



## PROBLEMS VS. BREAKDOWNS

Even the best-laid plans can go awry. Instead of looking to cast blame, true leaders know how to create wholly new possibilities.

By Katerin Le Folcalvez

**R**oadblocks, missteps and even failures are inevitable in every organization. They occur when a commitment—no matter how big or how small—is interrupted. In many organizations, these thwarted intentions are viewed as problems to be avoided at all costs.

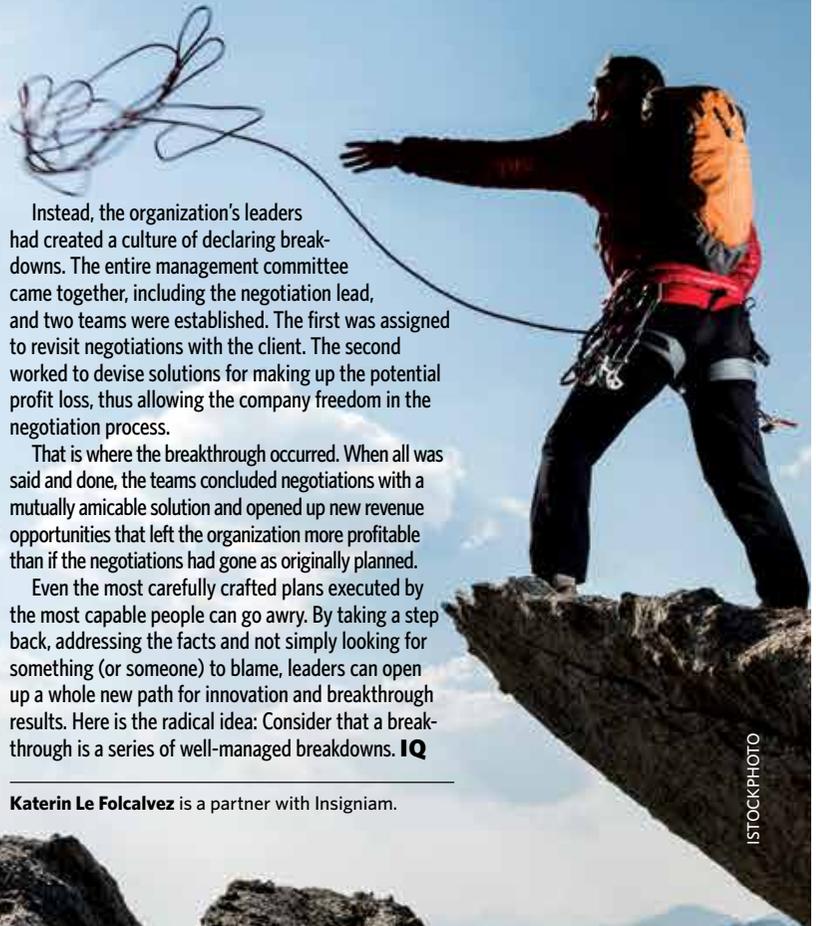
Transformational leaders, however, take a different view. Instead of seeing an interrupted commitment as a problem, they declare it a breakdown. While this difference may seem like a matter of mere semantics, it is actually a significant shift in mindset and culture that can catalyze powerful breakthroughs in an organization.

Problems reflect something that happened in the past. They are seen as something that “should not be.” This outlook spurs a supercharge of emotions where the instinct is to go on the defense, look for an excuse or simply ignore the situation and hope it will resolve itself. It is rather unproductive.

Breakdowns, on the other hand, focus simply on “what is.” They dispatch with negativity and judgment. Instead of looking at the failure to meet a commitment as something wrong with someone or something to blame, breakdowns challenge you to focus on the future you want to create. And it is through this process that you can find the breakthrough.

Here is an example from an Insigniam client in the fast-moving consumer goods industry. As the result of difficult negotiations, one client representing 20 percent of the company’s market share delisted its products.

If this organization were to view the situation as a problem, the negotiation lead would have surely been fired. People, processes and even the client would have been blamed. The organization would have gone into crisis mode, trying to win back the business at all costs.



Instead, the organization’s leaders had created a culture of declaring breakdowns. The entire management committee came together, including the negotiation lead, and two teams were established. The first was assigned to revisit negotiations with the client. The second worked to devise solutions for making up the potential profit loss, thus allowing the company freedom in the negotiation process.

That is where the breakthrough occurred. When all was said and done, the teams concluded negotiations with a mutually amicable solution and opened up new revenue opportunities that left the organization more profitable than if the negotiations had gone as originally planned.

Even the most carefully crafted plans executed by the most capable people can go awry. By taking a step back, addressing the facts and not simply looking for something (or someone) to blame, leaders can open up a whole new path for innovation and breakthrough results. Here is the radical idea: Consider that a breakthrough is a series of well-managed breakdowns. **IQ**

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