The Hurrier I Go, the Behinder I Get

IF QUALITY IS THE OUTCOME WE'RE AFTER, HURRY HAS NO PLACE IN THE PLAN.

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"THE HURRIER I GO, THE BEHINDER I GET."

THIS SIMPLE PHRASE WAS ON A PLAQUE IN MY HOME WHEN I WAS GROWING UP. (Forgive me, as I may be stretching from an idiom perspective.) For the longest time, I just couldn't make sense of it. Decades later, the phrase has become abundantly clear, repeatedly demonstrated, and consistently true... especially lately.

When we take on assignments, tasks, roles and responsibilities, they all come with a list of things to do. Depending on the level of complexity they include duration, cost, impact, etc. We then make determinations about the prioritization of activities and commence execution. Sure! This sounds like a very smooth process; my experience in real-life business lately has been quite a bit different.

First of all, the "do more with less" mandate that so many have been working under for so long is wearing thin. In spite of the reports from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics regarding increases in productivity levels, it appears the increase could be coming from a *shrunken workforce*. For many, the workforce had to shrink due to losses associated with the downturn in the economy. This did not always translate comfortably to an overall reduction in the workload. Now with the economy recovering (so they say) in some cases, it is becoming painfully clear that this existing workforce is often stretched beyond capacity. We appear in some cases to be in the "dark place" between downturn and comeback. Those folks functioning in this chasm could well be reaching their breaking point. This year at tax time, IRS Commissioner John Koskinen warned, "We are looking at a situation where realistically we have no choice but to do less with less," referencing budget cuts that have impacted the IRS Contact Centers. I believe there are many others

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who might finally adopt this mantra over the popular "do more with less." And maybe it's about time.

This brings me back to my first point regarding orderly decision making. This area is often put at serious risk when the workforce has been operating at maximum capacity for a period of time—time that is potentially greater than endurance levels allow.

This "maxed out" workforce… more aptly named the "do more with less" team… has to *hurry* to meet the deadlines and demands of the enterprise. *When one must hurry to get things done, how well can we expect the outcome to be?* Regardless of one's skill as a "multitasker," if quality is the outcome we're after, hurry has no place in the plan. If you actually have time to make a plan that is.

Organizing and prioritizing activities and making good decisions about tasks and activities cannot be considered a luxury or an indulgence. It must be considered a *requirement*. It seems that taking the time to think about ways to improve an area causing dissatisfaction to customers or a business that dissatisfies its leaders is not compatible with those who are hell bent on being the immediate "doer" or "fixer." The shame of it all is that time is rarely taken to determine if the conundrum under scrutiny was actually caused by moving too quickly in the first place (i.e., hurrying to provide a report or take some action) without due diligence around risk and unintended consequences such as damage to the brand, the workforce or the customer experience.

Recently, a company I came across was evaluating new technology to enhance or replace its telecom infrastructure. They were going about it quite methodically until a person of influence decided to dictate the decision based on his own choice and belief in his skill and knowledge in the discipline. The really challenging thing about watching this play out was that this leader's actual depth of knowledge was by no means sufficient to derail an analysis or make the best/right decision. But alas, his position was! So he bragged that he made this thing happen so much faster—*"Look at me, I'm such a genius." "Without me, the team would still be talking about it."* (As if "talking about it" were a bad thing.) UGH! Anyway, this leader stuck the company with insufficient and more expensive tools that resulted in a "cobbled together" solution—one that all will steadfastly defend until the blowback occurs in a couple of years. Often, this type of person has moved on to terrorize some other poor unsuspecting firm with his/her brand of "genius." They truly believe that anything that goes wrong or fails will fall once again to the incompetents left behind. Trust me, the failure will come and the cost will come; the reality may set in that perhaps having trusted this guy was a colossal error. Sadly, ego often prevents us from thinking badly about decisions made on our watch, even if someone else hijacked our role as decision maker.

Here is a rather grand example of moving faster rather than moving smartly. Think about the hiring process and how often a department is in "freak out" mode when identifying the need for new positions. The faster the process, the more likely the wrong person makes it onto your payroll. Hence, the "behinder" you get because wrong hires suck the life out of organizations. And just for the record, they don't generally quit. (I wrote a Rant on this: "Easy to Get is Hard to Get Rid Of," bit.ly/1KVg4re) They stick around because their options are so limited; it is the good people who quit because they get abused with an untenable workload.

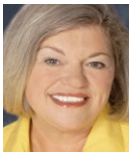
Another maxim for this "hurried" condition is Haste Makes Waste and I am sure there are many more. The point is to think about your process for allocating time to evaluate workload, call load and loads on all channels, to assess impact on the customer experience, and to make a solid and compelling case to senior management. So many managers allow decisions made in a hurry to be put into practice. Here are some examples: *"Oh, it is a quality problem… do more observations." "Oh, there's too much tardiness… make the consequence more severe." "Not at your desk?… let's buy one of those good ol' tracking-by-the-second machines and watch 'em more closely all day!"*

While many "solutions" to issues carry some merit, without serious causal analysis we are just acting in a hurry! The consequences may result in a dip in morale that causes serious quality, attendance, turnover, communication, and trust problems. And the "behinder" you will become.

I don't believe in beating an option to death via analysis. However, taking a few extra hours to ask questions, to anticipate consequences, and to play the "what if" game pays off in spades. I am not advising you to involve everyone in the building that may have an opinion. Once you get in the flow of slowing down and thinking, it happens without a ton of additional conscious thought—kind of like eating right. It's a lifestyle change more than anything else.

Oh, and speaking of being in a "hurry" mode, resist the urge to be one of those people who is "too busy to even take a vacation." Think about this: Men who don't take regular vacations are 32% more likely to have heart attacks than those who do; for women, the figure is 50%. And they are two to three times as likely to suffer from depression. (source: Framingham Heart Study, National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute).

OK everybody… carry on, move forward… but don't hurry.



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