

Slow Down to Speed Up

Ronald J. Stupak, PhD
President
EMCO Inc.
Earlysville, VA

David S. Greisler, DPA
York College
York, PA

“What in context beguiles, out of context mortifies.”- David Wayne

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. Though now trite, 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 stewards of the intellectual stores which we personally and professionally manage. 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? Our belief is, ironically, that we must slow down in order to speed up. The following “sacred seven” are points, which, if utilized, will help you, the reader, to slow in a manner that will improve your spiritual, mental, psychological, and physical health ... and in the process enhance your effectiveness and efficiency.

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, personal

angst, and organizational confusion, as staying busy has become an excuse for not forming and following strategic foci in both our personal and corporate lives. There is no doubt in our minds that each one reading this article can do anything he/she chooses, but conversely, one cannot do everything. The trick is having the wisdom to know the difference, along with the integrity and fortitude to make the critical tradeoffs. Therefore, the message under girding our presentation is to give you the capabilities, courage, and commandments to engage the difficulties of the cyber-speed, recession-anchored context with hope, thus improving the quality of your lives and your careers in order to make them enriching rather than enraging.

Techniques for Slowing Down to Speed Up.

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

Bill Gates

OK! So how do we escape this quandary? How do we make sure that each of us does what we are, rather than simply becoming what we do? Our belief is, ironically, that each of us must slow down in order to speed up. Consequently, the following “sacred seven” are axioms and actions, which if utilized, will help each of us to recalibrate our lives in a manner that will result in a fuller, focused, and more meaningful existence. In essence, we believe:

- that a new perspective often leads to new answers
- though choices are limited, it does not mean that there are no choices at all
- you do what you are; you are not what you do
- the first step in finding solutions is identifying the problems
- not everything that is faced can be changed; but, nothing can be changed until it is faced
- we cannot manage time; we can only manage ourselves
- the key is to know one’s self, and then make choices accordingly

The Sacred Seven

(See Table One for the full set of techniques from which our top seven were chosen)

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. The power of positive purpose can and will produce personal confidence, a strong (not a large) ego, and a commitment to perform within one's values structure. The essential thing we each can do is play the one string that each of us has, and that is our God-given uniqueness. Remember, world class organizations and individuals do not succeed because of platitudes, 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. Quit blaming others!

2. Good – better – best

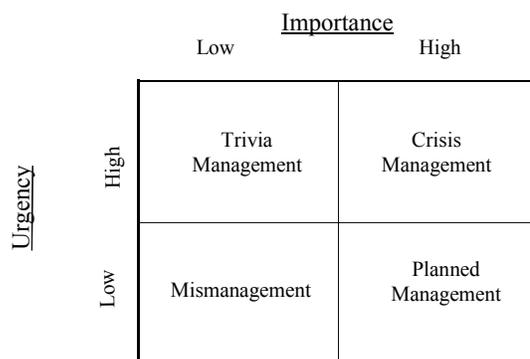
Only mediocre people believe that they have to be at their best all the time. In truth, one must make quality trade-offs between tasks and obligations all the time. Therefore, it is incumbent that one knows the difference between what is critical and what is marginal so that limited personal and organization resources are used in a priority-anchored manner. Never let perfection become the enemy of accuracy. Use time, energy, and resources within a good-better-best continuum, because at base it has less to do with how much one has than how much one can do with whatever one has to ensure high-performance in the context of goals, objectives, and strategies. 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. We observe decision making acumen deteriorating as the workweek bleeds from forty hours to fifty-five to sixty ... and more. 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. As depicted below, managers spiral from where they should be and desire to be (see 'Planned Management' quadrant in diagram which follows) to stress-inducing crisis management. The addictive properties of the adrenaline rush via URGENT pace degrades from matters of high importance (see Crisis Management quadrant) to matters which are less/not important ... and the 'Trivia Trap' is sprung. The false beauty of time spent in the Trivia Management box is that the decision maker *feels* good if the decision is a good one. However, if the decision is incorrect, who cares? It makes little if any difference to short term organizational performance. The dilemma is that the adrenaline rush wears off and the final spiraling down occurs as the individual slips into the "mismanagement" box ... and ultimately plateaus or is asked or forced to leave the organization.

The Trivia Trap



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. Retreat ... find silence and solitude

Another important aspect of slowing down is to listen to/for God. As the poet Michael Card asks, “Is not He who formed the ear worth the time it takes to hear? Should He who formed your lips for speaking be not heeded when He speaks?” We encourage daily times of silence and solitude in meditation. “Sacred silence” is normative in healthy living. Filling one’s mind with things from above brings focus, clarity, and joy that are indiscernible unless quietly pursued. We do it to our children all the time as a means of positive discipline → “Take a timeout.” The purpose of this is to calm down and re-center. The lesson applies to adults as well. Let “slowing-silence” become a tool for contemplative effectiveness. As Brent Curtis states, don’t let “...an endless series of chores and errands, a busyness...” separate us from our personal God, from each other, and even from our contemplative solitude.

6. 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 behavior; 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 do this by thinking creatively, producing innovatively, uniting cooperatively, and relating humanely in high performance teams based on empowering, enabling, and nurturing that allows those within our sphere of influence to realize their own dignity and humanity. Respect for each other and respect for your organization's mission produces an alignment that guarantees performance and productivity.

7. 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. As Frederick Buechner makes clear, the strained and even violent concept of vocation as an ought must be replaced by the humane image of vocation as “the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.” 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 a collaborative personal style (almost a form of servant leadership) where love for God, love for yourself, love for each other, and love of vocation bring forth an optimistic perspective for turning what can be difficult work into a labor of love.

Conclusion

“There is no power on earth that can break the grip of
a man with his hands on his own throat.”

Arthur Miller

Faster and faster in the end can only mean stasis. We do not just risk personal and organizational breakdowns in indiscriminate speed; indeed, we press the limits of our humanity, of our energy, and of our culture. As Mark Kingwell makes clear, “How fast you move is not the same as how fast you are going.” We would add that how fast you are going is not the same as how you are going fast! Slowing down to speed up becomes critical as we view the current environment of dot com shambles, technology led recession, information overload, and the terrorism jujitsu to peaceful globalism. 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.”

Table One

“We do not see problems as they are; we see them as we are.”

Naomi Remen

The debate that led to the “sacred seven” caused us to make some difficult choices in the prioritization process. We challenge the reader to develop her/his personalized list. Items that fell to the floor in our editing room ... important, but not worthy of our top seven ... are struck through as

- ~~8. Become sophisticatedly interdependent in integrating work and personal life~~
- ~~9. Take control of your life~~
- ~~10. Become a life long learner— as contexts change, we must change~~
- ~~11. Believe to achieve ... optimism, belief systems, confidence. The Lord can use your weaknesses.~~
- ~~12. Never lie ... this is one of the secrets of time management~~
- ~~13. Manage your boss~~
- ~~14. Quality rather than quantity.~~
- ~~15. Always create agendas~~
- ~~16. What gets measured gets done~~
- ~~17. Trust is not a feeling; trust is a behavior~~
- ~~18. Lead yourself; the rest will follow~~
- ~~19. Get spiritually engaged ... read and contemplate~~
- ~~20. Move from the notion of learning to the motion of acting~~
- ~~21. Assure that you use and create technology that is purpose-driven~~
- ~~22. Develop those with whom you work~~
- ~~23. Manage your boss, teams/team building, 360 evaluations~~
- ~~24. Delegate, enable, empower~~

25. Priorities

26. Balancee

27. Clear expectations, next generation of employees, retention/HR strategies, networking

28. Disencumbering; using the techniques of subtraction

We trust you will edit. We hope that this article is more than “another intellectual exercise” that is thought provoking at the time but never action inducing. Critically consider what goes on your list, work at implementation, and let the slowness in.

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