

Slow the Game Down

February 24, 2018

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We've all been there – having that feeling where everything seems urgent and frantic. When life seems out of control and you realize that you're not at your best. Or when you feel like you're in a never-ending crisis. **You can make things clearer by slowing down.** Resist the temptation to go faster to get more things done, instead, slow it down to be more effective.

Here's a strategy that's especially significant if you're a football fan. Many of us admire the gritty composure demonstrated by Aaron Rogers, quarterback for the Green Bay Packers. Even with massive linemen running at him, he still has the presence of mind to execute the called play.

Sometimes our business world feels like that. We analyzed the situation and called the play. Now, we wish that we could just slow the game down so that we can figure out how to do everything well in a short amount of time.

Aaron Rogers has to figure out how to do that in less than three seconds; because in three seconds he's going to get hit by a 300-pound lineman. If he can make his decision in 1.6 seconds, he's much better off. If he waits three seconds to decide, he's going to have to choose between getting hit hard or scramble and make something up.

The correlation to business is that we often feel like we're in that hurry-up situation. You're in a meeting and everything seems frantic. While there's no lineman rushing at you, the threat of an unreasonable deadline feels the same way. You wish you could just slow the game down and think so you can make a calm, cool and collected decision.

When you really think about how a great quarterback slows the game down, you realize that they have obsessively prepared ahead of time. They have considered all of the different options they might see before they execute. No matter what your favorite sport is, **the secret to slowing the game down is in the preparation.**

If you're going into a big meeting that you expect to be stressful, with lots of different opinions and a time crunch, the time to deal with those issues is in the preparation. Aaron Rogers will know a certain defensive play from watching tapes, so when he sees the linebacker in a particular place he knows where he needs to direct his attention because he's anticipated that option and planned for that. He has the confidence to execute the play within the time that he's allowed because he knows the multiple scenarios and what to look for.

Now Let's take it from the gridiron to the boardroom. If you are faced with a meeting where you know there might be certain objections or emotions in reaction to a question, or issues that may heat things up and make the team less effective, you can identify and anticipate them beforehand. Then, when they

happen, you can just react in a moment that doesn't feel sped up. It's a moment that's slowed down with your preparation.

I was working with a leader whose name is Bart (yes, really) and is a Green Bay fan. This preparation process analogy was the thing that changed his viewpoint and made him more effective. He realized that if Bart Starr or Brett Favre can slow the game down, why can't he? He and I developed these tools that helped him prepare for meetings and I shared some strategies to use in a pinch and how to prepare in five minutes or less.

Your preparation is three-fold: strategic, tactical and relational. You need to consider all three because any one of them could derail your meeting or one-on-one interactions. Understand what you're trying to accomplish, understand the personality style of the people you're meeting with, consider their emotional state and also your emotional state too. Then, whatever happens, it isn't a surprise.

It doesn't take a lot of time. It just takes intentionality and preparation. Most leaders can do it in three to five minutes. It's important to find the time to get grounded and get your head in the game.

And here's where you can really improve your game: in anticipation of the next meeting and to begin your intentionality and preparation immediately, at the end of each meeting evaluate how it went. What went as you anticipated? What didn't go as expected? What could you do differently next time? Debrief with yourself much as a quarterback does on the sidelines after a play. Then you can keep learning. Next time you'll be more productive because you'll be more prepared and able to anticipate obstacles. It gives you a way to deal with issues rather than get frustrated by them.

No matter what comes up, a leader still has to lead. They must be able to slow the game down and deal with the situation to be effective.