

Transcription - Kevin Eikenberry Part 3

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. We are concluding our conversation with Kevin Eikenberry today, looking at how we select and develop future leaders.

I'm going to jump in with a question even though we've got couple more on the list. Kevin, you've been very successful, that's obvious. Reflecting on all the years, are you able to say big three things that you think were key factors in making you successful?

Successful from what frame? For me as an individual, as a leader, as a business person? Give me, guide me a little bit more.

Okay, you've been successful in providing really good value for your clients. Right? And I'm talking about that. I can see that in your bio, in the feedback, etc. So now looking at that, saying they value what you're doing, they appreciate it, and they, you know, they've come in back for more and recommend others. That's great. And now thinking about that, what's, I know it's hard to get three things, but what do you think those would be?

Well, I'd like to think that one of them is that while there are many things that are similar from one situation and one organization and one leader, while there are many things that are similar, I would like to think that people would see that we move past immediate pattern recognition and really try to understand their specific situation. So I'd like to think that they see that from a process perspective, but behavior really, they see that from us as that we work really hard to listen. I would hope that that's one of those things.

Another one of those things is that I think that we work really hard at continuing to learn ourselves. First of all, if we're going to, if we're going to basically ask clients or encourage clients to be learners, then we're back to this whole values thing. Like am I saying that or am I doing it? Right? And so we try to model that stuff.

And the third thing that comes to my mind in this moment is related to the second. And that is, that I take it really seriously, that if I'm working with a group and I'm sharing ideas and I'm sharing principles and things that, it's relevant and that I'm making sure that I'm doing, or doing my best to do, those things with my team too. So that people, I think, see us as real and relevant and hopefully accessible. I think those three things come together and come back to those three things.

Thank you. Following on from that, have you in your consulting work with other organisations discovered something that you needed to implement immediately with your own team?

There's been lots of things that would really help us. I try really hard to not be blinded by the shiny object. Right? So there have been a hundred times that I've seen an organisation do stuff that said like that's really good. That stuff that would probably help us. To answer your question specifically, I can't think of a time when I came back to say we have to do this right now. But there have been lots of things that we've learned from, that we have in all sorts of parts of the business, whether it's a process related to it or getting better at some area of

project management or whatever that might be. I'm only pausing because of your word immediate, I guess is my point.

That's fine. I think that's the appropriate answer that I was looking for in terms of our audience.

I got the right answer everybody. Yay! Gold star. Do I get a certificate?

We can arrange it but don't push me on it because I have a reputation with my public speaking clientele, if they'd mucked up in the courses and weren't concentrating on what they were doing and then they wanted their certificate at the end, I used to punch holes in the certificate for every time that they did not do the right thing.

Ouch. There won't be much paper. There won't be much paper left in on mine.

So we move on to question three which is about finding and developing leaders. A continuing question that we get around the issue is how soon should we be identifying or letting them self-identify that they want to move into that kind of role?

Can we afford that sort of approach in terms of time and investment? So an investment, I guess we were talking about, we've talked very recently about, in our day, when we were being managers, we had things called management development schemes that were six month rotations around an organization where you worked in areas that were completely different to your own subject matter expertise. And whilst we would, we valued that, we don't see that organizations feel that they have the time or the opportunity to invest in that development. So should we be doing it in some fashion and how do we do it?

So I'm going to start with what I heard the question is first before I come back to the rotational side part of the question. So here's my thought everybody, that leadership is not a noun, it's not a job title, it's a verb, it's stuff that we do. We're only leading if people are following. So can we be, could we be, should we be nurturing the skills of leadership in our folks as early as we can? 100%. Should we be asking people what their goals are? Should they be able to reserve the right to change their mind? Of course, right?

I think that if, you know, we take so, in most cases, we take so much time to work hard to select the right people and we were so rightly wanting to make sure that they stay. The same client that I was with earlier today, you know, a big part of our conversation was around turnover, right, or retention, which is everywhere you want to look at that. And so we invest all this time and all this money to bring people in and hopefully get the right people in. Sometimes it's like we spend so much time on that and then we just sort of think, well, it's all going to work out after that. You know, we do, we do a little onboarding and then it's all going to be fine.

Now, I think that we should be having those conversations with people early and often. But that's different than this whole rotational assignment thing, right? So when should that happen? I think that depends a lot on your organization. It depends on, depends on how much of a pipeline you need, how big is your work, your organization, how many of those rotations can there be? And I think there's a lot we can get without doing a six month rotation, three months, six months, nine months, 12 months

rotation. How can we get people on a project? How can we get people in a situation? How can we get them to interact with the people in another department? Doesn't have to be as the manager or as the intern or as a whatever that would look like.

So I'm not throwing any shade on any of those ideas of having those rotations. They can be great. But I think like many other things, we need to manage those effectively and not just put people in a role and then move them out. Like if we're doing that from a learning perspective, then part of that needs to be, let's talk about what are the expectations of when we put you in this role, what we want you to be thinking about and working on while you're there and then be debriefing them when they come out and giving them and really making sure they're getting learning and not just six months of time in those roles. And so, you know, I think it depends here on, you know, how big is my organization? How many of those kinds of assignments can there be? Do we have a way to actually get the best value out of those things as opposed to going through the motions? But they're great opportunities, but there are lots of ways for us to work and build our leaders without those things. I guess not like you can't have, you can't be building your leaders without those things happening.

I think in terms of what we've talked about up to this point, the flexibility and the agility that is needed in our leadership, leans more towards having a project based if you want to develop people that way rather than a more structured scheme. The structured scheme really was a reflection of the fact that people thought they had a job for life and that's not the case anymore and hasn't been for some considerable time. And so we have to, generationally, change the leadership thinking into being more flexible in terms of what's coming. You know, it's not like I've had to do my time this way.

And if I know I'm going to have somebody here for the next 25 years, it makes a lot more sense for me to invest three years over the rolling around into various roles. If I don't know that, you know, that that's what the future holds or that our business is going to be fundamentally changing over that time, then it might not even be that we don't want to do that, but it might just almost be hard really, really, really hard to even do. So that's why I think I would be focusing on, especially if you're not doing any of that now, even if your long term goal was that, you know, rotational thing would be like, how can I get pieces of that without them actually moving, without them having a new role, in back filling for them and all that other stuff? Like how can I put people in projects? And again, all of it has to be intentional and the other person has to be involved in it. Like, it's, you're doing this for learning and so that means there has to be a learning goal. There has to be a picture of the future. There has to be reflection. All of that stuff needs to happen if you really want to get the most value out of it.

Great.

Can I push in?

Of course.

One topic that is very dear to our hearts, particularly Kim's, is communication and it comes up in like every time we have any discussion about anything. I've noticed that you

mentioned that the skill, the most important skill, is communication. I really would love to hear your views on communication and for our listeners to share that with you.

So a couple things. Here's the first one. We have to be clear about what communication is. Communication is message sent, message received, message understood. And a lot of time, well, let me just do this little thought experiment with everybody. Just want you to answer this question in your head. How many times have you said or thought these things? Well, how many times do I have to tell them? Well, it was in the PowerPoint. Did they read the email? What part of no don't they understand? Like weren't they paying attention in the meeting?

You've said or thought all of those things, maybe today. Right. And all of those things, let's be really clear, everybody, all of those things are about you saying, I sent the message. I did my part. If communication is message sent, message received, message understood, one part of that's in your control, the sending.

The other two things you can only influence. But that is what's the most important part at the end of the day. Right. It's the other two parts.

How am I saying it? How am I communicating it? Well, if you've sent the email three times, maybe an email wasn't the best medium, right? So rather than pointing your finger at them and saying, it's their fault, three fingers are pointing back at you saying, oh, well, maybe it's me. What do I need to do differently to get my message received and understood? What do I need to think about the relationship that I have with these people as it relates to how I can have a better chance of getting my message received and understood? So that's the first piece.

The second thing I would say, and I think it really relates to doing this all at a distance since we've kind of been hinting at that throughout this, I used a word earlier that I want to come back to. I said when we're on the video, the communication is richer. There's really two things to think about in terms of our communication. So it's true all the time, but it's even more important to think about when we're at distance. One of those things is richness. The richest communication is one-on-one, face-to-face, in real time. Everything else, we lose richness. We lose nuance. We lose some of the cues that would help us get the best possible communication as we add more people, right? As we go from one to one, to one to ten, to one to fifty, presentation skills mode, right? Like it's more complex. It's less rich. But what we're gaining as we add people is scope. So there's a constant trade-off between richness and scope. So the richer the communication, the lower the scope, because the richest is two people. So as we raise scope, more people, faster, as we raise scope, we're lower richness. And so what that leads us to in communicating, as we're now communicating at a distance, here's what else we have, we have more ways to do it than ever, right? So what we do is, we do the one we like the most or most comfortable with. Let's just say it's email, right? I like email. I'm going to use email. Is email the best mix of richness and scope to get this message received or not? It might not be, maybe that means we need to come together physically. Maybe that means we need to turn on the webcam. Maybe that means any number of things, right? Because like all of us have been on the emails, and I'm not picking on email really, except that it's the biggest culprit here, right? We've all been on the email thread that's five, six messages in, right? And it's going sideways at best. We've all been on that. If we unravel it, what do we do? We get on the phone. So the rule on our team is if it's three messages in, I

used to say it's time to pick up the phone. Now I say it's time to turn on the webcam. But the point is, like, we have to change the media because it's not working. Email is a fabulous tool. It is not a good tool for actual communication, for actual conversation.

So Kim, you mentioned in that very lengthy, I don't know how gave you that intro, but in that very long thing, one of the things that you mentioned is that I grew up on a farm. And so if I go into, if I go into the shop at the farm, I bet I find 20 hammers. And I can tell you this, I have a favorite among all those hammers. It's one of the three sledgehammers that I remember. It wasn't a favorite at the time, but in retrospect, it's a favorite because of the jobs I did with that sledgehammer with my father. If I need to put a nail in the wall, I could pick the best hammer or I could pick my favorite hammer. It would be wiser to pick a framing hammer than the sledgehammer, right? I might be able to get the nail in the wall. I might cause all sorts of other issues. It's the same thing with the various communication tools we have. We need to pick wisely and richness versus scope is a way to help us think about that.

It's an example that resonates with me because my dad is still on the family farm and he is notorious for getting new tools because he just forgets where he leaves them.

You can't have enough hammers.

I'm not going to let him listen to this. Absolutely no way. (I'll tell him). Okay, I know. He talks about Fulyana as his other daughter, the one who looks after him. I wouldn't say Kevin said you can never have enough hammers.

You can't have too many. There's a difference. You can't have too many. You can never have too many tractors, but you can run out of barn space. Good dream.

We still do have one question. This is probably one that we've sort of skirted around as well in terms of the conversation this morning. It is about encouraging a flexible mindset in a results driven environment.

Well, I would say it's not either. It's not either or it's not flexible or results. It's flexible to get results. So it's both and so let's think about it this way. Can I if I can reframe it for a second? So in the book Flexible Leadership, one of the big ideas is this idea of both and thinking that there can be a tension between two things. So let me give you an example because it kind of relates to this idea of results.

I believe that leadership is about reaching valuable outcomes with and through others. So outcomes and others. And I would call that a flexor and some leaders are all about getting the outcome. They're all about getting the results. At the far end of that, there are problems. Other leaders are like no, I'm about the people.

If we take care of the people and grow the people, the people will get the outcomes. And there are problems at that end, not being focused enough on the outcomes, right? So we think we got outcomes and others. There's a natural tension between those two things. Too many of us as leaders, maybe most of us as leaders, have a natural tendency to lean toward one end of that or the other. I would suggest that it's in that tension, if we can understand that tension, that rather than I'm a people focused leader or I'm a results focused leader, the right answer is where do I need to be right now? What is the situation or our context call for right

now? Maybe right now, even if I lean a little bit more toward the others or the people side, right now we need to be leaning into the results, like right now I need to be shifting, flexing in the direction of outcomes or results because that's what our situation dictates right now.

But you know what? We've just gone through this major project and we've just finished it and we cross the finish line and people have been working 110% if that's such a thing as that, right? And maybe that's where we needed to be to get this project out the door. But does that mean we need to stay at 110%? No, right now maybe we need to be shifting the other direction. What does the season tell us?

What is the context tell us? What does the situation tell us? Not what is my preference, not what is my natural inclination, not what does my leadership style tell me? Not what is my identity as a leader, but what will get us the best results?

I believe it means that we're flexing between those two, the tension between the two ends of that flexor.

I'm exhausted.

Well it's morning for you guys. This is 6.30 at night for me.

This is reasonable hours, you know, we have had in terms of the time difference.

We've had ones where we've had to start at 6 in the morning and that's when we're not, well I don't mind the early start, but it becomes telling at the end of the day, shall we say? And I've got to, I'm actually after this going on to run a workshop, we have a thing in this country called U3A, which is University of the Third Age.

So it's designed for people who are 65 and over who want to learn a new skill. I've got a series of floral workshops that I've been running for these people. So I've got to duck out, pick the things that I need, the flowers and the foliage that I need, pack up my 15 packs and drive an hour, which is nothing in this country, to get to the closest place that I can run with a workshop.

Well you know, in the, you were talking about this global world, right? During the pandemic, I sat in this chair, this used to be a desk and now it's like a studio, I've got lights everywhere, I got this camera and all that stuff. I remember in the course of maybe 18 months during the pandemic, there was not an hour on the, in the, in the 24 hour day that I wasn't sitting here delivering training to someone, somewhere in the world, right? Not like in the same day. It wasn't like 24 straight hours, but like you could pick a time AM or PM on the dial and at some point I was here doing that for someone in the world because that's what we need to be on. Now that doesn't mean that I was then going to be here for another 18 hours or whatever.

And you know, for us as leaders, if we're leading teams that are at longer distances, we have to be the one to make the shift at least some of the time, right?

Now, in that case, I'm doing it because it's what the client, I mean the clients dictating that. But like in the US, there are three hours time difference between me and so on. We can't always do this on what Kevin wants to do. We know some of the time based on what works better for the other person. Yeah. But if we want to start to build the kind of relationship, get the kind of results, build the kind of engagement, kinds of things we talked about today, it has to be done.

I think that's a really good place to end it because it sort of encapsulates all of the things that we've tried to talk about in our time together. Kevin, we do thank you for the time that you spent with us sharing your expertise and your experiences. We will put up onto the website, we have a guest page for each of the people we talk to, and on that we'll have some links to your books and your website and anything else that the people might want to contact you with. If we get questions that come in to us, we will pass them on to you as well.

Well, just tell you one thing that I'm going to tell you. I'm going to ask you to put there, I'm going to tell everybody right now, I have, if you've been listening to us, I would like to give you a gift. You can find the gift by going to KevinEikenberry.com/gift. So make sure you put that on that page. What's there is, I wrote a masterclass, built a masterclass about building confidence in ourselves and others, that we sell every day, but I want to give it to anyone who's here that wants to go to that page. There'll be information on that page about my new book as well, but I want to just give you that gift that sells for \$79 US every day, but not for you. You get it for nothing. It's our Remarkable Masterclass On Building Our Confidence and Confidence In Others.

Great. Thank you. Our listeners will really like that. The topic would be very, very important to our listeners for sure.

Thank you, Kevin. You may go and enjoy the rest of your evening, and we wish you well.

Thank you. It's really nice meeting you, Kevin.

It was my pleasure. You guys were wonderful. It was super, I had a great time. Thanks for having me.

That's our conversation with Kevin Eikenberry. As he mentioned in the podcast, the link for his very generous gift is on his guest page on our website. But for now, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.