



# Slow Down

Thoughts on leadership  
by Karl Pister



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One time, I was speaking with a physician leader of a major healthcare organization about the importance of 'slowing down to speed up' (a phrase coined by author Jim Collins in the book Good to Great) as his organization starts the process of coming out of lockdown status.





When a person, or organization, has been in such a lockdown mode, the first inclination would be to come out fast, hard, and strong. However, when people have been blitzed to the degree that this pandemic has produced, they are going to need to have some time to reflect and share, because their entire mental, and in some cases physical, worlds have been shattered, and unless they feel that safety will be restored, as I mentioned before in the 'Habits' writing, they will not listen to you beyond your first words.

Should you think that your organization is tough and strong enough to jump right back in, consider the following story I read this morning in an excellent article by McKinsey Consulting that came out over the weekend (*Tuning In, Turning outward: Cultivating Compassionate Leadership in a Crisis, McKinsey and Company, May 4, 2020*):

*During the September 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, New York City Fire Department Chief Joseph Pfeifer recalls another chief climbing atop a charred firetruck and motioning firefighters to gather around it.*



*"I want you to take off your helmets," the chief said. Incredulous looks raced through the group—the helmet was a part of these first responders' identity, and removing it normally only occurred at a shift's end. But the chief continued: "We lost a lot of people today. This calls for a moment of silence."*

*The simple gesture put voice to what the firefighters were feeling. When the chief spoke again, he said, "Let's put our helmets back on. We have more lives to save." Pfeifer remembers the meeting ending with the group even more deeply aligned around their mission.*

Now, please consider -- if in the midst of the chaos of the World Trade Center tragedy, with so much death and devastation around them the very same day of the attack-- if some of the most battle-hardened and trauma-trained first-responders in the world needed a moment of reflection, could I suggest that your teams get that same essential courtesy? And, while the NYFD could not spare much time that day, could I also suggest that you take a good part of your first post lockdown meetings to address your 'moment of silence?'"



The McKinsey article went on to say:

*Stepping back to gain perspective is a practice as useful for organizations as it is for individuals. Once people have had a chance to share their raw emotional experience and check in with one another on their circumstances and losses, the ability to then tap into the generosity, wisdom, and strength of the team as a whole can help provide vision and resources to manage and perhaps ease or temper people's sense of risk and uncertainty.*

And, you only get one chance for a first impression post-Covid. If you fall to the temptation to jump without respecting this slowdown need, anything you do after that to try to recoup trust and connection will most likely be seen as 'too little, too late.'

In essence, it gets back to the message I sent to you on March 24th, "Don't Mess with Maslow". Something completely out of your control has blitzed your teams. And their response, being personal, has also been out of your control. However, as the lockdowns loosen and people begin to venture out again both physically and emotionally, how you lead will be looked at through a new lens...



Show empathy and connection and your team will follow you into the amazing world of opportunity that will be there for innovative and creative thinking. Ignore the need for that, or just give it lip service, and chances are high that those amazing opportunities will not be yours.





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