

## **Getting Better - *Kaizen***

### **Balanced by Producing Results on the Real Problems**

Getting better is based upon the principles of continuous improvement, continuous learning, and continuous change. The Japanese call it *kaizen* and, because it builds trust, it becomes a powerful relationship-building tool. When people see you as a learning, growing, renewing individual or organization they develop confidence in your ability to succeed in rapidly changing environments.

The opposite of getting better is deterioration, resting on past successes, or becoming irrelevant. As Bob Dylan wrote, “He not busy being born is busy dying.” Simply staying where you are does not inspire trust; it diminishes trust. Two counterfeits of getting better are the eternal student who never produces anything and those with only one course of action, their own. The latter seem to force everything into what *they* are good at doing; the hammer that sees everything as a nail.

### ***Two Ways to Get Better***

1. Seek and utilize feedback from people you trust and respect. Asking the right questions is important, but how you respond says more. Expect surprises that the perceptions of others will differ from your own. Prepare yourself to reframe your mindsets and become creative in developing paths toward positive change.

2. Learn from your mistakes and the experience of others. Do your best but do not expect perfection the first time you attempt something new. “For everyone there is a first time,” Kaldhen Sherpa, Himalayan mountain guide. Appropriate risk-taking, in an environment safe to make mistakes, is a special growth opportunity for you and your organization. You can create such an environment. Evaluate not what others could have done differently but what you yourself could do differently. What others have done may not apply to your situation. Search for parts of what they did that might apply to your case, especially if the person or their actions align with principles that you know have a fundamental truth. Don’t assume today’s knowledge and skills will meet tomorrow’s challenges.

### ***Deliver Results on What Really Matters***

Define and confront reality. Take the tough issues and get them up on top of the table where you can really discuss them at levels deeper than assumptions. Genuinely and authentically address the difficult issues that affect people’s lives. This calls upon personal courage, responsibility, respect, and integrity. Personally evaluate things that you or others may have neglected.

The opposite action is to ignore reality and act as though its undesired elements don’t exist. People don’t want to face bad news, feel uncomfortable, lose face, or damage their image. This does not grow easier with time as you lose options with failure of timely

action. The counterfeit is to present yourself as confronting reality while your actions evade it; you stay busy to skirt the real problems.

A leader helps people see the real situation, build an action plan, and identify necessary tasks. Leaders do this by asking for the ideas of those who are part of the leader's feedback system. Tackle these things together and be accountable to deliver results not necessarily the perfect resolution. With tough problems small wins are worth celebrating.

Condensed by David Christenson from the writings of:  
Covey, Stephen M.R., The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything, Free Press, Simon & Schuster, Inc. 2006