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Speeding Change By Slowing Down

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I have always believed that the fastest path to the future is found through increasing velocity of change. I don't believe I'll get much push-back on that statement, but I'm rather certain I'll encounter some resistance with my next one: Increasing velocity of change is best accomplished by slowing down.



Most CEOs feel as if they're in a race to change the future, and they would be correct. By nature, being a CEO is a forward-looking endeavor. In fact, this is so much the case that virtually every aspect of being a chief executive is focused on the future. But what if I told you most CEOs are looking in the wrong direction? What if the fastest path to the future is found looking backward and not forward?

“THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER IS THAT CHANGE ALWAYS BEGINS WITH A HARSH CRITIQUE OF THE PAST AND THE PRESENT.”

I was recently asked, what would I do differently as a leader if I could turn back time? Oddly enough, this wasn't a difficult question for me to answer—I live here. I ask myself similar questions every day; what did I learn today? what should I have done differently? Over the years, I have learned that brutal honesty regarding self-reflection is the key to unlocking better performance in the future.

However, most CEOs left to their own devices will often pursue the wrong path to the future. The truth of the matter is that change always begins with a harsh critique of the past and the present. The best CEOs live in this world—they are purpose driven and not ego driven. They know that it's not about who's right, but what's right. They understand that beating their competition to the future is directly tied to their personal, professional, organizational and global levels of awareness. Intellectual acuity is nice, but intellectual honesty is essential.

So, when I was asked the question, what would I do differently? the following is how I answered:

- I'd surrender faster and replace myself sooner.
- I'd control less and influence more.
- I'd spend more time as student and less time as teacher.
- I'd develop talent earlier and faster.
- I'd free people from boxes, not place them in boxes.

I eventually did all these things, but I clearly held onto the CEO role for too long. Controlling leaders operate in a world of addition and subtraction, while the calculus of a leader understands that surrender is built on exponential multiplication. Here's the thing: the purpose of leadership is not to shine the spotlight on yourself, but to unlock the potential of others so they can shine the spotlight on countless more. Control is about power—not leadership. Surrender allows leaders to get out of their own way and focus on adding value to those whom they serve.

What if you could turn back time? You can. You can turn back time anytime you choose to do so. The question is, do you have the patience and the courage it takes to step back as a springboard for leaping forward?