

8 steps

**TO ACCELERATE  
CHANGE IN YOUR  
ORGANIZATION**

**WITH NEW INSIGHTS FOR LEADING IN A COVID-19 CONTEXT**

**JOHN KOTTER'S LEADING CHANGE IS WIDELY RECOGNIZED AS THE SEMINAL WORK IN THE FIELD OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE. IT INTRODUCED THE 8-STEP PROCESS FOR LEADING CHANGE WITH A BOLD MESSAGE TO READERS:**

*you can lead change — here's how to do it.*

**AND NO MATTER HOW YOU LOOK AT IT,  
THE WORLD CONTINUES TO CHANGE *faster.***



**BUT OUR  
ABILITY TO  
KEEP UP  
HASN'T  
KEPT PACE.**

# WHAT HASN'T CHANGED?

There are two fundamental goals underscoring most transformations:

Increase revenue/profits or decrease costs

Become more effective or efficient

→ or both.

At Kotter, we continue to evolve our thinking, informed by our work

*and have enhanced our 8-step process*

to give organizations additional capabilities to lead change under the particular conditions of today's warp-speed world. First introduced in *Accelerate*, published by Harvard Business Review Press in 2014, we have broadened the scope of the 8-Step Process from its original version, giving it reach and potency today and beyond.

# BOTH VERSIONS ARE RELEVANT AND EFFECTIVE TODAY, YET ARE DESIGNED FOR **DIFFERENT** CONTEXTS + OBJECTIVES

*Leading change*

8-STEP PROCESS | 1996

- Respond to or effect episodic change in finite and sequential ways.
- Drive change with a small, powerful core group.
- Function within a traditional hierarchy.
- Focus on doing one thing very well in a linear fashion over time.

→ *accelerate*

8-STEP PROCESS | 2014 + BEYOND

- Run the steps concurrently and continuously.
- Form a large volunteer army from up, down, and across the organization to be the change engine.
- Function in a network flexibly and agilely outside of, but in conjunction with, a traditional hierarchy.
- Constantly seek opportunities, identify initiatives to capitalize on them, and complete them quickly.

**THE PURPOSE OF THIS EBOOK IS TO INTRODUCE YOU TO THE  
ENHANCED 8-STEPS (NOW KNOWN AS THE 8 ACCELERATORS) AND  
THE FOUR CHANGE PRINCIPLES TO SET YOUR  
ORGANIZATION UP FOR SUCCESS *even in 2020.***

# before we dive into the details — **HERE'S A SNEAK PEEK**



## THE 4 PRINCIPLES

### SELECT FEW + DIVERSE MANY

More people need to be able to make change happen—not just carry out someone else's directives. Done right, this uncovers leaders at all levels of an organization; ones you never knew you had.



### HAVE TO + WANT TO

Those who feel included in a meaningful opportunity will help create change in addition to their normal responsibilities. Existing team members can provide the energy if you invite them.



### HEAD + HEART

Most people aren't inspired by logic alone, but rather by the fundamental desire to contribute to a larger cause. If you can give greater meaning and purpose to your effort, extraordinary results are possible.



### LEADERSHIP + MANAGEMENT

In order to capitalize on windows of opportunity, leadership must be paramount—and not just from one executive. It's about vision, action, innovation, and celebration, as well as essential managerial processes.



# *it all starts here...* **CREATE A SENSE OF URGENCY**

Your top leaders must describe an opportunity that will appeal to individuals' heads + hearts, and use this statement to raise a large, urgent group of volunteers.

Over many decades, Dr. Kotter's (and others') research has shown that most transformation efforts fail. A consistent factor behind those failed transformations is that a sense of urgency was not generated and sustained.

Building urgency is all about concentrating on a window of opportunity that is open today but may close tomorrow. Such an opportunity brings people together, aligning them around a commonality, and clarifying where energy should be directed.

*results* →

**YOU HAVE A BREADTH OF FOCUSED READINESS ACROSS THE WORKFORCE THAT IS UNPRECEDENTED IN YOUR ORGANIZATION.**

## What is *your* Big Opportunity?

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- Do you see a Big Opportunity that could ignite the hearts + minds of your people?
- Do you know how to identify, articulate, and communicate it?
- Are you able to connect an external change factor with a special capability of your organization?
- What are the stakes if you succeed? What are the consequences if you fail?

**WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY ARE APPEARING MORE QUICKLY THAN EVER. IDENTIFYING AN OPPORTUNITY QUICKLY, AND MOBILIZING URGENCY AROUND IT, IS BECOMING THE KEY TO BEATING COMPETITORS.**

*— disrupt or be disrupted*

# HOW TO *create a sense of urgency* IN A COVID-19 WORLD

Ask: what are the priorities and projects that must be completed immediately? These could be vital priorities that have arrived alongside COVID-19, or all of those smaller projects on your list of 75 initiatives that never seem to get done. What tools do new participants need to move these identified projects and initiatives forward, and can they be sourced immediately? The more specific you are in naming “the work to be done,” the less mystery (or overwhelm) is likely to exist when sorting out the next logistical details.

Get laser focused on what is essential work to be done or not done, and be courageous in challenging or rethinking old patterns of thought around who must perform that work. The world has already been forced to rethink how work gets done – the opportunity here is thinking much more broadly about who can participate. Then clearly and compassionately share how this effort will uniquely impact the organization *now*, and welcome participation to help make it happen.

# BUILD A GUIDING COALITION

The Guiding Coalition is, in many ways, the nerve center of the 8-Step Process. It can take many shapes, but must consist of members from all layers of the hierarchy, represent all functions, receive information about the organization at all levels and ranks, and synthesize that information into new ways of working.

Without a Guiding Coalition, the organization will continue to rely on traditional, hierarchical ways of operating, which will not serve it over the long term.

*results*



**THE LINCHPIN OF YOUR ENTIRE TRANSFORMATION IS IN PLACE: AN ACCOUNTABLE, DIVERSE GROUP BOUND BY OPPORTUNITY, STRATEGY AND ACTION.**

**THE GUIDING COALITION IS THE FIRST OPPORTUNITY TO ENGAGE BEYOND THE “USUAL SUSPECTS” IN YOUR ORGANIZATION. YOU NEED MORE EYES TO SEE, MORE BRAINS TO THINK, AND MORE LEGS TO ACT IN ORDER TO ACCELERATE YOUR CHANGE EFFORTS.**

*select few + diverse many*

## What makes a *great* Guiding Coalition?

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- Diversity of the teams in terms of level, function, geographic location, tenure, gender and ideas.
- An ability and a willingness to work across the hierarchy, while also working with people across all levels and functions with respect and energy.
- A commitment to the change initiative at hand.

HOW TO

# build a guiding coalition

IN A COVID-19 WORLD

Look deeper into your organization for those contributors you haven't called on before. You'll be amazed by all the hidden talent within your organization – and what they can do when given permission to try. Chances are great that your usual suspects – that is, your go-to, trusted colleagues – are already tagged in a number of ways. This population, with their high performer reputations, are often overextended in the most “normal” of times, while others are available and poised to prove themselves, eager to have strategic tasks to challenge and distract them from the crushing boredom some are experiencing in quarantine.

# FORM A STRATEGIC VISION + INITIATIVES

Dr. Kotter defines strategic initiatives as targeted and coordinated activities that, if designed and executed fast enough and well enough, will make your vision a reality.

Characteristics of a terrific strategic vision:

Communicable | Desirable | Creates a Verbal Picture | Flexible | Feasible | Imaginable | Simple

*results* →

**YOUR FOCUS IS ON ACTIONS AND INITIATIVES – CRAFTED BY A DIVERSE SET OF EMPLOYEES, AND VALIDATED BY SENIOR LEADERS – THAT WILL ADVANCE YOUR OPPORTUNITY.**

**YOU CAN'T APPEAL TO PEOPLE  
WITH DATA AND FACTS ALONE.  
YOU MUST ALSO ACCOUNT FOR  
HOW PEOPLE FEEL. IF YOU CAN  
PROVIDE GREATER MEANING AND  
PURPOSE TO THEIR EFFORTS,  
AMAZING THINGS ARE POSSIBLE.**

*head + heart*

## What makes a *great* Strategic Vision?

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- Motivates people to take action.
- Coordinates and aligns their actions
- Without it, strategies can struggle to get activity behind them.
- Clarifies how the future will be different from the past, and how that future will become a reality.
- Ties directly to The Big Opportunity.

HOW TO

# form a strategic vision and initiatives **IN A COVID-19 WORLD**

Establish a clear mission and a desired set of outcomes – ie: efficiency gains, cost cutting, enabling work from home technology, etc. – that is unmistakably in service to the Big Opportunity. Remember that we are experiencing some shared human needs right now – to feel productive (even if it’s in a way that bears little resemblance to what productivity used to look like), to feel part of a team, and to feel supported in our needs.

As a leader, assure these newly deployed teams that they have “air cover” from leadership and permission to boldly move the needle, explicitly understand their goal, and understand any guardrails (budget, for instance) that exist to achieve that goal.

# ENLIST A VOLUNTEER ARMY

Large-scale change can only occur when very significant numbers of employees amass under a common opportunity and drive in the same direction.

*Accelerate* explains that "history has demonstrated that it is possible to find many change agents ... but only if people are given a choice, and feel they truly have permission to step forward and act." You must build excitement around the Big Opportunity and develop a feeling that one "wants to" (vs. "has to") contribute.

results



**YOU HAVE A SIZABLE BODY OF EMPLOYEES EXCITED AND ABLE TO TAKE ACTION ON CRITICALLY IMPORTANT INITIATIVES LINKED TO YOUR BUSINESS STRATEGY.**



**TO BUILD A VOLUNTEER ARMY,  
YOU NEED TO GIVE PEOPLE A  
CHOICE TO PARTICIPATE AND  
TRUE PERMISSION TO STEP UP  
AND ACT. THE VOLUNTEER ARMY  
DOESN'T NEED TO INVOLVE  
OUTSIDERS. YOUR EXISTING  
PEOPLE HOLD THE ENERGY.**

*have to + want to*

## How do you *build* a successful Volunteer Army?

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- Give people a reason and motivation to join the movement. A strong vision goes a long way.
- Don't boil the ocean – while you reach “stickiness” once you surpass 50%, about 15% of your organization is enough to build material momentum toward change.
- Recognize the effort of existing volunteers to keep them engaged to recruit more.

# HOW TO *build a volunteer army* IN A COVID-19 WORLD

Quickly pull together a database of all the people whose jobs have been significantly impacted, resulting in excess capacity. When you know what you need done and see the resources you have, you'll begin to see how you can put the puzzle together in never-before-done ways. You must first be able to see the available moving parts as clearly as you have defined the needs of the business.

# ENABLE ACTION BY REMOVING BARRIERS

By removing barriers such as inefficient processes and archaic norms, leaders provide the freedom necessary for employees to work across boundaries and create real impact.

Many leaders agree that even their own management practices are too bureaucratic and are a nuisance, yet remnants of the past can have tremendous staying power.

*results*



**YOU HAVE TANGIBLE EVIDENCE OF EMPLOYEE INNOVATIONS STEMMING FROM COLLAPSED SILOS AND NEW WAYS OF WORKING TOGETHER.**



**INNOVATION IS LESS ABOUT GENERATING BRAND NEW IDEAS AND MORE ABOUT KNOCKING DOWN BARRIERS TO MAKING THOSE IDEAS A REALITY.**

John Kotter | *Accelerate*



*quote  
Kotter*

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## ENABLE ACTION BY REMOVING BARRIERS

### How to *remove* Barriers

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- In order to remove barriers, you must identify them. Think about why past initiatives have failed. At what stage? Did they get off the ground at all? Stall mid-way? Get completed but then abandoned?
- Barriers can be commonly stated and accepted statements that, while appearing helpful, can deter attempts to get past legacy obstacles. These are statements like, “It’s just not done that way,” or “We tried that before – it didn’t work.”
- Common barriers include: silos, narrowness in thinking, pressure to hit numbers, complacency, legacy rules or procedures, and limited access to key stakeholders and leaders.

# HOW TO *remove barriers* IN A COVID-19 WORLD

It benefits no one in the organization to have colleagues with no quantitative skills or prowess work on accounting, for instance, or high-stakes financial modeling. However it's guaranteed that there are skills out there in the organization that are currently underutilized. There is a baseline skill-set and frame of reference needed for the priorities you have identified. Might there be a way to pair people with a skills mentor who has done some of this work needed in greater quantities, who can be a resource for questions and serve as a sounding board when someone new to the task feels stuck? Scaled across an entire segment of your workforce, imagine the culture-deepening network created by such deliberate cross-collaboration.

# GENERATE SHORT-TERM WINS

Wins are the molecules of results. They must be collected, categorized and communicated – early and often – to track progress and energize your volunteers to drive change.

A win is anything – big or small – that helps you move toward your opportunity. They may take the shape of actions taken, a lesson learned, a process improved, a new behavior demonstrated, etc.

*results*



**A BODY OF DATA THAT TELLS THE STORY OF YOUR TRANSFORMATION IN VALIDATED, QUANTIFIABLE AND QUALIFIABLE TERMS.**



**THESE WINS, AND THEIR CELEBRATION, CAN CARRY GREAT PSYCHOLOGICAL POWER AND PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE... THEY GIVE CREDIBILITY TO THE NEW STRUCTURE. THIS CREDIBILITY IN TURN PROMOTES MORE AND MORE COOPERATION WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION.**

John Kotter | *Accelerate*



*quote  
Kotter*

## Characteristics of an *effective* Win

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- Relevant in light of the opportunity before you.
- Meaningful to others. People beyond the winner or winners care about the win, be it members of your team, another team, customers, stakeholders, etc.
- Unambiguous, visible and tangible such that people can replicate or adapt it. Wins have the most impact when they scale across organizations.

# HOW TO *generate wins* IN A COVID-19 WORLD

Do not underestimate the power of positive stories in the darkest of times. We live chronically under-encouraged as a matter of course, so now reveals an extraordinary desire to see little molecules of success, of hope, of signs that we're moving in a positive direction.

These wins will inspire more wins, boost morale, add a sense of heart in a disheartening time, and help maintain a sense of organizational culture even with everyone remote to one another. By helping ever-larger numbers of people feel that a positive outcome is realistic and attainable, you're building a movement – an unstoppable engine – that can get you through almost any adversity.

# SUSTAIN ACCELERATION

Press harder after the first successes. Your increasing credibility can improve systems, structures and policies. Be relentless with initiating change after change until the vision is a reality.

So you've had a few wins. It can be easy to lift your foot off the gas pedal after experiencing some success. Instead, this is the time to press harder and use those wins as momentum to further fuel the change.

*results* →

**YOU HAVE CONFIRMATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL FITNESS AND STAMINA. THIS ENABLES THE REINVIGORATION OF YOUR MISSION, AND HELPS YOUR TEAM STAY THE COURSE OF CHANGE OVER TIME.**



**IF URGENCY DROPS SUFFICIENTLY AND MOMENTUM IS LOST, PUSHING COMPLACENCY AWAY A SECOND TIME CAN BE MUCH MORE DIFFICULT THAN IT WAS THE FIRST.**

John Kotter | *A Sense of Urgency*



quote  
Kotter

## Tips to *sustain* Acceleration

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- Revisit urgency after generating some significant wins. It's so easy to lose sight of the ultimate goal, which is to move the initiatives into the culture and sustain them. It may be necessary to revisit some of the urgency-raising activities incorporated at the start.
- Get more and more people involved, always looking for ways to expand the volunteer army.
- With new volunteers and fresh eyes, you'll find more barriers in need of knocking down. Remove them, too!

# HOW TO *sustain acceleration* IN A COVID-19 WORLD

For most of us, the conversations within companies and in the media have been reduced to the shortest term: the price of oil (or our stock price) today, when we will emerge from a lockdown, what summer vacations will feel like if they're able to occur, etc. As a leader you can:

- Help to shift this mental model to rediscover aspirations for the future.
- Do not lose sight of the opportunity that they have to impact the world – to make a difference.
- Have confidence that you have been relevant and will remain so (though perhaps differently) as we emerge from the current conditions.

# INSTITUTE CHANGE

To ensure new behaviors are repeated over the long term, it's important that you define and communicate the connections between those behaviors and the organization's success.

Years of a different kind of experience are often needed to create lasting change. That is why cultural changes come once you are deep into a transformation, not at the beginning. You first have to build the muscle and track record of antithetical experiences. Culture changes after you have successfully altered people's actions, connecting the dots between new behaviors and better performance.

*results*



**YOU HAVE COLLECTIVE RECOGNITION THAT YOUR ORGANIZATION HAS A NEW WAY OF WORKING WITH SPEED, AGILITY AND INNOVATION THAT DIRECTLY CONTRIBUTES TO STRATEGICALLY IMPORTANT BUSINESS RESULTS.**

AS NEW WAYS OF WORKING BECOME PART OF THE FABRIC OF YOUR ORGANIZATION, THE NEED FOR MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP IS CRITICAL. STRONG MANAGEMENT IS NEEDED TO HANDLE THE DAY-TO-DAY, AND STRONG LEADERSHIP IS NEEDED TO CAPITALIZE ON UNPREDICTABLE WINDS OF OPPORTUNITY.

*management + leadership*

## Making it *stick*

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- Accelerators 1-7 are all about building new muscles, new behaviors and new ways of working. Accelerator 8 is about sustaining it long into the future.
- New practices must be deeply rooted and anchored to replace the old ways
- There must be clear communication and synchronization between the traditional hierarchical structure and the innovative network of volunteers.
- A key challenge is grafting the new practices onto roots that may be old but still effective, while killing off the inconsistent pieces.

# HOW TO *make it stick* — IN A COVID-19 WORLD

Today, predictability is at an all-time low. This uncertainty is magnified if you're running a business or a function with responsibility for making decisions that have broad implications on many other people. What can you do as a leader? Predictably celebrate progress. Find the progress and the results (both big and small) and celebrate these – because there is progress being made every hour somewhere in the business. Identify and communicate this progress as part of their daily routine.

Celebration and appreciation cause our brains to increase the flow of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that plays a huge role in how we feel pleasure and pain. This introduction of more dopamine contributes to a state of Thrive – I feel good, and that makes me want to do more so I can get more of this feeling. When more people are functioning this way, you create powerful momentum that others can see and feel, even when working remotely.

**AT THE END OF A TRANSFORMATION YOUR ORG CHART MIGHT LOOK A LITTLE DIFFERENT. YOUR HIERARCHY WILL STILL BE IN PLACE, AS IT'S CRITICAL FOR DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS. BUT NOW YOU'LL ALSO HAVE A NETWORK CONSTANTLY INNOVATING AND POISED TO JUMP AT THE NEXT *opportunity.*** 

# and that network will be critical now... **AND IN THE NEW NORMAL**



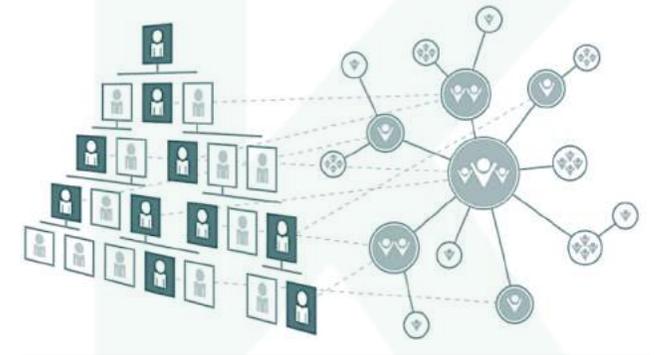
**CHANGE PROCESS**



**THE 4 PRINCIPLES**

<p><b>SELECT FEW + DIVERSE MANY</b></p> <p>More people need to be able to make change happen—not just carry out someone else’s directives. Done right, this uncovers leaders at all levels of an organization; ones you never knew you had.</p>		<p><b>HAVE TO + WANT TO</b></p> <p>Those who feel included in a meaningful opportunity will help create change in addition to their normal responsibilities. Existing team members can provide the energy if you invite them.</p>	
<p><b>HEAD + HEART</b></p> <p>Most people aren’t inspired by logic alone, but rather by the fundamental desire to contribute to a larger cause. If you can give greater meaning and purpose to your effort, extraordinary results are possible.</p>		<p><b>LEADERSHIP + MANAGEMENT</b></p> <p>In order to capitalize on windows of opportunity, leadership must be paramount—and not just from one executive. It’s about vision, action, innovation, and celebration, as well as essential managerial processes.</p>	

**CHANGE PRINCIPLES**



**NETWORK**



At Kotter, change is all we do.

Want to learn more about leading change in a downturn?

Explore our resources for navigating the COVID-19 induced recession at:  
[www.kotterinc.com/weathering-the-downturn](http://www.kotterinc.com/weathering-the-downturn)

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