

DO EPIC STUFF!



RENÉ ESTEBAN

# DO EPIC STUFF!

Leadership after  
Change Management

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN  
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*Do Epic Stuff!* is dedicated to my wife, Melanie,  
and my two daughters, Emilia and Alicia.  
May you always do what makes you happy.





## Introduction:

# Almost Anything Is Possible with This Book

Do you feel like jumping right in without much ado? Here are three basic assumptions and one promise:

Change management with its methods that haven't changed for more than 25 years has become obsolete. That's the first assumption. Handling changes has long since become a daily process in large corporations and no longer presents any real challenge. If the top of the crop are to come aboard, you must offer them a greater purpose and greater incentives than the prospect of somehow managing the change of the month.

The second assumption is: What's really important for today's corporations is to have teams of highly motivated people focus on big goals and to jointly achieve those sophisticated goals. In this book I call these big goals *epic stuff*. To achieve goals that constitute a leap and not just a small step – that's the true new challenge. Many people will fail simply because there is so much risk of failing: no budget; not enough people; a lack of confidence in oneself and the goal; poor communication; a counter-productive culture; a lack of the willingness to take on responsibility, just to name a few reasons.

The third basic assumption is: Inspired focus is the most essential aspect in order to get epic stuff truly on the road. Whatever we focus on is where our energy flows to. Today, one of the things people find hardest to do is to stay focused and concentrated for any longer period of time. Distractions and diversions are lurk-

ing everywhere. The temptation to lose yourself in one thousand and one activities instead of sticking to *one* major objective – I am talking about *one goal* – is huge. Yet inspired, enthused and motivated people still manage to do so again and again. Hence the inspired focus.

And now my promise: If you read this book, which admittedly is not the slimmest book around, you'll have all the tools for epic stuff at your fingertips. Then you can be a leader who accomplishes epic stuff in his or her environment and with his or her people. (Almost) anything is possible with this book. And I mean that just the way I've written it down here. For it doesn't matter at all which branch you're working in, what your market looks like, who your people are or how big your budget is – whether you will achieve your big goal depends little on the goal itself but mostly on how you approach the matter.

In this book I will share my knowledge about how to reach big goals with you, no matter what exactly your goal is. In principle, that's nothing new because change management has also always claimed to be the perfect toolbox for any form of change. What's new is the realization that the factors that are decisive for success are different from those many leaders still focus on. Therefore some details mentioned in this book may surprise you at first. But then you will realize that they are true: The way we think, our belief systems, our focus or the power of our positive vision have a far greater effect on our success in leadership than we used to think.

I didn't invent anything written in this book but rather observed, tested and confirmed it repeatedly at work. That fact lets me begin each chapter with an eye-opening story that is always based on facts. In addition, I talked to leaders who practice *epic stuff*. Don't worry, you won't have to work your way through boring interviews like those you've read a thousand times before and would probably skim through anyway. Instead I had conversations with top executives and entrepreneurs – including s shaolin

master – that were inspiring and at times rather personal, complementing and deepening each chapter.

My conversation partners were:

- David Jeans, owner of Beganya Business Services and Partner, FocusFirst, former SVP, Merck Life Science (Chapter 1)
- Kathie Starks, Branch Manager and Head of Asset Servicing, Bank of New York Mellon, and Frank Sielaff, Founder & Managing Director, entrusted former Director Digital Media, Merck Group (Chapter 2)
- Kai Czeschlik, CDO, Allianz, and Yuan Lu, Director of the Shaolin Center of Qi Lu in Schorndorf, Germany (Chapter 3)
- Walter Gunz, Co-Founder of MediaMarkt, and Susann Kunz, Director Brand Strategy and Business Development, adidas (Chapter 4)
- Martin Stork, Head of Workforce Enablement, BASF, and Klaus Straub, former CIO & Senior Vice President Information Management, BMW Group (Chapter 5)
- Dr. Christoph Hüls, Internal Entrepreneur in Action, Merck Group, and Nils Stamm, CDO, Deutsche Telekom & Board Member Münchner Kreis (Chapter 6)
- Daniel Szabo, CEO Körber Digital & Founder YOU MAWO, and Dr. Joachim Jäckle, former CIO & Global Head of Integrated Business Solutions, Henkel (Chapter 7)
- Axel Löber, Senior Vice President Global Brand & Marketing, E.ON, and Jörg Hellwig, CDO, Lanxess (Chapter 8)
- Ludwig Askemper, Managing Director of Mondelez Austria, and Dr. Rahmyn Kress, Henkel X Ventures & Founder Henkel X, as well as Dirk Ramhorst, CIO & CDO, Wacker Chemie (Chapter 9)

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of these fantastic conversation partners. I enjoyed every minute of each and every con-

versation. I was always able to feel the enthusiasm that motivates these different individuals.

And now I hope reading this book will inspire you and let you focus on your own goals!

Best,

*René Esteban*

## Chapter 1

# Head of Epic Stuff: You Want to Make a Difference, Don't You?

“Let’s have a talk,” Florian said to Alex. They were standing in the break room of the marketing department of a south German DAX Corporation they worked for. It was early afternoon. Florian – the youngest member of the department – had just fixed himself a cup of green tea. Alex, his immediate supervisor, preferred an espresso. “Sure, let’s talk,” Alex replied with a smile. He was curious to hear what was on Florian’s mind. Leaning casually against the counter, Florian looked at him; his gaze was open and friendly. His body language signaled: I’m in the here and now, feeling fine. The young man was the latest super talent of the marketing department! The company had hired him just three months ago. The whole team had been overjoyed that this likeable guy with his lightning-fast perception and fresh ideas would start working with them. They were one hundred per cent sure that the top of the crop among their competitors would also have snapped up Florian without a second thought. Lucky them!

“Well, Alex, I’ve been doing some thinking,” the super talent continued after taking a sip of tea. “And I decided that I don’t want to work after all.” – A pause. – “I mean, I don’t want to work in business. What I’d love to do is advocate for endangered animal species. Or the people in the African refugee zones. It doesn’t have to be for money, either. I’ll get by somehow. Well, anyway, I’m going to quit this job. Sorry.”

Florian's tone of voice was cheerful yet completely sober. Alex didn't notice the least bit of tension. Florian sounded as if he was standing in front of one of these windows of an Italian ice cream parlor, changing his order: "Scusi, Signore! Stop! I don't want strawberry cheesecake. I'd rather have a scoop of cookies."

How did Alex handle the situation? He needed a moment to collect himself. About three seconds. Twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three. Then he said to his still-super-talent and soon-ex-worker on the latter's possibly last day of work:

"Whoa, that comes as a surprise, Florian. Let me take a deep breath first! – I hope – and I mean it – that you'll find your *purpose*. If not here with us, then somewhere else. It doesn't really matter where. As long as you don't waste your life doing something that doesn't have any meaning for you. Too bad that we couldn't provide the right framework for your personal meaningful experience here with us. I, just like everybody else here, really enjoyed working with you. But I'd be the last person on Earth to put obstacles in your way if you want to leave. I can't wait to hear what you'll end up doing. But whatever it is: Do epic stuff! And enjoy every single minute of it for life is short. And thank you for enriching our team for three valuable months."

Was Alex disappointed? Certainly a bit. Most likely any leader would be in that kind of situation. Was he angry at the young man? Not in the least. It would have been totally beside the point anyway to reproach him. And absolutely useless to try to talk him out of it or to resist his wish to resign. All that would only have shown that Alex, well, actually anyone in his company, had failed to notice the signs of the times. In fact, they had all realized for quite a while that times have fundamentally changed.

Today you will hardly find any courageous workers who will do what the boss says just because he – or she – is the boss. Employees are motivated by the meaning and purpose of their work. Either your company provides them with the framework that matches their personal meaningful experience, or you can forget

about doing any epic stuff with them. Everything else – money, more money, even more money, more authority, corner offices, USM furniture, platinum corporate credit cards – is hardly an incentive any more. All these are only accessories many of them will be happy to take as well. What matters to a growing number of people in the working world, especially those of the young generation, is the *purpose*.

Employees are motivated by the meaning and purpose of their work.

However, Florian – who is not a fictional character, though his name is different in the real world – does take the easy way out here. Nothing against looking after animals or working to help refugees. But within your remit you, as the supervisor, can naturally convey a meaningful experience much more directly than Alex, the marketing director. And what if you are a manager in a corporation who is facing a global mammoth project without knowing how to motivate workers in 60 affiliates in other countries without having direct authority? These are exactly the starting positions this book is all about. And today purpose is what counts in situations like this one as well! The first thing you get to do is to convey a meaning to every single super-talent you need to achieve epic goals in large corporations. Why is that? What happened in the last few years?

## Look, Maslow is standing on his head!

Whenever I think of the world my grandparents lived in, I still picture Maslow's hierarchy of needs in the classic form of a pyramid – a pyramid like those found near Giza: with a wide bottom and a narrow tip. The idea of having food to eat was the foundation. For that you needed work, because only those who had a job

earned money and were able to buy food. The next requirement was the need for safety. No more wars! And by God no more inflation, either! Family bliss and spending money on yourself for a change? A nice thought if you had time for that. But self-realization and purpose, the tip of the pyramid? What was that supposed to mean? That didn't make any sense to my grandparents. Today's generation, however, thinks nothing of turning Maslow's hierarchy of needs upside down: What used to be the tip that only few could afford to reach at all is now the very foundation. These days no child in the developed world is able to fathom that anyone might not have enough to eat. Their greatest challenge is the candy shelf by the cash register: a tough test for any child's ability to resist temptation. They get their first smartphone at the age of seven. Our power of imagination doesn't fail when picturing the idea of self-realization but rather that of wars, food shortages and suffering. After all, these days such things only happen in videos on the internet! Our world is a bed of roses, at least for most of us.

In a situation like this one, people turn straight to self-realization. They start to look for meaning. Of course not every coffee break is used to contemplate the meaning of life – no more than sometimes late at night at the bar, after a few drinks. Yet if we take a closer look, we'll find that today just about everybody is looking for something that will give their life meaning and makes them happy and content. Some find their purpose in life at an early age, others not until they are 70 or 80. But there is hardly anyone anymore who doesn't care what happens to him or her in that short period between birth and death. To have at least survived, to hopefully have kept one's family largely intact – these priorities have virtually disappeared in highly developed societies.

Today we want to do more than just survive and pass on our genes to the next generation. Some people find meaning in the study of religion and philosophy. Today anyone can go to Tibet and become a monk at the age of 22. Yet even those who are not really interested in religion and philosophy want to grow and be



part of something greater. This has enormous consequences for companies and their employees.

I am deeply convinced that it is one of the deepest and most fulfilling experiences for any human to achieve big goals together. If companies manage to create a framework that inspires people to make most of themselves and realize their dreams, these companies will create epic things with the support of their highly motivated employees. Yes, even those who combine their meaningful experiences with corporate goals will still be working. Yet in that case it will be work without pressure and stress but with ease and joy and inner balance. We may radically reconsider leadership: Every company and every team first and foremost needs a mission. Teams are managed with meaning, with goals, with values, with purpose. I've been fortunate enough to repeatedly witness in recent years how teams in large corporations create great things if the purpose is the right one.

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On the other hand, I have experienced more than once how everything is deflated if employees no longer see any meaning in their daily activities after the umpteenth change project that was rushed through. "Pressure will only trigger counter-pressure, causing people to give priority to their own security," says Carolin Adler, Transformation & Change Manager of Körber AG, with whom I talked about the future of change management while working on this book. "In that case there is frequently no energy left for the actual change," Carolin analyzes. Yet she says with conviction, "Things are finally changing! With inspiring magnets, such as positive target images, and with designs of the future that are geared towards solutions, we have already got much better results. People want to work and make a difference while having a purpose and fun at work."

Today, even job postings don't really work any more if they only describe one area of responsibility and list the qualifications

and work experience expected of applicants. This is where purpose should come in! What are the things a company offers to their future employee so he or she can experience meaningful work, get appreciation, experience the joy of success? Does the job make the applicant part of something great – or merely an insignificant cog in a poorly oiled machine? Our labor market has for a long time worked to the advantage of employees. Not only HR executives know that; everybody does. If you want the top of the cream for your team, then offer them the opportunity to achieve big goals together – otherwise your job posting will only be briefly scanned and clicked away.

Is that what makes the new generation tick? The mysterious Generation Y? The Florians of this world? Yes and no. For a long time the desire of corporate employees to find meaning and reach big goals has no longer been limited to a certain age group. A lot has been written about the “millennials” – yet today the brightest minds of the generation between forty and their mid-to-late fifties think just like their younger colleagues under 35. They are up to date and have adopted the new values. At times this means that new and old values come together in one and the same team. Or they meet in the course of a merger that merges two different cultures. These are exciting challenges!

## Starting with a 5-star experience

The employees of a global textile company had never before experienced anything like that: Each one of them was welcomed individually by a driver dressed in a dark suit, carrying a sign with the company logo and their name, at the “arrivals” gate at the airport. They were picked up by a sleek limousine waiting directly by the exit and driven through rolling hills and dense forests to a luxury hotel by a lake in lush nature. From the hotel you

could see the lake and a mountain range on the horizon. Every guest was personally welcomed at the reception. Check-in had already been taken care of; everybody could go straight to their rooms. Bellboys carried the suitcases and unlocked the employees' rooms. They were greeted by a large fragrant flower bouquet on a table. A card made of fine paper was propped up against the vase, welcoming them with these words handwritten in ink: "We hope you had a good journey and will enjoy your stay. We are looking forward to having you here for the next three days. Your Workshop Team." There was also a small printed brochure with the exact schedule for the following days as well as information about the hotel, the meals, and sports and fitness activities it provided.

After settling into their rooms, some of the employees wondered whether they were dreaming. They knew these kick-off workshops introducing them to the next change project all too well! Usually they would get the address of some concrete hotel block near the exit of the highway by email and had to figure out themselves how to get there. When they arrived at the hotel, they had to ask their way around until they finally ran into their colleagues. Then they would learn bit by bit from the others what had been planned by "the top" for the next days. Now some of them almost felt like Hollywood stars as soon as they had arrived. Or at least as if they had moved up to the board. What had they done to deserve this kind of luxury, attention and appreciation? And some of them noticed that the term "change" had not yet been mentioned at all. Instead, the invitation to the workshop had read:

You're in this workshop because you've already achieved great things. We appreciate what you have contributed so far and are proud of you. We will set ourselves a big goal in the next three days. Together we will then reach this goal. For this we'll need your special skills. We're counting on you!

What was that all about? Wasn't the plan to make one team out of two teams in Germany as part of the group-wide digitization strategy "Impact 2030"? And wasn't that a classic change project? Yet no one spoke of "change". Instead everybody talked about a "big goal".

The next morning, just before 9:00 a. m.: One employee after another filed into the room where the workshop was to take place. The large windows provided a magnificent view of the lake and the mountains. The room was decorated with fresh bouquets of exquisite roses that emitted their subtle fragrance. Soft lounge music was playing. Everyone who came in recognized colleagues from their own team – and looked into just as many strange faces. They had to be "the others", the members of the previously separate department, the people they would have to work with and get along with in the future. And they would have to do that in a totally new structure: without e-procurement and e-commerce being separate, as they were used to, but in a new, larger team, working for a unified digital trading platform. No one could really picture it yet. At first everyone sat down among their old team members, so that there were two groups in the room. Calmly watching this development, the management team of the workshop didn't seem to mind for the time being.

Clarissa, a member of the management team, warmly welcomed all participants. After a relaxed warm-up round she asked everyone to sit down with a member of the other team, forming teams of two. Now the partners were encouraged to interview each other: What were your greatest successes in this company so far? Why do you like it here? What do you enjoy most? What's your personal passion? Afterwards everyone presented the results of their interviews to the group. Everyone listened attentively. Many participants had tackled these questions for the first time in a long time. And they learned a lot of new details about people they had been working with for years.

Then Clarissa surprised the group again. She said, "Today each one of us is going to spend all day completing one single slide