The Case Against Haste: Why Slowing Down Is Good for Business

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The American author and educator, Stephen Covey, once said, “Efficiency with people is ineffective. With people, fast is slow and slow is fast.”

My own life-rule about this, which I utilize frequently when coaching leaders, is “Haste is a form of violence.” When we move with haste, things get broken. People get hurt. If you knew you were about to step into a child’s playroom in the dark, would you move with haste? Not if you had seen a child playing with LEGOs earlier that day! (That’s called context.)

And yet, every day we move through life ignoring the context of the people around us, stumbling over building blocks and causing unnecessary pain. Many leaders mistake haste for urgency. The former is movement for the sake of busyness — to look important and/or to convey confidence or competence. In a world where busyness is valorized, but slow and deliberate is often denigrated, people wear their back-to-back-to-back meetings like badges of honor. But at the end of the day, what was truly accomplished, besides hours filled with talking but empty of true connection?

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Urgency is intentional and purposeful. It still requires us to move quickly, but you can often feel the difference even in

your physiological reactions to haste versus urgency.

Haste is a non-stop elevator, going down. Urgency is the same elevator, going up and stopping as needed to fulfill its purpose. Haste is a car chase that ends in a crash. Urgency is getting the ring to Mount Doom.

There are powerful and important reasons why we need to encourage leaders to slow down with their people, and not just because of Dr. Covey's advice about efficiency, though that is important when results matter. For true efficiency on teams, leaders need to be connecting the work that needs to be done to the values of their people. A team's values are their motivation, so to expect people to move with speed but without purpose or motivation, is the very definition of disengagement.

But when leaders slow down and connect empathetically with their people, everything about the morale, productivity and tenor of the team can change for the better.

Slowing down increases opportunities for empathy

Studies done in healthcare in recent years showed a correlation between low empathy and the number of patients physicians were seeing daily, specifically 56% percent of doctors indicated that they didn't have time to be empathetic. The irony that emerged from these studies, however, was that overall a lack of compassion and empathy actually created more work for the physicians.

Patients who didn't feel an empathetic connection to their physicians tended to share less information and take a less active role in their own treatment as compared to those who felt their physician showed empathy. The empathy connection also had therapeutic effects on both patient and doctor as the

patient's recovery process was faster, and there were indications that doctors who truly connected with their patients experienced less burnout and compassion fatigue.

In short, Dr. Covey was right. By slowing down to engage empathetically, doctors were ultimately seeing patients fewer times, because they got better faster. Empathy itself creates more time for empathy. All of these same rules apply in organizations and leadership everywhere. Slowing down and seeing people is good for teamwork, good for our health and good for business.

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Slowing down decreases opportunities for negative bias

Bias is a natural byproduct of the way our brains work. It keeps us safe, helps us make sense of our world and assists us in reaching decisions with relative speed. Bias is a way our brains try to simplify complex information by utilizing previous experiences and memories to help us navigate potential threats and dangers as we move through the world each day. According to a *Scientific American* blog about unconscious bias: "Over time our socialization and personal memories and experiences produce unconscious biases and apply them while the amygdala labels and categorizes incoming stimuli efficiently and unconsciously."

And the fact that the brain is working quickly means that it automatically categorizes familiar as "safe" and unfamiliar as "dangerous." This is a root cause of bias (and of racism and prejudice, as well), and haste exacerbates this further, because when we don't slow down to question if we should trust or fight the natural bias of our brains, we engage in distorted decision-making. We then make decisions that are

based on haste and fear instead of empathy and compassion for another human being.

Slowing down gives us the opportunity to ask better questions, create safe places for conversations and make better decisions that improve workplace environments and make the world a safer, kinder, more inclusive place.

Slowing down increases opportunities for mindfulness

The opposite of moving with haste is mindfulness, and though activities for teams around mindfulness have increased in the last few years, it is still an underutilized way of creating engagement and improving team performance. Mindfulness can show up two ways on a team: awareness of what the team is experiencing collectively and awareness of what each individual team member may be experiencing in a given moment.

The latter is important, because it can address issues of cognitive load that may be negatively impacting a team member, which, in turn, can cause interpersonal conflict and tension on the team. Slowing down to allow people moments of mindfulness to connect with their feelings, needs and motivations only improves a team's productivity and capacity for things like innovation and creativity.

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Slowing down increases opportunities for kindness

Ultimately, slowing down is about kindness. It's about being kind to the needs, speeds and creeds of people in your organization and on your teams. While teams comprised entirely of neurotypical extroverts may thrive on fast-paced, busy

days, that is simply not an accurate representation of most teams. In general, the introverts on your teams will need a slower pace and longer processing times. Neurodivergent team members may also need a more deliberate pace, niche environments and the comfort and familiarity of more established routines in order to thrive.

When we normalize haste and disparage slowing down, we miss people, we engage in distorted decision-making and we lose out on all the good things that kindness and compassion can bring to our organizations. While haste always results in making less progress and more work, giving your people the time and permission to slow down when they need to not only drives the results you need, and it also ensures that all the LEGOs are put away, so when the time comes for urgency, everyone can stay safe.

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