Once the desired results are agreed upon, the senior leadership team must be 100% aligned and all members must take individual ownership and accountability to consistently communicate a singular message to the organization. This 'business case' must be crafted to connect to the head and the heart of employees at all levels. Employees must be able to see how this will make their job easier, life better, help their team, help their family, further their career, benefit the organization, etc. *Employees will jump on board for a cause. Rarely will they do so for a metric*.

3) The third step is to define what the optimal culture would look like in order to achieve these desired results.

- **How would you see people behave?**
- **What beliefs would they hold?**
- **What would they be doing differently?**
- **What are the key gaps in behaviors and beliefs that are impeding progress toward the desired optimal culture?**

4) Leaders at all levels must model they way. They must internalize and utilize proven, pragmatic tools, principles and methodologies to create shifts in the way that employees think, act and behave in order to support and ultimately realize the optimal culture they defined.

The process must start at the base of the model, and getting to top is not easy. All of the steps take discipline and focus. However, the most difficult transition is moving from level two to level three.

Often change efforts stall after steps one and two, defining and talking about the 'thing' (The Drive to Improve and Leadership Emphasis). Leaders find that moving to level three (Team Accountability) is much more challenging than anticipated. They discover roadblocks, barriers and challenges that are often difficult to overcome.

In many cases, leadership receives pushback from the workforce, or is sidetracked with unexpected events that cause these efforts to be placed on hold or delayed. In many cases employees, teams and entire workforces learn to *'wait out the new initiative'* because they have seen this in the past. Other issues that often stall teams from taking accountability include:

- **Interpretation,**
- **Clarity,**
- **Commitment,**
- **Ownership,**
- **Conflicting priorities,**

- **Lack of alignment,**
- **Too busy,**
- **New priorities,**
- **Communication,**
- **Cultural Baggage and much more.**

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Let's say arrow one below (*under Team Accountability*) is initiative A. When we think back to the Bell Shaped Curve, what group is most likely to jump on board? Right, it's the 'Models.'

Now consider, for some reason Plan A does not materialize and we move to plan B. So we shelf Plan A and move to Plan B, **which groups did we reward (Resisters & Potentials) and which did we punish (Models)**?

By the time we get to plans C, D, E, F, are your top performers more or less likely to jump on board? They are disgruntled, frustrated and ready to jump ship. Look out for an exodus of top talent. As you get deeper into the alphabet, we are teaching the organization to wait out change and all future initiatives. **Every new initiative or strategy becomes progressively more difficult to execute and implement.**

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO MOVE THE MIDDLE?

The key principles to flawless execution of critical strategies and change efforts equip leadership with the ability to connect to the head and heart of employees residing in the 'potential' portion of the bell shaped curve. That is the group where the opportunity exists to accelerate achievement of desired results exists.

When employees in the 'potential' category self-select to move into the 'model' category, organizations realize dramatic and positive impact on results. Within the 'potential' category, there is a continuum of engagement that employees reside. The four key principles equip leaders with the skills and ability to connect with employees at all points along that continuum.

Key One: FOCUS – For some, simply creating extreme clarity on what is most important draws them into the 'model' category. This is not as simple as it may seem. Thirty plus years of research reveals that more than 90% of senior leadership teams fail to clearly define and communicate what is most important to the degree that employees at all levels are crystal clear. These desired results must also meet three requirements:
1) Meaningful **2)** Measurable **3)** Memorable
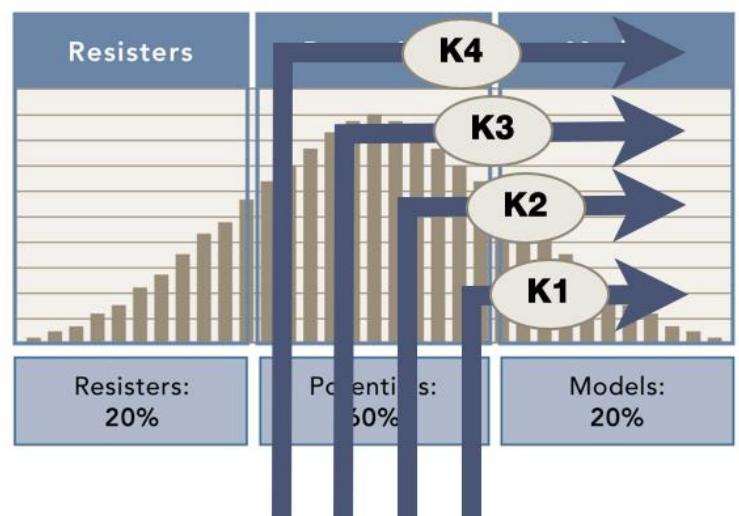
Key Two: LEVERAGE – As you move deeper into the 'potential' category, your focus requires more than being crystal clear on what is most important and the consistent communication of those desired results. This group needs to discern the actions and behaviors that will ensure that the desired results are achieved. They may need guidance on defining the *leading indicators* that will produce the defined goals. These *'lead measures'* must be both *predictive and influenceable*.

Key Three: ENGAGEMENT – Employees are most engaged in their work when they believe they are playing a game they can win. Once the desired results have been clearly defined and communicated (Key 1), and employees are clear on what actions and behaviors are predictive and influenceable (Key 2) that will lead to the **desired result (Lag Measure)**, it is important they know the score.

They must know if the team is winning or losing. They must be able to discern if the **actions they chose (Lead Measures)** are moving the team in the desired direction. If they are not, the team must choose new Lead Measures that will propel the team toward the desired outcome. If team members do not know where we stand (the score) how can they make a conscious decision as to what must be done and how they will contribute today?

Key Four: ACCOUNTABILITY – Some in the 'potential' category are quite close to being drawn into the 'resister' category. The 'resisters' are often heavily recruiting the 'potentials' to join them. That is why creating a cadence of accountability (Key 4) is vitally important. By establishing processes and systems that integrate these key principles into the DNA of the organization, those in the deep end of the 'potential' category, and at times, some in the 'resister' category, draw their own conclusion that they must get onboard, or self-select out.

## SOME BEST PRACTICES FOR LEADING CHANGE:

<u>More</u>	<u>Less</u>
Opportunity Focus	Tactics Focus
Develop a Want To Mindset	Force, or a Have To Mindset
Cultivate a Pull and Desire	Pushing Out or Thrust Upon
Urgency – Choose to Engage	Just Do It - Demand
Solutions Focus	Problems Focus
Commitment	Compliance
Focus on Results	Focus on my Job
Keep Moving Mentality	Stop or Wait Mindset

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About The Speaker/Author:

Mike Evans is an award-winning author/speaker 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 executive leadership and consulting roles with Kotter International, FranklinCovey, and Tom Peters Company.
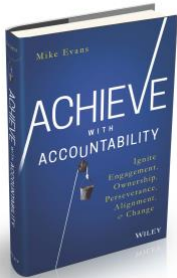
In addition to being a leading authority on *Unleashing Personal and Organizational Accountability*, clients rely upon Mike's solutions to; *Accelerate Change, Shape Their Optimal Culture, Flawlessly Execute Key Strategies, Ignite Leadership Capacity at all Levels, Amplify Employee Engagement, Thrive and Excel in the Age of Disruption, Embrace The Role of CEO of Your Life, Career and Destiny, 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, Caterpillar, PNC Bank, Cargill, Pfizer, General Mills, H&R Block, The United States Navy, John Deere, Fidelity Investments, Monsanto, Google, US Steel, Rite Aid, Agilent Technologies, Johnson & Johnson, Symantec, Cigna Corporation, ITPA, US Department of Commerce, BNY Mellon, Oracle, Astra Zeneca, Baxter International Inc., Shell Oil, UPMC, Citrus Valley Health, McAfee, American Airlines, Masonite, Novartis, Ernst & Young, ACE Hardware, DuPont USA, Quest Diagnostics, State Farm, BP Oil, Heinz USA, NAFCU, and NASA.