



distinctions

DISTINCTIONS | EXECUTIVE CASE STUDY

Make It Personal

CEO & Executive Advisory Across Three Education Transformations

Nearly 20 years of CEO & executive advisory across three education organizations - transforming for growth, scale, profitability and enduring enterprise value.

THE BUSINESS CONTEXT

Education is one of the sectors most in need of transformation. In private-equity-backed organizations, the mandate is even more demanding: strengthen the business, build leadership capacity, improve the student and associate experience, create scalable operating discipline, increase profitability, and position the enterprise for its next stage of value creation.

THE ADVISORY RELATIONSHIP

Across nearly two decades, the advisory relationship evolved as the organizations, investors and challenges changed. The work extended beyond CEO counsel to executive and senior leadership teams, leadership development, culture, organizational design, strategic planning, transformation, and direct work with associates.

"The work was not about fixing one problem. It was about creating the leadership, culture and operating system required for the next future."

THE COMMON THREAD

Across MedVance, MedTech and Post University, several consistent principles guided the work:

- 1 Get related first.**
Build trust and understanding.
- 2 Make it personal.**
Connect the work to what people care about.
- 3 Curiosity before certainty.**
Ask, listen and learn.
- 4 Surround yourself with the right people.**
Build a strong team.
- 5 Begin with the end in mind.**
Create a compelling imagined future.
- 6 Focus on the student and associate experience.**
Value all who make the mission real.



JOHN L. HOPKINS

President & CEO across all three organizations

LEO M. TONKIN

Founder & Principal, Distinctions, Inc.

ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDED

MedVance

Transforming what was possible.

MedTech / JTC

Creating one organization from many.

Post University

Taking transformation organization-wide.

CASE AT A GLANCE

MANDATE

Transform organizations for growth, scale, profitability and enterprise value.

SCOPE

CEO advisory through executive, senior leadership and associate engagement.

FOCUS

Strategy, leadership, culture, people and execution.

APPROACH

Imagined Future + Strategic Business Transformation.



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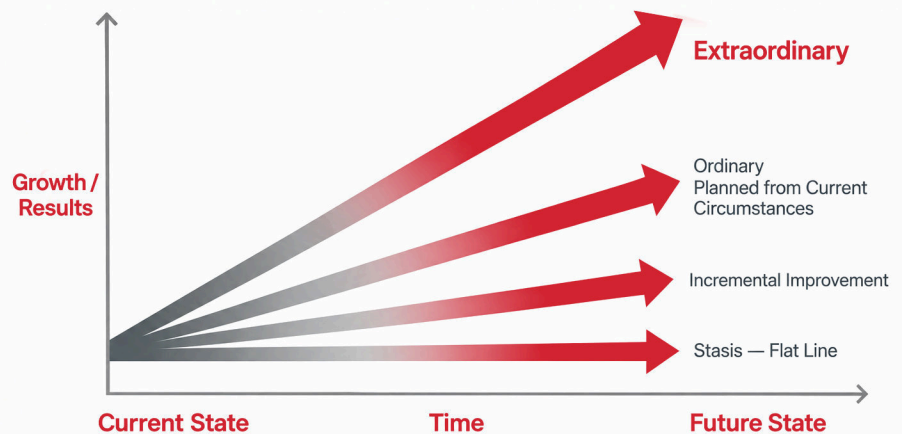
An Imagined Future

Creating the future from the future back.

In each organization, the work began with understanding the current state - but not letting the current state define the future. Together with John L. Hopkins and leadership teams, the process was to imagine a future that was compelling, actionable, and larger than current assumptions.

Most organizations plan from where they are. They project forward from existing structures, market conditions, and historical patterns. That often leads to predictable or probable outcomes. An imagined future begins differently: stand in the future first, define what must become true, and work backward to align strategy, leadership, culture, and execution.

In a world of constant change, organizations need to be nimble, agile, and able to execute change quickly. Across each enterprise, the imagined future became a shared process involving leaders, managers, and associates - creating alignment, ownership, and a stronger sense of tribe.



*“Begin with the end in mind —
then organize the enterprise to make it real.”*

From Vision to Execution

An imagined future only matters when it is translated into disciplined execution.

FORMULATE

Define the future and tell the truth about the present.

Clarify the imagined future, then confront what's so today. Identify the gap between current reality and the future being created — including the leadership, capability, structure, and performance changes required.

ARTICULATE

Make the future understandable, credible, and actionable.

Translate the future into a business case, priorities, and a shared story. Create enough context and clarity so that leaders and associates understand why the change matters, what success looks like, and how their work connects to it.

EXECUTE

Build the structures and disciplines that make it real.

Turn intention into implementation. Establish roadmaps, project and operating disciplines, strategic-change practices, communication and training, and the measures needed to monitor progress and benefits.



Creating the Future Together

From leadership vision to enterprise-wide ownership.

An imagined future cannot remain something created by the CEO or executive team and then communicated downward. Across all three organizations, leaders, managers, and associates were deliberately involved in understanding the future, contributing to it, and seeing their own role in creating it.

When people help shape the future, see how they fit, and understand what is expected of them, they shift from observers to owners. Alignment grows. Engagement deepens. A stronger sense of tribe takes hold.

The Foundation of a Strong Tribe

People are more likely to own what they help create.

BELONG

Part of something larger.

PARTICIPATE

Contribute and be heard.

MATTER

Make a meaningful difference.

BE VALUED

Contribution is recognized

"People don't just want to know where the organization is going — they want to be part of getting there. That's how you create engagement."

From Enrollment to Execution

Turning vision into shared ownership - and shared ownership into action.

1 GET RELATED

Build trust, create connection, and seek first to understand.

2 ENROLL

Invite people into a compelling possibility and show why it matters.

3 ENGAGE

Create meaningful participation, contribution, and dialogue.

4 ALIGN

Build shared understanding, common language, and clear agreements.

5 COMMIT

Turn intention into personal and team commitments.

6 EXECUTE

Translate commitment into disciplined action and follow-through.

THE LEADERSHIP SHIFT - WHAT CHANGED

John's curiosity mattered. He asked why, listened, and sought first to understand, creating room for people to participate without feeling the answer was predetermined. Rather than asking people to support a finished plan, leaders, managers, and associates helped understand the future, contribute to it, and see where they fit. The shift was from communicating the future to creating it together — from leadership ownership to enterprise ownership. Participation changed the quality of the conversation, strengthened alignment, and turned agreement with a strategy into personal commitment to making the future real.



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Make It Personal in Practice

From touchpoints to transformation.

We applied the imagined future by redesigning the experiences for associates and students, aligning structure and processes, and building a culture of continuous improvement.

Every touchpoint — from first contact to long-term success — was an opportunity to make it more personal, more human, and more effective.

"An extraordinary experience is a series of meaningful moments, intentionally designed and continuously improved."

The Associate Journey

Attract. Develop. Engage. Grow.



The Student Experience

Enroll. Support. Succeed.



A MORE AGILE ORGANIZATION

Improving the experience also meant changing how the organization worked. We reduced unnecessary hierarchy, moved decisions closer to the people with the information, and expanded what individuals and teams could control and influence. The result was greater ownership, accountability, and agility.

A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The work was never considered finished. We listened to what associates and students were experiencing, identified friction and opportunity, made changes, and evaluated whether those changes improved the experience. What we learned informed the next round of improvement.



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