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Dustin Hostetler • Jul. 19, 2017

I just recently finished up a busy baseball weekend with my son. What does busy look like? We had one tournament with a travelling all-star team while still wrapping up the playoffs in his local little league. After two games in the heat at the tournament, we drove back to our hometown of Wooster, OH to play an evening playoff game under the lights for the right to advance to the "City Series" – the best of three championship series of the two best teams in the league.

A little background on his little league team and this game. First, at the beginning of

But that's not the makeup of this team – a bunch of nine and ten-year olds who don't know what the words "you can't" even mean apparently. Even with the frustration of some questionable calls. Even with having the number one team battle back to tie the game in the bottom of the sixth to force extra innings and regain all of the momentum. Even with all the doubt from the parents (yes, I'll be honest), these kids always believed. In the top of the eighth, our most improved player of the season hit his first ever home run and we went up two runs heading into the bottom of the eighth. Our pitcher at this point was pitching faster in the eighth than he was when he came on in the fifth because of adrenaline. The players in the field behind him never sounded louder in their positive encouragement. And they backed him up with outstanding defensive play. We closed them down 1-2-3 in the bottom of the eighth and celebrated with high fives all around and of course a little pizza afterward.

So, what does this story have to do with change inside CPA firms?

I've been using the Henry Ford quote "Whether you think you can, or can't, you're right" in a lot of my material and messaging around change management in CPA firms since I started consulting on process and technology change over ten years ago. That quote speaks to the heart of a dynamic I see play out all the time: where 75% of your internal team sees the potential for a change you're making and readily adopts. But 25% don't believe it will work (or they don't want to learn anything new), so they sabotage it.

So most of the positive changes your firm has been making in the areas of process, technology and the client experience have a net result of slightly ahead of neutral. Hardly the stuff of champions.

This scenario is a hidden problem in our profession today – and is playing out currently inside many of your firms. We have at least two-thirds of the professionals and team members in firms who believe "we can" when it comes to change. We have

around one-third of the professionals and team members in firms today who believe

First, you should always present answers to the two 'why' questions everyone has when a change is being made.

#1 – Why did we need to change in the first place?

#2 – Why will this change be better than what I'm currently doing?

View these two questions as tollgates. Assuming you past the first, you still need to answer and pass the second to get people to the "we can" feeling. We use the highly effective Lean Six Sigma five-step process improvement model of DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control) to facilitate our teams to understanding and obtaining buy-in around those two 'why' questions.

Second, help your team understand the 'Rule of 21'. No, not blackjack. The habit breaking (forming) rule that says it takes 21 days (or 21 times) of doing something different to make a new habit. Too often we have people in our organizations that may give a half-hearted attempt one time and then throw up their hands like a three-year old and order everyone back to the old way. That's as old-school as it gets and is preventing a lot of positive momentum for your team and organization. Instead, encourage and empower your team to follow this rule of 21 before making judgments. Some changes don't take 21 times to "get it." Others do. Make sure your entire team, including partners, understand this rule.

Buy-in is a powerful, powerful thing. This weekend, I saw it will an undermanned team to an improbably victory. This group of ten players showed us adults a thing or two about belief in "we can" instead of "we can't." They worked hard this season, believing in the coaches to get themselves better by understanding why the techniques they were learning were better than what they were currently doing. And it wasn't an overnight change. It took time as the Rule of 21 implies. But they sure

believed, and it all came together at the exact right time. Whether you think you can,

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