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## **Uncertainty Is the New Normal. Here's How Extraordinary Leaders Perform Through It.**

*Written by Mark Kamin, CEO and May Wang, COO & Senior Program Leader*

Tariffs. Wars. The risk of oil prices going through the roof. Economic forecasts that are obsolete before the ink dries. Whatever the specific disruption, every leader we speak with right now is navigating the same underlying question: how do I keep my organization performing when I cannot control what is happening around me?

Picture two leaders. Same company. Same quarter. Same headwinds.

The first walks into the Monday meeting, gives a tight update, and moves quickly to the numbers. Nobody asks questions. The meeting ends early. People file out and get back to their desks — quieter than before.

The second walks in, acknowledges directly that things are uncertain, says clearly what she knows and what she does not, and then asks her team: given how uncertain things are, where are the opportunities we have not yet seen, and where might we be moving faster than the

market? The meeting runs long. Three people stay after. By Wednesday, two new ideas are on the table.

Same circumstances. Completely different energy. Completely different results.

We have seen this pattern play out more times than we can count — in manufacturing plants, financial firms, healthcare systems, and everything in between. What we know with certainty is this: in volatile times, your team's performance is not primarily determined by your strategy. It is determined by how you as a leader elevate excellence with your team, and the opportunities that open up.

### **What Actually Happens When Leaders Go Quiet**

When the external environment gets difficult, most organizations drift — without anyone deciding to drift — into a kind of collective survival mode. People get cautious. Communication gets guarded. The best people start quietly hedging their commitment, waiting to see which way things go.

By the time a leader notices the performance impact, the erosion has already been happening for months.

Extraordinary leaders interrupt that drift — deliberately, and early. Here is what that looks like in practice.

They name reality without letting it become the whole story. They tell their teams honestly what is happening and what is not yet known. Then they explicitly declare what this moment means for the organization — not false optimism, but a chosen interpretation that opens action rather than closes it. The circumstances do not change. The energy with which people meet those circumstances does.

They keep their standards high. Many leaders quietly lower the bar during difficult periods, reasoning that people are already stressed. The effect is the opposite of compassionate — it is corrosive. When excellence is no longer expected, people lose the experience of being part of something that matters. In our experience, people do not want to be let off the hook during hard times. They want to be called to something worthy of their best effort.

They communicate more, not less. The instinct to manage information until there is more clarity creates exactly the anxiety it is trying to prevent. Teams feel the uncertainty regardless. When leaders go quiet, people fill the silence with their worst assumptions. Honest, grounded communication — here is what we know, here is what we do not, here is how we are thinking — is what keeps teams aligned and focused when everything else is shifting.

They connect people to a purpose beyond this quarter. Disruption tests whether an organization's sense of purpose is real or decorative. Leaders who can genuinely anchor their teams to why the work matters create a stability that no external condition can easily disrupt.

### **The Question Worth Asking**

The leaders whose teams perform in volatile times are not the ones with the best forecasts. They are the ones their people are willing to go the extra mile for — because those leaders showed up authentically and consistently when it was hard.

So here is the question worth sitting with before your next team meeting:

Are you the first leader in that story, or the second?

Because in times like these, that difference is everything.

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*Mark Kamin & Associates has spent over forty years helping leaders and organizations generate extraordinary performance in any conditions. We would love to talk with you.*

<https://mka-world.com/contact/> | [Inquire@mka-world.com](mailto:Inquire@mka-world.com)

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