

Commitment Is Different Than Agreement—And Great Leaders Know the Difference

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The other day, I met with Dan, a senior operations leader at a fast-growing company. We grabbed a booth at a quiet diner, away from the noise of the office. As soon as we sat down, he got right to the point.

“They say they understand,” he said, clearly frustrated. “They nod their heads in meetings. But then—nothing. I follow up. I remind them. I chase them down.”

I nodded and said, “That’s because agreement isn’t commitment.”

He frowned. “What do you mean?”

I grabbed a napkin and wrote four words in a column:

“Listen, Understand, Agree, Commit.”

Sliding the napkin across the table, I pointed to “Agree.”

“Most leaders stop here,” I said. “Listening is passive. Understanding is logical. Agreement is polite. But commitment? That’s personal. That’s a choice.”

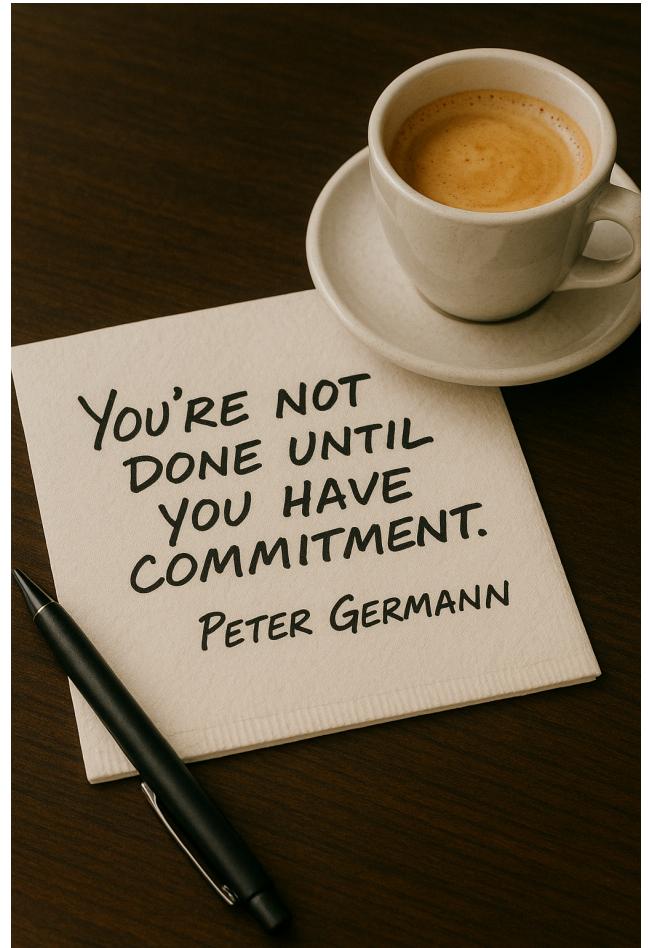
Dan leaned in. “So how do I get them to commit?”

I flipped the napkin over and wrote another line:

“You’re not done until you have commitment.”

“What does that mean?” he asked.

“It means commitment isn’t assumed,” I explained. “It’s earned. It requires intention and asks for ownership. A good leader doesn’t stop at a head nod, they ask, ‘Are you committed to making this happen?’ And then they pay attention. They listen for hesitation. They look for conviction.”



Dan was quiet for a moment. “I’ve been assuming agreement was enough. But I haven’t really been asking for commitment.”

He folded the napkin carefully and slid it into his pocket. “I’ll try this tomorrow,” he said. “Not just following up, but asking for real commitment. And making space for my team to step into ownership.”

A few weeks later, Dan followed up with me. “It worked,” he said. “At first, it felt a little awkward asking directly, but now my team knows exactly where I stand, and they’re stepping up. We’re actually getting things done without the constant reminders.”

Dan’s story is a reminder that good leadership doesn’t stop at agreement. It’s about drawing out commitment and that begins with the leader being clear and courageous enough to ask for it.

When Dan made that shift, he changed how his team showed up.

If you’re not getting commitment, you’re not done leading yet.