

## **Fully embracing “Authentic Engagement” improves John Kotter’s “accelerate” approach to change**

John Kotter has upgraded his 8 Steps [1] for bringing about change with his 8 Accelerators and dual operating systems [2]. Kotter’s 8 Steps are widely used, e.g., according to Booz&Co., most business transformations use some form of John Kotter’s eight steps.[3] Kotter’s “accelerate” approach is a significant improvement over his “8 step” approach, and is also likely to be widely used. One important improvement is the emphasis on engagement. However, there is room for achieving an even higher level of engagement, and thereby adding to both the speed of change and the likelihood of success. Here’s why and how.

Let’s begin with an observation: We (humans) go the “extra mile” to achieve desired results and work as team if we become and are motivated to stay “**authentically engaged**”, i.e.,

- a. Believe in what is to be achieved (does the need or opportunity make sense)
- b. Have been involved in determining how the result is to be achieved
- c. Feel that everyone is working to achieve the same end-in-mind (and feel that it’s a win-win for all)

We become emotionally involved and committed to achieving the desired results. We share our enthusiasm with others. Others join and get involved. Network marketers understand this.

Our experience is that **there are opportunities for improving two of Kotter’s 8 accelerators by fully embracing authentic engagement**:

- Expanding the scope of Accelerator #4 from focusing on “communicating for buy-in” to authentically engaging for buy-in. Authentic engagement is achieved through a combination of informing (communicating), consulting, collaborating and empowering (to make decisions).
- Incorporating cultural strengths and weaknesses in the strategies for change, rather than “institutionalizing strategic changes in the culture” as per Accelerator #8. Achieving authentic engagement requires being candid and addressing cultural barriers to change (e.g., behaviors, attitudes and trust), right from the start. Furthermore, Booz&Co. conducted a survey in 2013 that suggests a strong correlation between the success of change programs and leveraging culture in the change process. [3]

Kotter proposes “dual operating systems” for accelerating change, one operates the business and the second changes the business. **The dual operating systems approach is brilliant but can be improved by fully embracing authentic engagement**: Rather than recruiting volunteers to simply help implement already finalized change strategies, our experience is to begin by asking volunteers to critique the proposed strategies. Their input contributes to addressing operational challenges, developing authentic engagement and accelerating change. Of course, rejected suggestions need to be explained in order to sustain engagement.

John Kotter has already demonstrated that his accelerate approaches helps companies become and remain successful – based on his success with clients. The improvements presented here are based on our experience in leading and managing change during the past ten years. They do not diminish Kotter’s “accelerator approach” but, rather, enhance it. It’s all about what Dwight Eisenhower once said about leadership: “The art of getting others to do what you want done because they want to do it”. Gandhi and Mandela were masters at achieving this.

### References

1. John Kotter, The Heart of Change, 2002
2. John Kotter, Accelerating, Harvard Business Review, November 2012
3. DeAnne Aguirre, Rutger von Post, and Micah Alpern, Culture’s Role in Enabling Organizational Change, November 2013 (a Booz&Co article that is available on the web)