

# business issues

## THE "WILL" VS. THE "WHY"

BY NATHAN JAMAIL

Understanding the mindset of  
top performers.



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**THERE IS A COMMON MINDSET** among those who are always looking to win, no matter the obstacle.

These winners can be found in all industries and all positions. Most of them move up in their organization quickly by having a simple thought—"Will"—while those who struggle focus on a different mantra—"Why." Top performers, no matter what happens to them or around them say, "We will do..." Those who struggle ask, "Why did they do..." The "we will" mindset turns today's challenges into tomorrow's success stories. The "why did they" mindset turns today's challenges into tomorrow's failures with excuses that start with, "We lost because they did..."

The difference is simple: Top performers focus on looking forward, despite what happened in the past.

John, a successful engineer, is a perfect example of focusing on the "will." The company he works for made some business decisions that caused his firm to have to change the way they did business in order to be successful. So, John quickly brought his team and some industry leaders together, and said, "Given the change in our company direction, we are going to start focusing on these key services." Not only did he share the focus change, but he also created a practice program and a game plan to ensure his team's success. He did not focus any attention or energy on "why" the decision was made because he knew it was immaterial to his success. In fact, he assumed, since he believed in the company and the leadership for the past 20 years, that the decision they were making was the right one despite how it might look from his limited view. Within the first 90 days, not only did John not see any negative effects due to the change, but his team actually started achieving their greatest successes ever.

Mike, another engineer, did not fare as well. Mike kept focusing on the many reasons why the company's decisions were wrong. He could not understand why the company would make these changes. He spent the next 30 days telling anyone who would listen, including his team, why he thought the company was going in the wrong direction. He and his team attempted to keep moving forward, despite their feelings toward the new direction. Mike would say, "It is what it is," and, "All we can do is our best." Worse than that, every time something went wrong or sales slowed down, Mike would blame it on the company's decision; therefore, so did his team. In the next 90 days, Mike's team struggled just like Mike "knew they would." By focusing on the past—why something happened or why the company made the wrong change—Mike was unable to focus on the future and adapt to the new direction, causing his team much pain and bad results. Now Mike says, "We are down because of what the company did. If they would have done XYZ, we would have had success."

Both leaders are great people and know their business very well. The difference between John's success and Mike's failure was merely their mindset. John's path was not easier or based on where he lived (although Mike would disagree). John's business was at risk, the same as Mike's, but John decided to focus on what his

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team would do moving forward versus why a decision was made, or even what others were doing. By focusing on their actions and plans, John’s team was motivated and saw this change as a chance to win—and they did. The others were looking back, getting discouraged and frustrated with the past. This focus became the predictor of their future. Their mindset—not the changes the company made—determined their lack of success. The hardest part is being able to see the power of perspective during a change or event. That is why one’s mindset is more important than the process.

A person must have the “we will” mindset as part of their culture and everyday life. With this mindset, they will not have to worry about dealing with change, regardless of whether it is the

company they work for, the competition or the economy that is changing, because the decisions and changes that happened in the past are not important to their success. The only thing that is important to their success is what they will do about the changes. Those who look at the future with a positive long-term outlook, despite the amount of short-term pain, will always win. Simply moving forward is not enough. You must do so with belief and a committed and excited focus to welcome the obstacles, because on the other side is victory. ■

*Do you agree with the approach discussed here? How closely does it align with your company’s or your personal management style and philosophy? We’d love your feedback! Send your thoughts to [melnick@aisc.org](mailto:melnick@aisc.org).*

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