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**WILLINGNESS:
THE KEY TO MOTIVATING PEOPLE**

Athletes have run millions of miles inspired by one of the most famous, compelling slogans of modern advertising: “Just Do It.” Too bad it isn’t that easy in business. While slogans are nice, we know that things only get done when people are truly motivated. Slogans capture sentiment, but they don’t create it.

In order for any enterprise to succeed, there must be consent, or willingness; a collective view that an idea is good. Once this happens, the group moves to a future focus—when they agree, they want to take action.

Leaders don’t need slogans, but sometimes they might wish they had psychology degrees; a way of understanding human nature so they inspire others. Willingness creates momentum and helps people execute. But makes diverse groups of people in an organization want to achieve a common goal?

A simple way to explain willingness is this—willingness is created when people clearly comprehend what to do and why. This means leaders must know how to articulate a vision, and explain why it is true. There is a simple three-step process to articulating what to do and why. These three steps are: state the facts, explain the logic, and make the emotional connection.

Let’s say you have to make a persuasive presentation. You start with the facts. Facts must be relevant to the audience, and they must be self-evident or provable. You must have trusted sources, testimonials, credible information. And, the facts must actually matter to your audience.

Think about the way you make the decision to buy a new car. The salesman may give you 40 reasons why a mini-van is practical, but if you want to speed down Route 66 in a red, 2004 sports car with leather seats, you will not be convinced.

You may think this kind of information is presentations 101 – but one of the biggest mistakes we see leaders make is telling audiences what they want them to hear, not what the audience considers relevant. A presenter who hasn’t taken the time to analyze the audience, whether it’s employees, clients, customers, or the media, has little chance to persuade them to do anything.

One multi-national company was facing tough questions about a change in direction that forced out some top-quality people in the organization. Leaders were feeling defensive, and they sounded that way when they were on the phone with their customers. What they didn't realize was their defensive posture about the business decision was irrelevant to most customers, who simply wanted to know how it affected them. By refocusing on what customers cared about, the company rewrote a talking points memo, sent out letters to customers that satisfied concerns and made the whole mess go away in a few short weeks.

The second element in creating willingness is explaining the logic – A causes B, and that results in C. There are countless types of logic, but most people intrinsically get it. They use logic to connect provable facts with recommended actions. Logic allows a group to collectively debate a situation, review possible courses of action and make a decision about whether to go along with an idea. This process takes place whether or not leaders want it to happen; people discuss it anyway over email or coffee, and decide amongst themselves whether they are willing.

The third element of willingness is emotional connection. People may listen to the facts and logic of an idea and still not be willing to move forward. Emotional attachment to the leader and the idea is critical, especially to sustain action. They must not only see the facts and truth of a situation, they must trust the leader. The emotional connection to the leader and idea become a sustaining force in willingness, especially when they meet obstacles.

In order to succeed, you have to “take people with you” on the journey. Most people in professional life are longing for a reason bigger than a paycheck to do what they do. But, they must see what you see, feel what you feel. You must move them at the emotional level; if you know how to get people excited about your ideas and give them a reason to believe in you, you have an unstoppable force called willingness.

The value of willingness in an organization cannot be overestimated. Willingness primes the pump of the organization. Just as a runner cannot win a race without warming up his muscles and ensuring his body is prepared for a grueling race, people cannot grind through the steps necessary to achieve long term goals until they are mentally primed.

How do you know when you have willingness in the organization? You can't gauge it by the applause. How many times a day do employees go to meetings, clap in approval and then head to the water cooler to dissect all of its flaws? This process is unavoidable – people need to evaluate the facts, discuss the logic and make up their own minds after they leave the meeting. They simply won't devote themselves to a project or cause until they have the opportunity to decide for themselves.