



Dare to be slow

Paul Gauci

“Hurry sickness” is dangerous. Do you feel like a laboratory mouse running inside a wheel, getting nowhere? In today’s around-the-clock world, many people feel that they cannot get ahead, no matter how hard and fast they work. So what’s the best way to break out of the wheel? Slow down. That sounds counterintuitive, but if trying to keep up puts you further behind, why not try something new? Take a big-picture approach, strive for balance and keep your eye on your primary goals.

The organisational perspective

That the pace of change is increasing ever more rapidly, and that the complexity most businesses face is also growing is a well known fact.

Perhaps the best thing most firms can do from a creativity and innovation perspective is to slow down in order to speed up. There are several factors within this statement to discuss.

First, in most organizations everyone is far too busy. There are too many meetings and too many decisions and too little time to think and reflect. We've begun to value people by how "busy" they are and thinking that time is valuable. Time is not as valuable as knowledge and insight. We need to encourage our most important managers to slow down, think about their

products, customers and markets in context, and use some unstructured time to think about new products and services.

Second, it is natural to try to do things more quickly in the face of ever increasing change, but then we join a treadmill directed by some other power - not driven by our pace. As we try to ensure our organisation matches the pace of the market, especially dynamic global markets, we will quickly recognise that bureaucratic organizations were built with the intention of slowing things down, rather than speeding them up. Let's use that to our advantage. Rather than react to the market, let's forecast what we believe the market will do, using trend spotting and scenario planning, and put the power of the

organization to work defining the future.

Then we can set the pace of change and work on developing the future products and services at our pace, and using our strengths, rather than trying to maintain the rat race established by someone else.

Third, we need to consider what is "fixed" and what is "fluid". Traditionally we've assumed that business models are fixed - they exist for a period of time, and then they perish. What is assumed to change if the business model is fixed is the product or service - we are constantly changing existing products or introducing new ones within a fairly consistent business model.

Perhaps we need to assume a business model which is flexible

and which should change over time? What if the business models are adaptable, and products and services are adaptable as well? What remains "fixed" is the customer value proposition and the firm's strategic intent, while everything else is subject to change. Suddenly change and the pace of change isn't measured in product lifecycles, which are growing ever shorter, but in business model "eras". What isn't going to change drastically over any period of time is the customer's need for excellent services and experiences. If we can "fix" those, then let's construct business models and products that evolve on our timescales, changing as necessary.

Given the fight or flight instinct, it is natural in humans to react to changes in our environment we think are threats or things we can't control. Perhaps if we change the "paradigm" to assume we can assert a paradigm in which we decide to embrace the threats of speed and complexity rather than fight them, and do so by slowing down, looking further into the future and creating change at a pace acceptable to customers and to ourselves.

After all, customers are just as bewildered and threatened by the complexity and pace of change as we are in business. Customers don't want change for change sake, they actually want their problems to be solved in ways that are easy to

understand and adopt. Some firms that grasp that they control more of their future than they think they do, and who are willing to slow down to embrace complexity and change, will be the winners.

"But I've also learned that only through focus can you do world-class things, no matter how capable you are."

Bill Gates

The self perspective

A good time manager actually responds to some things more slowly than a bad time manager would. For example, someone who is doing the highest priority task is probably not busy answering incoming email while they're doing it. There are more important tasks than processing email. Intuitively, we all know this. What we need to do now is recognize that processing one's work (evaluating what's come in and how to handle it) and planning one's work are also mission-critical tasks.

The promise of technology and increased sophistication in our society is enhanced efficiency that manifests itself in an improved lifestyle ... a lifestyle in which leisure increases and the burden of work wanes. Increasingly, however, this promise is lost.

Permanent overload in both one's personal life and organizational life results from both an over supply of tasks and

from an assumption that all those tasks have to be done ... and have to be done ASAP. Surely, in the current environment of economic recession and institutional cutbacks, the deafening cry of doing "more with less" is leading to employee burnout and organizational confusion, as staying busy has become an excuse for not forming and following strategic foci in both our personal and corporate lives.

The phrase "information overload" depicts our dilemma. An increasing amount of personal energy is required to separate "noise" from "knowledge." Once discerned, it seems we have less time and energy to translate knowledge into wisdom ... and even less time and energy to enact our wisdom. As the pace quickens, as the demands increase, and as we age and therefore function with less energy, we need to challenge ourselves to be better time managers.

With incessant workplace demands to become more efficient, effective, and innovative, we drive ourselves at an acceleratingly frantic pace ... and seem to fall further and further behind. How do we escape this quandary? Perhaps, ironically, we must slow down in order to speed up. Fine ! So how do we escape this quandary? The following actions, may help us recalibrate our lives in a manner that will result in a fuller, focused, and more meaningful existence.

1. Change yourself on the inside

The key is to get to know yourself and then make choices based on personal ethical standards, value foundations, mental attitudes, and life priorities. To be effective, many times who one is, is more important than what one knows.

What drives you at a deeper level? In order to improve, we have to focus on our strengths. A person can perform only from strength. One cannot build performance on weaknesses, let alone on something one cannot do at all. We have to discover what we do well, how we do it and for what reasons. This may sound simple, but in fact it's a mystery to most people.

The power of positive purpose can and will produce personal confidence, a strong ego, and a commitment to perform within one's values structure. Remember, world class organizations and individuals do not succeed because of insecurities, and fear of failing, rather they succeed because of positive attitudes, self-confidence, and believing in achieving their visions. Self-identity and the quest for self-awareness are the salient anchors that one must internalize before one can be a success in any capacity. Know yourself ... be honest about your values, skills, limitations, and biases.

The following questions are powerful catalysts to personal growth and fulfillment. Contemplate each of these

questions, write answers and review them constantly. This will help you to stay in touch with your passion and vision.

Ten Power Questions

- When am I most naturally myself? What people, places, and activities allow me to feel most fully myself?
- What is one thing I could stop doing, or start doing, or do differently, starting today that would most improve the quality of my life?
- What is my greatest talent?
- How can I get paid for doing what I love?
- Who are my most inspiring role models?
- How can I best be of service to others?
- What is my heart's deepest desire?
- How am I perceived by: my closest friend, my worst enemy, my boss, my children, my co-workers, etc.?
- What are the blessings of my life?
- What legacy would I like to leave?

2. Good – better – best

It is impossible for to be at your best all the time. In truth, one must make quality trade-offs between tasks and obligations all the time. Therefore, it is incumbent that you know the difference between what is critical and what is marginal so that limited personal and

organisation resources are used in a priority-anchored manner. Never let perfection become the enemy of the good. Use time, energy, and resources within a good-better-best continuum. To know the difference between being busy and hyperactive and being focused and productive is essential to both one's personal and vocational life.

3. Eliminate trivia

The seduction of trivia is insidious as the hours in the office mount. As the blunting nature of difficult decision-making blurs focus, individuals get fatigued. The importance of decisions (criticality to institutional success) and the urgency with which they must be made (the "time" dimension) get skewed.

Managers often spiral from where they should be and desire to be to stress-inducing crisis management. The addictive properties of the adrenaline rush via URGENT pace degrades from matters of high importance to matters which are less/not important ... and the 'Trivia Trap' is sprung as the individual slips into the "mismanagement" box.

4. Become an active listener

When one hears the word 'listener' images are conjured up of an auditory process in which one assumes a reclined, contemplative posture with thoughtful, affirmative nods of the head. While this "passive listening" is preferred to not listening at all, it falls far short of the active listening necessary in slowing down.

Effective listening simultaneously engages both auditory and visual senses. Listen with your ears and your eyes and your whole body, metaphorically on the balls of your feet ... on the edge of your seat. Active listening takes effort, but picking up clues by both hearing and seeing and feeling encourages one to ask better questions, thereby unearthing agendas and issues that may not be initially apparent. By becoming an active listener, it demonstrates to others that you understand and care for them and that you value their opinions and observations. By listening for the intrinsic value of what others say, you develop relationships that lead to dialogue, collaboration, and trust.

5. Improve your “serve”

Dignity, trust, and hope are rarely soft personal or management skills. The respect required to build relationships and become a leader is mostly acquired by communicating trust through one’s behaviour; demonstrating by one’s actions a faith in humanity; and serving one’s colleagues/employees with caring and compassion. It is this combination of commitment and concern within the guidelines of “servant” leadership, that gives all of us the confidence and the will to do difficult but rewarding work.

Let’s remain aware of our innate spiritual nature while struggling through the trials of everyday life in the workplace. Clearly, in today’s organizational milieu of

cultural diversity, open systems, flattened hierarchies, decision-making transparencies, and customer demands for better access to and better service from all organizations, it is incumbent upon each of us to help both others and ourselves.

We can do this working humanely in teams based on empowering, enabling, and nurturing that allows those within our sphere of influence to realise their own dignity and humanity. Respect for each other and respect for your organisation’s mission produces an alignment that guarantees performance and productivity.

“Success in the knowledge economy comes to those who know themselves — their strengths, their values, and how they best perform.”

Peter Drucker

6. Seek wisdom, competence, and confidence

The half-life of information is six months. The half-life of wisdom is a lifetime. The self is not infinitely elastic. It has potentials and it has limits. If the work we do lacks integrity for us, then we, the work, and the people we do it with will suffer. Fundamentally, there must be a blend and a balance among your intellectual quotient, your emotional quotient, and your spiritual commitments, as you move from the notion of learning to the motion of acting.

Thinking without action is futile, action without thinking is fatal, and doing either without a deep commitment to community, interpersonal collaboration, professional competence, and personal confidence is to fail. Perpetual optimism, positive attitudes, and purposeful performance lead to positive actions.

By creating an interdependent blend of intellect, emotion, and spirituality you can produce your own personal collaborative style enabling you to achieve success in your goals and people relationships.

7. Retreat ... find silence and solitude

An important aspect of slowing down is to listen to yourself. “Take a timeout.” The purpose of this is to calm down and re-center.. Let “slowing-silence” become a tool for contemplative effectiveness.

The major up side to slowing down, is creating space for your inner wisdom. The voice of guidance always empowers choices when moving too fast, some of those choices become obscured and can be missed. Conversely, sitting and waiting without action can limit your choices as well. Making an active decision to take time to connect with guidance changes your relationship to your physical, emotional, mental and spiritual bodies. Slowing down is different for everybody. Some people meditate, exercise, do sports, listen to music, or play with kids. It doesn't matter. What does

matter is when you slow down enough to listen to guidance, you feed your energy systems, opportunities expand and challenges transform.

So Slow down to Speed Up !

Faster and faster in the end can only mean stasis. We do not just risk personal and organisational breakdowns in indiscriminate speed; indeed, we press the limits of our humanity, of our energy, and of our culture.

When the principle of "slowing

down, to speed up" is applied in day to day life, it saves headaches, empowers relationships, creates more time, opportunity and abundance than any other time management principle one may read about.

We need to know where we are going even when things are uncertain, moving fast and contain multiple distractions, which is a fact of life and business in the current global economy. Slowing down to speed up becomes critical as we

view the current environment. We must master ourselves so that we can master the things that have accelerated us beyond our values. In essence, the way forward is paradoxically not to look ahead, but to slow down and look around. Remember, seeing the future is only half the battle; you have to live to get there. Perhaps C.S. Lewis was right when he stated, "Only lazy people are too busy."

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