

QUIT CHECKING THE BOX

AND SHIFT YOUR ORGANIZATION
FROM ACTIVITIES TO OUTCOMES



OKR
COHORT

Businesses of every size, shape and purpose are experiencing some of the greatest challenges in history today. Even prior to the global pandemic, companies and their employees were starting to feel the impact of the challenges that are now coming to light in every industry. Companies have felt the blow delivered by the “great resignation” once employees were told they could return to work, and a massive number of employees didn’t return. And now, businesses are experiencing what we referred to in our previous special report, “quiet quitting,” a trend where their employees are doing the bare minimum at work. This is very likely a response to burnout and stress and a way for employees to regain balance in their lives. But there is also something else that is a contributing factor to the stress, the burnout and the disengagement employees feel.

I, along with my partner and co-founder of OKR Cohort, Nizar Khoja, work with organizations around the country to help them understand what’s really behind the great resignation and quiet quitting and how to implement ways to motivate their employees to be interested and engaged in their work, how to provide value, how to keep their customers and clients satisfied and their businesses thriving and moving forward.

WHEN THE RIGHT THING TURNS OUT TO BE THE WRONG THING

What Nizar and I are seeing around the country is that employees are focused on checking off tasks on a list instead of understanding what they are doing and delivering true value. This impacts everyone: employees, leaders, and customers.

Everyone has a list. It could be a list they created for themselves. It could be a list their leader created for them. What happens is that once the employee has this list, they just focus on getting the things on the list completed, done, checked-off, instead of understanding what they're working on and the impact it has on the organization. It's hard for employees because they feel a sense of accomplishment when they check-off a task. But it's a false sense of accomplishment because they are focused on the wrong things thinking they are the right things.

Then, leaders start to lose trust in their employees when those employees aren't delivering the right thing and suddenly, communication is impacted. There's a ripple effect that impacts customers too. Innovation and product strategy suffers because employees are just delivering "a task," instead of business value.

This leads to employees being "busy but not successful," which leads to burnout and loss of motivation. It is also a challenge because we see significant employee disengagement, which we think is a reason for the uptick in "quiet quitting".

DISENGAGEMENT AND DISAPPOINTMENT RUNS ACROSS THE BOARD

This way of working has an impact across the board. One big impact to both employees and leaders is that breakdown of communication that I mentioned. Employees are not getting the proper priorities communicated to them from top down and they are surprised when they learn their tasks aren't moving the needle forward for the

company. We've heard this from employees all the time, "we think we're doing the right thing and then we deliver it, and it's like wait a minute that didn't get us where we intended to go." So now employees are more disengaged because they thought they were doing the right thing and it ends up being the wrong thing.

So much has been lost: the time that was dedicated to accomplishing "the task" and the time spent delivering it. It's hard to prioritize tasks now. The frustration grows day in and day out. Employees feel that frustration ripple into their personal lives as well. Leaders are frustrated with their employees. Suddenly leaders, instead of being out there working on the business, are now in their employees' business and that's not where leaders belong. They don't belong in the weeds with employees telling them what to do and micromanaging them. Employees need their leaders to trust them to get the job done and make sure they know how to deliver value. Sometimes the motivation and trust deteriorate so much in an organization that work stops for leaders and employees because everyone simply gives up.

This directly leads to customers being negatively impacted. When the right work isn't being completed customers aren't receiving valuable products and services. This leads to customers leaving and selecting a different vendor or provider. When that happens the companies' profit margins and cash flow take a hit and the company loses credibility and value to shareholders.

EMPLOYEES NEED TO KNOW THEIR WORK MATTERS

What we hear all the time is that employees would like to feel that the work they are doing matters. They want to deliver valuable work and feel empowered and fulfilled after completing that work knowing it was on target. When the products and services that they're delivering are at a higher level of design and execution and they're providing what people need, their productivity and efficiency soars and they are able to do more and don't feel burnt out. They are hyper focused on doing the right things that deliver value. Their managers and leaders can then work on the business instead of in the business and strategize on what's to come and help provide that vision and leadership that people crave.

When that happens, there is a positive impact and the company as well as its customers are completely satisfied with the top tier product and services. The organization is delivering. We see customer retention improve and the opportunity for cross-selling of new products and services increase. We also see organizations attracting new customers and improving their organic growth.

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT OKR COHORT DOES FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Nizar and I are pragmatic thought leaders in the domain of OKRs, which is a key framework that supports an outcome-focused organizational environment. OKR stands for Objective and Key Results. It is a lightweight framework that bridges strategy to execution.

The difference between tasks and key results is really what I'm talking about today. Leaders hire us to help shift the focus from activities to outcomes where we help them embed purpose in their work and focus on getting the right things done. This is what we do on a day-in-and-day-out basis. We help shift the mindset to delivering value.

We spend a lot of time in the business helping shift to the outcome mindset. We help people understand **what outcome they need to achieve** instead of what work they need to do. We do this through a series of workshops or sometimes just with one-on-one coaching. We help everyone understand how they can convert what they're doing into the value they need to deliver. I think that's important in this OKR framework sometimes, even though it feels like it's the hardest part. People think creating the OKR is hard. No, that's not true. It's breaking it down and understanding how the work that's being done delivers value. So we take them through four simple steps to convert their activity into a key result.

FOUR STEPS TO DEFINING A KEY RESULT

Step 1: The first thing to do is naming the activity-- make sure you understand what is the work that you're going to do.

Step 2: Then, take that work and understand what it will accomplish.

Step 3: Next, think about what success would look like if that work was accomplished. At this point you usually end up with a good-sized list.

Step 4: Lastly, you need to take that list and break it down into the most important outcome. **Not all the outcomes** but the **most important outcome** or problem you're solving for your business that you want to focus everyone's lens on.

Once you've got that identified you go back in to align vertically and horizontally which we've covered before. Here's a quick example. Let's say the activity we've identified is that we need to build a website. This might be a marketing activity. So now you need to break that down into what would building a marketing website do for you. First, of course, it creates a global presence for your organization. If you're in Lakeville, Minnesota, you don't have a global presence. But as soon as you get your site on the web, you're going to have a global presence. You're also going to be able to provide information for both customers and partners and prospects on what your company does.

If you want you can also set your website up to enable digital sales. So, suddenly, you're not just selling out of your garage or out of your mom-and-pop store to whoever passes by, you're now selling to the whole world.

Now that you've figured out what you want to accomplish with your website, now, you need to think about what success would look like for you.

With that global presence, people will get to know your business – both individuals and companies worldwide will know about what you do and how you do it. You can point potential customers to the information they need, and they can self-serve the content that they want to get at.

Success might mean you don't have to field as many calls. People will be able to figure out answers for themselves based on what you're putting out there. And prospects not only can get information, but they can guide themselves through the sales process through a digital online purchase.

So now we know what the work needs to accomplish and what success would look like. We simply need to translate that into key results.

IDENTIFY KEY RESULTS, NOT KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

I want you to take a minute to think about this: it's key results we're going after not just key performance indicators. There's a huge difference. If you think about a website, key performance indicators might be things like how many views did your website get, how many clicks on the pages, how many downloads of the articles. These are good information points, but **they're not key results**. A key result is intended to get you out of status quo and to connect the work to the outcomes needed for the strategic objectives.

So now you really want to think about and define some of the most important key results. Since you're building a website, most likely you want to get some leads. One good key result would be qualified marketing leads increasing from wherever it was in the past to maybe a hundred percent more. Let's double our qualified marketing leads through this website. A second great key result would be increasing your digital sales. And if you didn't have a website before at all that sold products or services, now you're going to be increasing your digital sales from zero to let's say 50. We may not know what it's going to be, but let's set a baseline of what that increase could be.

Suddenly, when you're now doing the work of building the website, you're going to be very focused on the key result: Does this website flow in a way that generates good leads? Can people click in and get their information to us? And can they make a purchase?

You're getting the focus off the activities and on the right thing and you see a huge difference in what's delivered. Of course, once you're done with that you would align the key results you've identified vertically and horizontally. For a great and simple explanation on KPIs vs Key Results, check out this [article](#) my partner Nizar Khoja published some time ago.

IT'S TIME TO MAKE A DECISION FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

It's probably time for organizations to think about all this. And we want you to decide one of two things: Whether you're going to allow yourself and your employees to just get those meaningless tasks done, whether you understand the value or not. Or, do you want to make sure you are ready to take the right actions and align and measure your business outcomes to drive value with every task that's getting completed?

If you want to make those connections for your employees from what they're doing to delivering value, you can reach out to our team at okrcohort.com/connect

Schedule a conversation with me or Nizar and we'll help you understand how you can move your employees to that outcome mindset.

I think the key there is the dialogue. You can try this process and work on shifting from activities to mindset. But what we would love to do is have that dialogue with you and understand your challenge and help you make that shift.

CONNECT WITH US AND LET US HELP YOU OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES AND FOCUS ON WHAT REALLY MATTERS.

Our team covered this very topic on a recent episode of our video and podcast series! If you'd like to learn more and enjoy an in-depth conversation surrounding this informative topic, head over to our [YouTube channel](#) or visit OKR Cohort on your favorite podcasting platform!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DENISE KANFIELD



Denise is a Business Agility Leadership Coach and OKRs Expert recognized for being an action-biased trail blazer to support leaders and teams through transformational change. She has expertise in training, organizational development, operations, and sales leadership which allow her to quickly understand and align her work to the company's strategy & roadmap for change. Denise thrives on coaching senior and executive leadership, bringing a 'meet you where you are' approach while using data and OKRs to drive meaningful results and lasting adoption.