

Transcription - Kevin Eikenberry Part 1

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.

Today we are joined by Kevin Eikenberry from the US and I will give you the abridged version of his introduction because he's pretty impressive when you read the full introduction. That will be on the website for those of you who would like more information about Kevin.

Kevin Eikenberry is a world-renowned leadership and remote work thought leader, a multiple-time best-selling author, speaker, consultant, trainer, coach, leader, learner, husband and father, not necessarily in that order. Kevin is the Chief Potential Officer, which I love as a phrase, of the Kevin Eikenberry Group, a leadership and learning consulting company that has been helping organisations, teams and individuals reach their potential since 1993, and the co-founder of the Remote Leadership Institute formed in 2014.

Kevin's specialties include leadership, remote/hybrid work and leadership, teams and team work, organisational culture, facilitating change, organisational learning and more. Kevin's philosophy in business and in life is that every person and every organisation has extraordinary potential. Investments of time, energy, focus and money are required for that potential to be realised. He believes learning is an active ongoing process, not a passive one-time event. Learning work and life should be fun and if we are doing it right, work and learning is played.

He has a string of accolades, has worked with organisations of all types and sizes and leaders from at least 43 countries around the world. Kevin has developed hundreds of learning events, he's a popular instructor on LinkedIn and a best-selling author, as I said earlier, as well as a sought after keynote speaker. Kevin also writes, "Unleashing Your Remarkable Potential", a weekly email publication, read worldwide since 2004, to assist organisations and individuals in turning their potential into desired results, as well as a weekly LinkedIn newsletter "Remarkable Results." He has a leadership and learning blog, he is regularly recognised as one of the best leadership bloggers in the world. His podcast, The Remarkable Leadership Podcast, has hosted hundreds of guests since July 2016 and boasts listeners in over 90 countries.

I will say for our listeners, we've already claimed the title, we know that we've been going here longer than Kevin, so he's waving his hands in the air.

I'm bowing, bowing to you guys. We should have given you a different bio, it didn't have to be the one my mom wrote, we could have a better bio!

Kevin and his family, live in Indianapolis, Indiana. Growing up on a Michigan farm, Kevin says he learned some of his most important leadership lessons working with his father. Kevin earned a degree, and I'm not going to say the initials because in this country, the initials that were in the bio, mean something very different, (well, it means something else here too) he's got his degree with honors, let's say, from Purdue University, collects antique John Deere tractors, of which I have a couple on the farm here, is an avid reader and loves his family and his Boilermakers. I'm assuming that the Boilermakers, because it's got a capital B, is either a football or a hockey team.

It's that sports teams from Purdue where I went to school. And that is way more everybody than you need to know. So now the first episode of this show is over. We'll look back next week.

Thank you for finding time to join us, Kevin. We are indeed very interested to hear what you've got to say. We did send Kevin some questions, as we do with all of our guests. And the first one is about leaders or managers, what do we need going forward? And for those of you who are continuous listeners, you will know that we have just finished a series where we talked about the difference between a manager and a leader, so that was what triggered this question. We thought Kevin's going to be the next interesting person that can talk to us about this, is there a difference, first of all, between leaders and managers? And what do we need for leaders, not for managers, going forward?

I haven't listened to the last episode so I don't know where you guys landed, but I will tell you this, that I believe that people who in English language, whether it's, wherever in the world that we use the English language, we tend to have these these two words that we use almost like synonyms, manager and leader. And if you Google those two things, a lot of times you'll see stuff like management bad, leadership good. I don't think that's the answer. I think all of us that have that kind of role, have both of those things to do.

I believe we, in very short, we manage things and lead people and that managing is a part of, a very important part of, our role, but relatively an easier part of our role. There's much more likely clear distinctions about some ideas, about how to do certain things and there's, it's a less complex part of our role, but both are super important. So there's my answer to that first half of the question.

It's good because what we came to the conclusion that, in the progression of a career, people become a manager. Over time, they transform into this leader, but it's that transformation that is not focused on in terms of skilling them up into being a better leader.

Too often there isn't even enough in that first transition, right? From what we would call, from one of my books, from bud to boss, right, from being a peer to being a supervisor, leader, manager, whatever word you want to use there. And I'm not sure we do that largely, as well as as we could, but yeah, I agree with that. So what do we need now is the second part of your question?

I would say, well, I just wrote a book called Flexible Leadership. So I suppose the right answer is, well, leaders need to be more flexible. Let's be clear about what I mean by that. What I mean by that is people might say, hey, flexible sounds good, but then they might say, but wait a minute, aren't I supposed to be stable, consistent? Aren't people supposed to know what they're getting from me? Like how Kevin, how do you juxtapose? Isn't that paradoxical? And I would say, well, in your mind's eye, think of a tree, not like a sapling, but a tree that's, you know, 10, 15, 20, 30 or more years old. And you would say, well, that's stable and that's secure and it's not moving. It's rooted, right, which makes it stable. But that same tree, if there's any breeze at all, you know, it's also flexible, it's pliant, it's movable. So it is both stable, consistent and flexible. And I believe that's a metaphor for what we need to be as leaders. We need to be rooted in our values, in our principles, in the principles of

human behavior, human dynamics, etc. We need to be rooted in the mission, purpose of our organization, and we need to be flexible in how we, and that simple metaphor, I believe, says something really important that most many people miss, and that is that too often we want to think about the world as well, we're either this or we're that. That it's. That's an either or world and I would propose, just like I already said about managing and leading, that it's a both and words, right, that we can be both consistent, stable and flexible, that we can be both a manager and a leader.

And that ultimately for us to be more effective leaders in a world that's changing, that is uncertain, that is hard to look much further ahead than than the headlights on our vehicle at night, that we have to be ready to adapt and flex our approach as we understand the context in which we live. In fact, I would say to you that the antidote for uncertainty is flexibility.

Very early in your, in your what we saw through the bio, you identified leaders and leadership by hybrid and remote teams. What made you focus on that so, essentially, so early, so before the rest of the world decided that they needed to have that sort of flexibility, shall we say?

Yeah, we started doing work in that area around 2013, 2014 is when we started the Institute and then we wrote a book called The Long Distance Leader in 2017 long before maybe it was 2018, maybe it was 18 now, but it was long before a pandemic and lockdowns and all that stuff. And really, if you look at it then, we already had some people working at a distance, at least some of the time and we knew because that's my team, my team has been hybrid, mostly really remote for almost my entire existence, certainly since I've had employees. And so we brought what we learned and what we shared with clients together around that, recognizing that not everything about leadership changes when you're doing it at distance, but the things that change are really important, like some of the roots, didn't change, haven't changed, won't change and yet the nuance, the difference, what is different matters a lot. You know, I think the interesting thing about all that now is that everyone sort of said, oh yeah, we had to do that, we had to do that. Some organizations took that change really seriously in terms of supporting their leaders, others didn't. If they didn't, especially if they didn't, now they've sort of said, well, we know how to do that. Just, in fact, we're not doing it well, it just means we've now done it.

I think there's still a lot of room for discussion about how do we lead a remote team, a hybrid team, distributed team around the world. We use different words for this and everyone has a different version of it and we have, just for a long time, just used the word lead at a distance. So I was walking through a client site today where they're hybrid for some of the folks and I think I probably saw 30 desks and I saw three people at desks. Right. So even though the professed thing is we're going to be in the office some of the time, there were not many of them. Right. And I think that's, I think that's what the future is.

But when you look back, it's exactly what you said, when we work in a global organization or national organization, we have been interacting at a distance anyway. But one consistent thing is getting time, keeping touch with those people. So for example, visit them as well as as that. So you have to have an element of interaction in person, even limited, even limited. Of course, if it's in another country, you won't be visiting them every month.

Yeah. So let me share a story. So we were talking earlier about both of, all of us, having been podcasters for a long time. I had the great fortune having Tom Peters on my podcast twice. And the first time that Tom was on show and Tom is one of the two guys that wrote, among other things, *In Search Of Excellence*, from which the phrase came, management by wandering around. Yes. And the first time he and I talked it was prior to the pandemic. So put that in context. And his comment to me was, Kevin if your team is remote, what does managing by wandering around look like? He said is it managing by frequent flyer miles? And I said, no, Tom, it's leading by webcam. Now that doesn't mean that we shouldn't get on airplanes. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't get together to your point. But really what I want to highlight is the one word you said that I think is super important. And that's interaction, because what happens too often is that we end up only having transactions.

We transact the business. So let's just play this out, right? I call my boss, Kim, picking at my phone is a prop. So I call Kim and I say, man, I know you're busy. I know you don't have, I don't want to take a lot of time, but I have a question. And so Kim says, what's your question? I ask her the question. She answers the question. We say thank you and we transacted the business. There was no interaction. I'm not saying that that shouldn't ever happen. And I'm not saying that doesn't ever happen in the office face to face. But it's less likely to happen. So what we, what I suggest is that when we're two things, even when we're not together physically, that we need to make sure we're interacting, talking about more, excuse me, more than work and weather, if you will. While we're talking about the work and the weather, then we're just transacting business. Sometimes that's okay. If that's all we're doing, it's going to cause problems. And when we're remote, it's more likely to happen. Not intentionally. It's just more likely to what's going to happen. And then when we are together, however often that is, we have to make the interaction a major part of why we're together. So my team is only all together once a year. And so I would say half of the time we're together is not work. We have to rekindle, refresh, reconnect, all that has to be a part of it. And we have to plan that part as importantly as we plan the strategy and the problem solving.

Let's take a break from this introductory session with Kevin Eikenberry. Join us for part two, for now, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.