Mark Graban Keynote speaker and author

KEYNOTE

The Silence Tax

Why People Stay Quiet, and What Leaders Can Do About It



> People speak up when it feels **safe enough** and **worthwhile**.

When it feels like neither, organizations pay a tax. Problems surface late, mistakes repeat, and ideas never reach anyone who could act on them. The cost rarely shows up in a report, because silence doesn't generate data.

This keynote looks at the two forces behind silence, fear and futility, and at the leadership responses that decide whether someone speaks up a second time. Reducing fear matters. So does showing people that raising a concern actually leads somewhere.

The MEER model

Four leadership behaviors that reduce both fear and futility

M
Model
Model the behaviors you want others to practice.

E
Encourage
Encourage people to speak up about concerns and ideas.

E
Enable
Enable people to turn ideas and words into action.

R
Reward
Reward speaking up so people have a reason to do it again.

WHAT LEADERS LEAVE WITH

- A clear way to diagnose silence: is the barrier fear, futility, or both?
- An understanding of how their response, in the moment someone brings a problem, mistake, or idea, shapes what happens next time.
- Specific MEER behaviors they can start practicing with their teams the following week.

FORMATS

Keynote (45 to 90 minutes), half-day workshop, facilitated leadership conversation, or virtual session, shaped around your audience and goals.

In person or virtual, in the United States and internationally, including events that use interpretation.

Watch the 3-minute speaker reel

OTHER KEYNOTES

The Mistakes That Make Us… Better. How leaders respond to mistakes and support learning.

When Being Right Is the Wrong Strategy for Change. How questions and conversation help people work through change.

React Less and Improve More. Distinguishing signal from noise in performance metrics.

WHO THIS TALK IS FOR

Two ways into the same problem

IF YOU'VE INVESTED IN LEAN OR OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Make it safer to raise problems

Problem-solving methods only work when problems get reported. This angle focuses on how leaders reduce fear, so issues and mistakes surface while they are still small.

IF YOU'VE INVESTED IN PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Make speaking up worthwhile

Feeling safe isn't enough if nothing happens afterward. This angle focuses on problem solving and follow-through, so people see that their input leads to action.

Examples are drawn from healthcare, manufacturing, technology, and other industries, and selected for your audience.

ABOUT MARK

Mark Graban is an author, speaker, and consultant who helps leaders build cultures where people raise problems and improvement follows. He started his career as an industrial engineer at a General Motors engine plant and has since worked across manufacturing, healthcare, and technology.

He is a three-time Shingo Publication Award recipient, a faculty member at the Lean Enterprise Institute, and host of the podcasts *My Favorite Mistake* and *Lean Blog Interviews*. He holds an industrial engineering degree from Northwestern University and an MBA and engineering master's degree from MIT.

BOOKS

- *The Silence Tax* forthcoming, early 2027
- *The Mistakes That Make Us*
- *Measures of Success*
- *Lean Hospitals*
- *Healthcare Kaizen* with Joe Swartz

SELECTED ORGANIZATIONS AND EVENTS

COMPANIES

Honda
Eli Lilly
Genentech
Cardinal Health
Liberty Mutual Insurance

HEALTHCARE

Cleveland Clinic
Duke Health
NYU Langone Medical Center
Alberta Health Services
American Medical Association

CONFERENCES

Peak Performance Symposium
Shingo Institute Conference
AME Conference
Lean Startup Week
HIMSS Conference
Lean Transformation Summit

INTERNATIONAL, ACADEMIC

Lean Healthcare Summits in Brazil and Europe
Lean Healthcare Event, Helsinki
MIT Leaders for Global Operations
Wharton School

> *"Mark brings a confidence to a discussion, all the while assuring the participants that there is still plenty left to know and discuss. Professional, and easy to work with — knowing Mark is on board for our conference makes our job so much easier."*
>
> **Joe Pesz**, Board of Directors, Michigan Lean Consortium

> *"His challenge to 'close one loop' prompted me to close two. Both were long overdue and a bit painful. The outcome was clarity."*
>
> **Lisa Thomas**, President & CEO, Peak Performance Inc.

Start with your audience and goals

Share your event date, location or virtual format, audience, and budget. Mark will help you choose the topic and format that fits.

markgraban.com/speaking/book-mark

Speaking samples | All topics