



The Necessity of Speed

Jack Zenger & Joseph Folkman

Every car has a lot of speed in it.
The trick is getting the speed out of it.

—A. J. FOYT

Life for a manager inside an organization has an unrelenting pace, with very few occasions when there is uninterrupted time. As a result, relationship building and development opportunities may fall by the wayside or become superficial due to the enormity of managerial time constraints.

In 1973, Henry Mintzberg authored a book called *The Nature of Managerial Work*. In it, he noted that managerial activity was characterized by its enormous variety, that it consisted of a series of relatively brief interactions, and that it was incredibly fragmented. He observed that phone calls averaged less than 6 minutes. Typical “one-on-one” meetings averaged 12 minutes. If Mintzberg were to repeat that research today, most of us would guess that phone calls and meetings have grown more frequent, conversations are even shorter, a barrage of

emails (that for some number in the hundreds) has been added, and the overall pace has become more hectic still. We doubt most leaders can find half-hours of uninterrupted time in their day.

The hectic pace alone increases the workload. Added to that, however, is the need to be a good collaborator and team player. The need for frequent interactions with others layers on additional tasks. And being a good boss means that people must have access to you. No, it is not okay to lock the office door to get all of your work done. Your influence is directly proportional to the quality and frequency of the connections you make through the day. So what can you do? Here are a few of the ideas we recommend:

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1 | Set the Pace When You Initiate the Conversation

When you drop by someone's office, remain standing, and after exchanging a couple of remarks, express appreciation and note some of the recent efforts the person has put into his or her work. That conversation needn't take long, but it can go a long way in building strong relationships.

Another important conversation you could have with others involves staying informed about the intimate details of the organization. Stop by someone's office and say, "I would like to hear what good things are happening in your area," or you can ask, "Tell me something you think I don't know and maybe don't want to hear." These conversations don't have to be long, and if you are in the driver's seat, you can make them happen at a relatively brisk pace.

2 | Softly Guide Others' Conversations

There are many times when someone will come to your office and want to have a laid-back chat, but you can respectfully hasten the pace of that conversation. One approach is standing up and therefore signaling you are short on time. You can also honestly inform people if you have a time constraint and let them know at the beginning of the conversation how much time you have to talk or whether the conversation can be continued at a later time.

The former CEO of HCL Technologies in India, Vineet Nayar, described that in most interactions that occur, “there is something that I need from you or you need from me.” When someone dropped by Nayar’s office, he would say, cutting to the chase: “So you need something from me; what is it?”

The person would then say something like, “I need your approval to purchase this.” He would reply with something like, “Describe it briefly to me.” The person would do that, and most often he would say, “Approved.”

Most of the time these interactions would last one or two minutes and the meeting was over. Help others get to the heart of the matter and let them know you respect their time and you want them to respect yours.

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3 | Set Expectations with Your Workforce

Employees appreciate consistency. Whatever way you consistently choose to push conversations forward will help them to be better prepared. For example, if they drop by your office with a question or a problem, and the first question out of your mouth is going to be, “What do you think? What have you considered? What strikes you as the best way to go?” that will accelerate a conversation. If they know you are going to ask for a very clear statement of what they need and want from you, it won’t take many such conversations for them to realize they should come with a proposed solution in mind.

4 | Use Very Short Scheduled Meetings

Northcote Parkinson was a naval historian who later became a management scholar. He observed the foibles of business and then elected to poke fun at them. His book, *Parkinson’s Law*, was the precursor to Lawrence Peter’s book *The Peter Principle* and cartoonist Scott Adams’s “Dilbert” comic strip. The most famous of Parkinson’s laws was “Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.”

Nearly without exception, if we say a project is going to take two weeks—that is minimally how long it will take. Deadlines are often missed, but only on a rare occasion will something be completed early. Human nature seems to dictate that we nearly always take the full amount of time allotted to do something.

Parkinson's law can also be applied to meetings. A meeting will nearly always expand to fill the time allocated for it. Very often it will run long. Almost never will it end early. Try scheduling shorter meetings and see how much can be achieved in a shorter time. Even a five-minute meeting can be effective when people come prepared.

One of the authors of this manifesto worked with an executive who had a hectic schedule. He was serving as a professor of chemistry at Stanford while also heading up the research function for a pharmaceutical company in Palo Alto. He had his assistant in the company schedule three- to five-minute meetings with those who reported to him. That sent a clear signal that there would be no time for idle chatter. Subordinates made their points and got the decisions they needed in their brief window of time.

5 | Change Your Attitude

Beliefs and attitudes shape people's behavior. After looking carefully at those who indicated they worked at a faster pace than others, we identified a set of attitudes or beliefs that were strongly held. We believe that by cultivating these beliefs people can increase their personal speed. All attitudes and beliefs are cultivated by experience or from the direct influence of others.

For example, an attitude that 94 percent of those who worked at a high pace agreed with was, "I do my best work, and rise to the occasion when performing under a deadline or time pressure." Can you think about some awful experiences you might have had while performing under pressure? Most everyone can, but people with a faster pace also think about the time when because of a deadline or time pressure they rose to the occasion and did a great job.

Ask yourself about your beliefs and attitudes, and how they may affect your pace. Often these beliefs are not completely rational. Sometimes our attitudes are based on very old data (for example, what happened to us in grade school). We've found ten key attitudes held by people who have a fast pace. Are there some of these attitudes that you might be able to utilize?

TOP 10 ATTITUDES OF PEOPLE WITH A FAST PACE

- 1** I do my best work, and rise to the occasion when performing under a deadline or time pressure. (94 percent)
- 2** When things get bogged down in a meeting, I do what I can to move things along. (90 percent)
- 3** I hate to move slowly and have delays. (84 percent)
- 4** Generally, I feel that I have things under control and can accomplish the important priorities. (83 percent)
- 5** I get a bigger sense of achievement and pride when I accomplish a lot in a short amount of time. (80 percent)
- 6** When making important decisions with a group of others, I am usually more worried about moving too slowly and getting bogged down in bureaucracy. (80 percent)
- 7** When things move too slowly, I tend to get impatient and upset. (74 percent)
- 8** I enjoy my work most when things move ahead quickly. (67 percent)
- 9** Better solutions come from moving quickly and testing options. (63 percent)
- 10** I get a greater sense of accomplishment out of getting things done. (61 percent)

6 | Stop Multitasking

By now, most people have heard that multitasking really doesn't save time or make you more efficient. Take the simple example of driving a car and turning on the radio. That seems like a rather benign form of multitasking, but research has shown that the amount of brain bandwidth now being focused on your driving has been decreased by 37 percent. It is true that the brain can jump back and forth between areas of focus in less than one-tenth of a second. But time is not the issue—it is the amount of brain bandwidth required to make the jump.

Strangely, those who think they are good at multitasking have been found to be the worst. Frequent multitaskers have more difficulty organizing their thoughts and are slower in switching from one task to another. Bottom line, our brains work most efficiently when they focus on one thing at a time.

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7 | Delegate

Another great time-saving tactic, especially for those in a managerial position, is delegation. It is the classic “win-win” action of a leader. The leader is freed up to focus on activities that only the leader can perform, and subordinates are given additional activities that expand the scope of their job and usually increase their level of job satisfaction.

The nature of the work people do is highly correlated with their satisfaction and engagement. Managers can ask subordinates questions like: “What do you see me doing that you would like to handle?” “What added responsibilities would enhance your development and at the same time free me up to do things I currently can’t get to?”

We’ve observed that when people are pressed for time, they often resort to the idea that: “I’ll do it myself! That’s quicker.” That is obviously a shortsighted solution. It may be faster at this moment in time, but it clearly doesn’t build organizational capacity, nor does it specifically develop the subordinate who is capable of taking on additional activities.

8 | Learn to Use the Latest Technology

Software programs can be an enormous boon to productivity. The ability to file information, schedule tasks to be completed, manage your calendar, and send and receive virtually instantaneous messages have been an enormous help in using work time productively.

One challenge is simply staying abreast of the constant stream of applications being written that promise to increase our productivity. One size does not fit all.

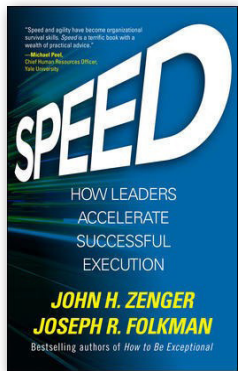
The key is to find the ones that are compatible with how you work. For those who write lengthy emails, memos, contracts, documents, or white papers, we heartily recommend new voice recognition software. In the past five years, the accuracy of such software has skyrocketed. It can save you both time and the physical exertion of typing long documents.

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Conclusion

Don't let your busy day tempt you to decrease the number of interactions you have. These conversations can be beneficial if kept positive, productive, and short. On the other hand, don't have people avoid you because they don't wish to hear a 45-minute monologue on whatever topic is being discussed. Because emotions are contagious, make your interactions and meetings generally positive. **By using a variety of approaches, you can make an extremely powerful and positive impact through an ongoing stream of brief interactions.** 📌

Info



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