

Caution: Avoid Operating Heavy Machinery, Leading Teams, and Living Life Under the Influence of a Sense of Urgency

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Sense of Urgency: the quality or state of *BEing* urgent. A *habitualized* way of *BEing*, living, or leading that is consistently rushed and urgent.

The Benefits of Urgency:

- It's culturally lauded as "high performing"
- We get to feel productive
- We get to feel a sense of worth, useful, and successful because we're accomplishing so much
- We get to avoid feeling certain emotions that we'd have to reckon with if we slowed down and got present

The Costs of Urgency:

- Reinforcement of the fallacy that **our worth is derived from our ability to produce work/labor**.
- **Dismissal of others** – our anxiety can silence their experience, and our rushing around can create an impact of valuing productivity over people.
- **Invalidation of inclusivity** – when we are "urgent," we make less space for collaboration; we make less space to pause and ask "whose voices are not present in this decision?"; we are often less aware of critical gaps in different perspectives and experiences; and we can justify *not* demanding an inclusive process and product that demands diversity because we are racing toward an "urgent" finish line.
- **Racial discrimination, unconscious bias, and structural racism** – when we make hasty decisions and operate in hasty ways, white people in particular but all of us are less likely to guard against unconscious bias, which can fuel racist systems in the work place. People of color are systemically overlooked in hiring decisions and for promotions, receive lower wages than white counterparts, and receive extra scrutiny from managers. These instances of racism are often difficult for white people to see even when they aren't operating in urgency. A sense of urgency amplifies the frequency and intensity with which people of color are *already* invalidated, overlooked, negated, and demeaned in the American workplace.
- **Long term health costs** that come from sustained mental, emotional, and physical stress. Anxiety; depression; digestive problems; heart problems – to name a few on a very long list.
- When we sustain a sense of urgency, we can **bias short-term results over long-term strategy and impact**.
- Organizational **culture based on transaction** – we can lose sight of priority and importance (see below), and unintentionally foster a culture all about what we do.

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- **Struggle to determine priorities** – when urgency is a way of being, we weaken both our skill and will to be able to identify the priorities and treat them as such.

Divesting from Urgency:

What we really want when we reach for a sense of urgency is to convey importance – to convey meaning. It's possible to do one without the other. But it requires leadership that's clear in heart; it requires excellent communication skills (and the willingness to practice those skills); it requires holding tight to inclusivity no matter how pressing the deadline. It may also involve unlearning and even detoxing from an acquired, urgent way of being – at the individual level, and perhaps organizationally too.

Here are several subtle but powerful distinctions that can help you release your reliance on a sense of urgency as a way of being, as a strategy for motivation, and/or as a method of leadership.

- **Importance > Urgency** – help your team (or your life partners) understand why a particular outcome is important. When things are important to us, we tend to treat them as if they *really* matter – and when things *really* matter, we don't rush them.
- **Go Slow to Go Fast** – more often than not, racing and rushing through a project will end up meaning *even more time* down the road because we have to go back to correct mistakes, to apologize for behaviors that devalued people, to get additional perspectives... And we lose trust, culture, inclusivity along the way. Slow down.
- **Energy > Time** – sometimes when people use urgency as a motivator or way of being, what they're trying to ask those around them for is a similarly demonstrated commitment of energy to the task at hand. But folks who have absorbed urgency as a way of being often – consciously or unconsciously – have begun to equate time (the amount of time spent on something) with results/commitment.
- **Presence > Production** – when something is *truly* important, I want my team's and my own attention to be incredibly present and mindful in the time we spend on that project. I want to hold the project with complete care and attention. When we're urgent, we are almost never *present* because we're anticipating the future and we're rushing to get *there* – rather than being *here*.
- **Enoughness > Scarcity** – one of the root causes of a sense of urgency is an orientation to scarcity. This mentality usually stems from experiences in childhood connected to trauma or poverty – real experiences when there truly wasn't enough of something. The trouble comes when the mindset gets engrained in our unconscious beliefs, and those beliefs form our way of being and leading. In a sense of urgency, we are constrained – we're stressed, we're worried about time, we're worried about *not enoughness*. Practicing enoughness is challenging – and liberating. Right now, there is enough time. And right now, I am enough.

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