

OPT-IN: Building Optimism into Your Leadership

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For years we have bought into the notion that a burning platform is required to provoke change in organizations. This theory is based on a belief that people choose comfort over risk and respond to fear over encouragement. It is true that the adrenaline caused by a burning platform charges the argument for change with powerful motivators – anxiety and fear. However, today’s business environment requires leaders who can tap into more than stress to develop people who are change-able rather than change-reactive.

The speed of disruption is breakneck, and people can’t sustain focus and drive results when they are constantly responding with anxiety. A far better position for leaders is to help people to be changeable, resilient, and confident in themselves and the organization.

The **KARRIKINS IO Dispositions Model™** explores how leaders show up. All four dispositions play a role in how we respond to situations. It is useful for leaders to self-scan and adjust their responses as needed. The model includes the Inventor, the Discourager, the Skeptic, and the Optimist.

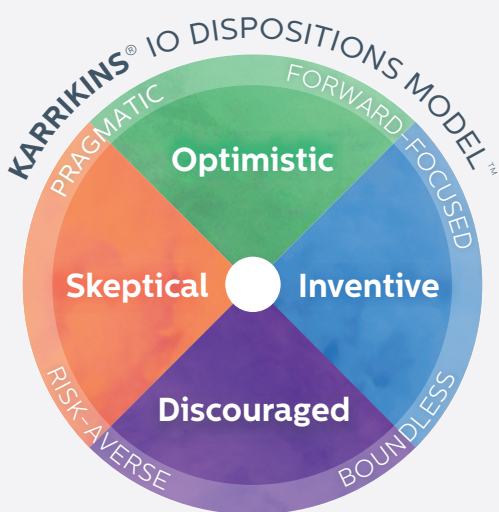
The Optimist disposition is a powerful and often under-leveraged leadership tool. It combines a pragmatism and forward-focus to create a resilient and confident foundation for decision making and action. Many people think they are optimistic leaders, but the behaviors they demonstrate and the ways they communicate reflect something else to the people around them. We think it is important for people to be intentional about optimism as a leadership tool so it doesn’t get lost in the noisiness of disruption and change.

Optimism is not believing things will be easy; it is believing in your ability to do hard things.

By being more intentional about using optimism as a lever for change, leaders can drive stronger changeability throughout the organization, and motivate people to respond to disruption, change, opportunity, and crisis with resilience and strength. It takes work to be intentional about optimism, but when it spreads, the results are powerful and long lasting – more so than the spike in attention we see when a burning platform approach is used to motivate change.

To amplify Intentional Optimism, the **KARRIKINS OPT-IN Model™** has five actions you can take to strengthen how you show up as a pragmatic and forward-focused leader. It combines future possibilities with a pragmatic view of what’s required to get there.

[OPT-IN through five key behaviors >](#)



O Orient toward the best likely outcome

Figure out what you can control and where you can have an impact and decide what you will do in that space to create a positive outcome. It is important to remember that “best” and “likely” don’t always equal awesome. If you are skidding on black ice toward a concrete barrier, the best likely outcome might be that you mitigate harm by making whatever adjustments to speed and direction you can before the inevitable impact. Optimism isn’t about ignoring reality, it is about finding the place, no matter how small, where you have control and working there to make a difference.

P Pursue forward-focused questions

Ask questions that accelerate you toward the future by helping you to make progress while also course correcting as you go. Optimists ask questions and push into what is possible while also pragmatically investigating what is required to get there.

T Take on the hard work

Don’t bother being optimistic if you aren’t willing to work at something. Believing that something bold will be easy isn’t optimism – it is delusion. Own how you show up and do the hard work to have the impact you want to make. You might have to change yourself first, which is the hardest work of all. Figure out what is getting in your way. Do what is hard to break through – ask for help, give up comfort, take a risk. Optimism is not believing things will be easy; it is believing in your ability to do hard things.

I Include unexpected others

Does your organization use the same SMEs to solve every problem? Optimists have confidence in the ability of others to contribute in unexpected ways and to grow into SMEs by being included when it really matters. Take a chance by bringing in someone unexpected to problem solve or ideate. Optimists also know the value of the Skeptic and the Inventor – being the bridge between the two creates exciting new possibilities. Plus, it is way more fun!

N Notice and name your choices

One of the most powerful ways to tap into your inner Optimist is to notice and name your choices. Being intentional about what you are doing by paying attention and giving voice to it helps you to build your internal response systems and gives you a sense of control over what is happening around you. At the same time, it makes your choices more visible to others and helps spread optimism to the rest of your team.

Optimism is hard to spread because Optimists often don’t work at making it visible – in fact, they sometimes intentionally hide it to avoid being seen as “too positive”, “Pollyannas”, or “unrealistic”. **Own the power of Intentional Optimism by leaning into the combination of pragmatic and future-focused.** Bring that energy to your team in visible and actionable ways to create a groundswell of optimism in your organization, and you will see amazing things happen as a result.

About the author

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JULIE WILLIAMSON, PhD
Chief Growth Enabler and Partner

Julie is a growth-minded leader who believes executives set the standard for others through the example they provide. She is a strategist, technologist, and a social scientist who puts her energy toward working with leaders around the world as they tackle some of the biggest challenges in their industries and organizations.

In today's increasingly complex and interconnected world, Julie knows the power of aligned leaders to deliver on strategy and create value. That's why she focuses her time and energy on helping senior leaders come together to deliver the work that matters most.



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We are **Karrikins**.

We're world-class facilitators, cultural changemakers, behavioral scientists, and experience creators, but above all, we're people looking to make a lasting and positive impact. With decades of diverse experience in helping companies set ambitious strategies and act on them, our leaders guide our collective impact and enable transformative growth for leaders and teams.

Visit us at karrikinsgroup.com to learn more about our game changing alignment solutions for executive teams, delivery teams, and individuals who are ready to lean into the power of alignment to deliver on their most ambitious goals. Through our Alignment Institute we offer catalytic workshops, individual programs, and smaller group experiences.

KG Alignment Institute

KG Alignment Journey

KG Board Alignment



KARRIKIN (n): a group of compounds found in the smoke of burning plants that stimulates seed germination and catalyzes growth.