



Getting on the Same Page

PART 1: Why Do You Need a Method?

The CEO as a Conductor

Imagine this, Kristyn, a new CEO, has just been hired to transform an organization. It's day one and she is in her office. Kristyn is the type of CEO we have worked with over the years. She has a vision, and that vision is clear in her mind. So clear that she pins a \$100 bill on the wall in her office. Kristyn has been brought on to lead the change from \$30 a share to \$100 a share in the next 5 years. As she pins the bill to the wall, an overwhelming thought of 'how am I going to make this happen' sinks in. She envisions herself as an orchestra conductor, realizing the only way they are going to achieve this goal is to ensure all teams work together. She begins to recall her interactions with a Work Excellence coach at her previous organization and the phrase he used "you can achieve anything if you are on the same page." As Kristyn starts the first day, she realizes her role is to be the conductor of this organization and allow each person in the organization to reach their full potential and work together.

THE ORCHESTRA

We don't like calling successful organizations well-oiled machines. The description leaches humanity out of an enterprise. It suggests that employees are nothing more than easily replaced cogs, lacking individuality. No, we like to call a business where everyone is on the same page an orchestra. Think about it. The hierarchies of orchestras and organizations are remarkably similar. The conductor and the CEO must be good leaders. No one expects the conductor to be proficient at playing every instrument. Nor does the CEO have to know how to do every job. Instead, they must guide the group, seamlessly helping them get on the same page. This is literally true in the case of the music- reading orchestra.



In the orchestra's organizational hierarchy, the first-chair violinist is one rung below the conductor. This person is often called the concertmaster — and for good reason. They not only have to be the best violinist in the orchestra, but they are also the primary contact between the conductor and the other musicians. Although their playing must be impeccable and they often play solo, one of their most important jobs is understanding what the conductor wants. Then by using technical and industry-specific jargon, they communicate those ideas to the other performers. They also learn the piece themselves, all the while fine tuning the overall performance. In a corporate office, this same role is filled by the executive team. If the CEO's ideas are not being properly communicated by the leaders, then the organization will never run as it should. If your message is getting muddled, that communication problem must be addressed before any other changes are adopted. After all, if your ideas are never properly implemented or executed, then how do you know if they are working or not?

If you are skeptical about the orchestra/organization comparison, consider the Harvard MBA students who shadowed musicians, joining them in the pit and analyzing the conductor's role. As a 2015 Forbes article entitled "Leadership and the Art of Orchestra Conducting" points out, orchestras are divided into woodwind, brass, strings, and percussion sections just like an "executive team." MBA students learned that no matter what a player's background or training, they had to get on the same page. Or as Merck Orchestra conductor Wolfgang Heinzl explains, "I must take these people and give them the feeling that everyone is important to me. One must give everyone the feeling that he is important..."

Executives who don't emphasize the importance of each team member soon have a team that is not executing. If this is happening at your organization,



that is a big reason why you are dissatisfied with your results — whether it's sales performance, rising customer complaints, or employee turnover. We like the orchestra analogy because it helps you visualize an organization's disparate parts while it also delineates the goal. It is a rare organization that functions as adeptly as a well-practiced orchestra.

Perhaps the most successful orchestra conductor was the 20th century composer, Leonard Bernstein. Best known for scoring movies and shows like Peter Pan and West Side Story, he also led more orchestra performances with the New York Philharmonic than anyone else. From 1958 to 1969, Bernstein traveled the world as a conductor overseeing some of the best musicians on the planet. Watching any of the over 400 videos of his work reveals a confident maestro; entranced by the music, queuing individual sections, and instructing them when to swell and fade.

When performing a complex composition, like Beethoven's 9th symphony, everyone in the orchestra has sheet music. During the over one-hour long performance, each note must appear effortless while every musician must not only be on the same page but on the same line. In a perfect performance everyone moves along at the exact same tempo together. Being on the same page is vital. If the string instruments and the wind instruments are out of sync, the music would not be Beethoven. It would not sound right.

Bernstein didn't just know how to get everyone on the same page. He also knew how to keep them there. Just as Conductor Heinzl after him, before practicing a new piece Bernstein reached out to every single musician and made them feel needed. That is one way he brought the disparate parts together, melding individual players into one beautiful sound.



While Bernstein piloted the helm of his orchestral ship, the audience only saw grace and precision. Yet behind the scenes, there was a lot going on. In a top-notch orchestra, every member is an elite musician at the pinnacle of their profession. They can all perform flawlessly. The challenge is they could have practiced the same concerto in a different key, with a different conductor. Some may have recently graduated at the top of their class. Others might have played for years in Italy or France, adopting different techniques than from those who played in Germany or Spain. As an added challenge, most who ascend to the top of highly competitive professions have alpha personalities. This makes conflicts almost inevitable.

Business is the same way. Just as a pianist may have learned a different method than the obo, the head of the sales department might have a different method than the head of manufacturing. In most cases, having only one method works the best. There is no need to argue about which method is “better.”

Just like an orchestra, groups of people working together may have as many methods as there are people. As conductor, Bernstein established a common method along with a technique that gathered all the energy in the room and focused it on a singular goal. He brought a hundred skilled artists together and created something greater than the sum of its parts. When the orchestra played together, in harmony, the audience was transported to another realm that transcended physical instruments and spoke directly to the heart.

Although transcendence may be a lofty objective for a corporation, being on the same page focuses every team member from the receptionist to the CEO on a singular goal. Amazon’s success is traced to founder Jeff Bezos’ relentless focus



on satisfying the customer, going as far as to wheel an empty chair into meetings at HQ to remind executives that the unseen customer was the most important person in the room. When Paul English founded travel site Kayak, he required every engineer to answer customer service calls. Being laser-focused on the customer helped those organizations stay on the same page. For your organization it means you can transition your team from a group of intelligent but unconnected individuals to a tight knit, high performing team. This is what being a leader is all about.

Of course, if getting on the same page was easy, everyone would be doing it. Considering how many people complain that “We’re not on the same page,” you would think there would be several books written to address it. Then again, just because you can tell a classically trained orchestra from a seventh-grade band with your eyes closed, that does not mean you can adeptly pick up a baton and take over conducting duties. There is a massive distinction between understanding something and applying that knowledge.

Maybe you have key players who aren’t functioning the way they should. That might be because they are better suited to other positions. For example, a salesperson who is uncomfortable in front of crowds might be better deployed in the back office. Another common challenge is when every single employee is high performing, but they are using different methods. That means they can’t gel as a team.

We want to help you become your organization’s Leonard Bernstein. To do that, there is much more to the job than standing at the helm and looking impressive. It takes an in-depth knowledge of personality and motivation. It is “composed” of equal parts patience, wisdom, and kindness. It won’t happen



overnight. When it does happen, you will see how being on the same page makes everything else possible.

Like some of the most important books ever written, Getting on the Same Page began as an oral tradition. We sat in front of people and coached them individually. Over time, we developed workbooks and conducted workshops along with providing coaching for a variety of organizations. No matter their size or industry, we helped them deliver the results they wanted in a time frame they established. As you keep reading, you will discover that the Work Excellence Method is about more than increasing profits.

That's partly because not every organization who has successfully deployed our method is profit focused. The Method has been applied at non-for-profit organizations as well.

Sometimes, a method is not utilized systemwide but instead is limited to one department or one level. Although the departments that use a method will achieve their goals faster and more effectively, the rest of the organization may lag behind. That is one big reason why we always recommend a company-wide adoption of a method. We know doing this will lead to a radical transformation in organizational culture and team members' behavior. This translates into increased value for their culture and customers (and often increased profits as well.)

Work Excellence is about changing mindsets and providing visualizations of all work that people do. Good leaders usually have a clear grasp of their organization's current state. Unfortunately, they often struggle to articulate it. This creates an execution problem. A good method should teach leaders to



clearly understand and communicate their current state. It also allows them to define their optimal long-term strategic vision, their future state. Once the current state and the future state are identified, leaders can choose the best method for the journey from one state to the next. Think about moving from point A (current state) to point Z (future state; long-term strategic goals). This can be overwhelming, but breaking the steps down into A to B, B to C, helps that journey be more manageable by establishing short-term desired states along the way. To begin executing, leaders must clearly communicate and engage the team. A good method allows team members to see their work in a common visual form. This helps teams recognize the importance of their work since they are now able to see what goals need to be accomplished and how they directly contribute. And by seeing, we mean getting the entire organization — both leaders and team members — to see the same page.

That is how an organization achieves alignment and executes better. An organization can only achieve excellence if everybody involved appreciates how much their individual contributions impact the organization. The way to improve execution is to provide clarity to your current state and future state and choosing a method to help you get there.

FRANKENSTEIN

If an orchestra is the successful collaboration of disparate elements, then its opposite can be found in a well-known horror: Frankenstein. Created by a teenage Mary Shelley as part of a story competition, the tale of a man-made monster is the perfect metaphor for what happens in an organization when everyone is not on the same page.

Frankenstein is a cautionary tale about the dangers of scientific hubris and technology. It illustrates the tension between the Age of Enlightenment and the



Age of Romance — with Shelley discrediting the enlightenment's championing of reason and rationality by presenting a story that undid both. It is also the ideal metaphor for what happens when a collection of employees can't manage to work together.

First published in 1818, *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* follows Dr. Victor Frankenstein's quest to create life. While the novel left the precise mechanism that gave the creature its spark unclear, in numerous film adaptations after assembling a collection of body parts harvested from the local graveyard, the doctor harnesses the power of an electrical storm. He hopes to turn the corpse into a companion. Instead, the creature that comes to life is unmanageable and dangerous. In the novel, the creature's shift toward mayhem comes because others are disgusted by his appearance. In most of the films, the culprit is that amongst the grim menagerie of muscle and bone, Dr. Frankenstein chose a brain formerly occupying the body of a murderous mental patient.

Management consultants often talk about Frankenstein businesses. Just as the movies made the creature's neck bolts and forehead stitches iconic elements, those businesses can be easily identified by numerous factors. Some of these include leaders losing control of the creation; businesses doing things its leaders do not want it to do; leaders preferring their own beliefs while refusing to hear other viewpoints; and employees' opinions and experiences being ignored in strategic discussions. With Frankenstein businesses, communication breaks down and the organization's behavior actually scares customers away (just as the creature scared away villagers).

That's why Frankenstein's monster is both a cautionary tale and an



important one. Just as the creature's disparate body parts never seemed to work together, in many organizations the different departments are not aligned, and the employees seem to be going in different directions. That's why executives often notice that their teams are not on the same page. We hear it weekly in the groups we coach.

In order to create value, you must be on the same page. To stay on the same page, you need visibility. That's a good method in a nutshell. We designed a method for any business that wants to improve. It will help you get and stay on the same page. If you use the thinking and the teaching that we offer in this book, you'll guide those competing parts into a collaborative whole. You will not only achieve hard-to-reach goals but exceed them.

Keep in mind that a method is simply the way you think, the way you work, and the tools that you use. In the pages that follow, we will walk through each of those. We will examine why organizations need to get on the same page by using a common method to create more value now.

VALUE CREATION NOW

Is the method you are using creating value, now? Is the time and energy that you are spending producing the results you want? Excellence and value are correlated with one another.

Value is not just about increasing profits. While this may sometimes be the goal, most of the time this is merely a measurement reflecting the desired results. We use "value" and "results" interchangeably. Still, there is a preference for "value" because "results" can be broad. Value creation is our focus here, but it is intrinsically linked to your common method. Ask yourself the following questions: What value do you want? What value should you be creating? Has



this value been communicated and agreed upon?

A manufacturing organization might define the value they are seeking as increasing productivity, reducing lead times, or increasing sales. In a service organization, however, it could be improving service time, enhancing customer care, or differentiating themselves from competitors through a unique service.

Excellent work is striving for high performance and achieving your goals faster. Think about the challenges faced by a world class conductor. They must integrate the disparate parts of an orchestra while addressing the needs of musicians who might hail from dozens of different backgrounds. How does a conductor get them to produce beautiful music? How do you get your team members to produce excellence?

The stronger your method, the better chance you have of creating value, now. You need to be foundationally anchored in excellence. If you strive for that, deploying a method centered around excellence, doing things well and honoring people, you will be amazed by the results!

Think of a time when you interacted with a business and your expectations weren't met. When the staff responded, they had an excellence mindset. They did everything possible to quickly resolve your problem. The result? They made the bond between the two of you stronger than before the problem. In other words, if the problem had never happened your regard for the company would not have been as high. The lifetime value of the customer just went up. How amazing is that? That is what happens when excellence is properly applied.

Compare that to a negative customer experience that was not approached through a value creation mindset. The creation of value is an ongoing



continuous activity. The ultimate check for a team is, “Are you progressing and creating value, now?” If not, “Do you know the reasons why?”

Never confuse excellence with perfection. This can be hard for perfectionists. They struggle to get people on their page. Excellence, on the other hand, is about working hard to be the best. It is about problem solving and thinking outside the box. It means looking creatively for solutions that you never thought about. If your work is not based on an excellence type mindset, then you aren’t going to achieve as much value as you could if you adopted one.

The flip side of that is the negative. This can be seen by how workers respond when they are asked to go above and beyond to achieve a goal. Are they onboard? Or is there so much pushback that eventually upper management gives up and settles for the status quo? It is all dependent upon an organization’s mindset. The thing is, you can’t really see how a company truly operates until you witness them in the midst of a crisis.

You are where you are. It’s neither good nor bad. It is just where you are. When we interact with clients, we find people are enormously grateful when they discover that we are not out to judge them and tell them what to do. Our mission is to be alongside them. We want to help them get to where they want to go. We want to aid them as they climb the mountain toward their future state.

Our goal is not to tell you what to do. It is to help you make what you are doing visible. You’re going to talk about it with those you work with and you’re going to choose what to do. When people realize on their own what their objectives should be and how effective same-page thinking can be, then it is easier to get movement towards their future state.



We are guides. We walk alongside you while offering a method based upon the value you and your team determine. It's about you and all the work you do to create value. We have seen that journey multiple times. A team that is committed and on the same page most often reaches the top.

In all these scenarios, people follow — whether consciously or subconsciously — some method of working because that is intrinsic in your DNA.

Humans possess a distinctive ability for decision-making, propelling them to seek fulfillment through their work, each with varying levels of effectiveness. As organizational membership grows, managing work and achieving desired value becomes increasingly challenging due to differences in thinking and approach. When ideas, cultures, backgrounds, and personal preferences clash, chaos, noise, and storming ensue. Chapter Three delves into how organizations can operate successfully amid diverse working and thinking styles.

The Work Excellence method is versatile, applicable to any endeavor, although this book predominantly focuses on corporations and similar entities.

Getting on the same page is not about making everyone think and work the same way. It is about defining why the work is important and setting clear expectations. This empowers team members to work autonomously. People crave direction and feedback which, as you will discover inside these pages, can be truly transformative. When people know they are creating value, they view their work not just as a means to a paycheck but start working in a more purposeful manner.



Setting ambitious goals, such as doubling sales or improving culture, involves collaborative problem-solving. Orchestras work in synergy to create music that is more than the sum of its parts. Similarly, your organization can achieve value beyond expectation. The difference is in the mindset, it is in your method of working, and it is in the magic of arriving on the same page.

In the context of a diverse workforce—varying in expertise, age, race, gender, religion, politics, and talent—each member must contribute, akin to musicians playing different instruments. As a leader, your role is that of a conductor, integrating their skills to deliver the final product. The challenge lies in bringing everyone onto the same page, starting with identifying a method. It may be difficult, but it's not impossible; the journey begins with recognizing the need for alignment.

Back to Kristyn. A sense of calm comes over Kristyn as she realizes that she has done this before. She knows she can accomplish this goal if they can define the sheet of music so they can all play their part. She takes one last look at the \$100 bill, gathers her things, and walks to the meeting room to meet her leadership team for the first time as CEO. Remember all you have to do is be the conductor.

Learn more about how to get your teams on the same page and read the full book [here](#)



WORK EXCELLENCE