
Chapter 5

The Roadblock of Pace

Slow down!

—YOUR MOM, WHEN YOU WERE A KID

I have a confession to make. The manuscript for the book you hold in your hands was due at a really bad time for me. I had what felt like fifty million other things that were due at the exact same time I was finishing this book. The content for our Advance One Day business leaders' event that we host each fall was due. The content for the pastors event we host in the fall was due. We were launching a mini fundraising campaign in our church, raising money to upgrade some environments that desperately needed it. We were heading into the biggest growth season of the year for our church, which requires extra time for me in terms of message preparation. My kids were both heading back to school. And, as if all that wasn't weighing heavy enough on me, my

favorite sports team, the Tampa Bay Rays, were in fourth place at the time and running the risk of missing the playoffs.¹

But even in light of all that, I was moving along okay with the book . . . until the wheels came off.

According to the schedule I had created for finishing this book, I needed to have all the content out of my head and onto paper by August 1. That way I could take the last six weeks to edit and polish it before turning it in on September 15. And I had done that. It was when I sat down the first week of August to begin the editing phase that everything seemingly blew up in my face.

As I began reading, I realized the entire set-up of the book was wrong. And when I say wrong I mean “This is good content but about 35 percent doesn’t even belong in this book.”

I walked into where my wife was sitting and said, “Honey, I think I have to start over.”

To which she answered, “What do you mean—start over? As

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CHAPTER ON
BEING TOO BUSY.**

in “Oh no, my husband is gonna go crazy for the next six weeks and that is not gonna be a good thing at all.” . . . Start over?

Yes, that kind of start over..

For the next ten minutes, she and I talked about how, with all my other responsibilities, the need to rewrite would probably put me way over the top in terms of my schedule and workload.

Now, the good news is that, by the next morning, I knew exactly what needed to be done with the book. I needed to write about the roadblocks to teachability, the last of which is the one you are presently reading. And therein lies the irony: I was too

busy to write a chapter on being busy. How in the world could I write about being too rushed to be teachable when I was, well, too rushed to be teachable?

For the next two weeks, this reality played tricks with my head and caused me to have a severe case of writer's block, right up until the night before I was scheduled to write this chapter. When I lay down in bed on that Tuesday night next to my wife, in a "Hail Mary"

type of moment, I asked her, "Honey, what is the number-one reason that an unhealthy pace is a roadblock to teachability?"

After fifteen seconds she said, "Because everything good in life, including teachability, lives and grows in the margins. And an unhealthy pace eliminates the margins in our lives."

And that my friends, is why you have to make sure you marry up. She nailed it. One of the greatest enemies to teachability is the speed with which we choose to live our lives. When we choose to live at an unhealthy pace, our teachability drops off considerably.

If it's true (and it is) that everything good in our life lives and grows in the margins, then why do we have such a hard time creating the margins in our lives that we need for all those good things to grow?

My friend Brady Boyd wrote a book called, *Addicted to Busy* in which he described this scenario perfectly: "Ultimately, every problem I see in every person I know is a problem of moving too fast for too long in too many aspects of life. Every problem."²

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Don't miss that.

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is an enemy to teachability in our lives.

THE ILLUSION OF SUSTAINABLE

When it comes to keeping an unhealthy pace, here's what we tell ourselves, and I know this because it's what I tell myself too. We trick ourselves on this issue by saying:

- “But I'm talented.”
- “But I'm having fun.”
- “But I am doing what I love.”
- “But the things I'm doing are all good things.”
- “But I'm young.”
- “But these are my primary earning years.”
- “But I have a lot of energy that I would be wasting on something else.”
- “But at least I'm not doing something destructive like drinking or gambling.”

And then we convince ourselves that we can keep up our current pace forever.

Now I hear you saying, “No, Matt, it's not forever. It's just for a season.”

I know. I've said that too. But let's be honest. One season

somehow turns into another, doesn't it? What was going to be an exception to the rule has now become the rule.

When we live for an extended period of time at an unhealthy pace, our bodies begin to adapt and believe that this is our new normal. So when we go back down to a more reasonable pace, we feel guilty, antsy, unproductive, less successful, and driven to pick up the pace again. And that, of course, perpetuates the cycle.

Turns out, being busy is addictive.

DRIVING IN THE POURING RAIN

As you've picked up by now, I live in Florida, which is a fantastic place to live most of the year.⁴ However, the summers are hot, and they also include what is known down here as the rainy season. I don't understand it all, but basically, because of the barometric blah-blah-blah and the temperature of the water in the Gulf of Mexico, something or other happens that makes it rain like cats and dogs every afternoon from June 1 to October 1.

Well, we Floridians get used to the rain. And because of minor matters like errands to run and jobs to go to, we have no choice but to drive in it.

One afternoon last summer I was driving in a torrential downpour while trying to listen to a leadership podcast I had downloaded earlier that day. As I whooshed along with both hands white-knuckling the wheel, doing my best to focus on the podcast an interesting realization hit me: *I can't do this.*

Multitasker that I am, I discovered that it is impossible to

process a leadership message while driving in the pouring rain. My teachability went to zero because of the focus that steering my car through a deluge required from me.

The same thing is true in our lives. When the normal everyday pace of our life feels like we're driving in the rain, there is no way we can be teachable and learn what we need to learn in order to grow and reach our full potential.

It's impossible. Our minds and bodies simply don't work that way.

SAUL, THE DISTRACTED, OBSESSED LEADER

You knew we would bring this back to Saul, right?

Throughout this part of the book we've been examining the life of King Saul from ancient Israel as a case study of a guy who lacked teachability in his life. And in the previous chapter, we saw that God lifted his hand of favor off Saul and placed it upon his son-in-law, David. (That's right—the young David of David-and-Goliath fame.) We also saw that Saul kind of lost it after that. He let his pain skew his vision and did some pretty crazy things.

But what we haven't seen yet is that poor David was the primary target of Saul's craziness. In fact, Saul became a man consumed with a single mission: kill David! No matter what extreme measures getting rid of David would require, Saul made it his sole ambition and desire. In fact, the Bible records story after story of Saul's complete obsession with finding his son-in-law and destroying him.

Here's just a small example, from 1 Samuel 24:1:

After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, “David is in the Desert of En Gedi.” So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men.

Did you catch that? Saul and his army had just returned from fighting their formidable enemy the Philistines, which should have warranted a much deserved and much needed rest. But did Saul rest? No way. He was a man on a mission—a mission to destroy his son-in-law. So he rallied his tired troops and set off in search of David. He risked the lives of thousands of men in the hopes of finding and killing David.

The next several verses of chapter 24 tell us that while on this urgent mission to find and destroy David, Saul ventured into a cave where David and his men were hiding out. Luckily, for Saul, David was a man of integrity and decided not to do the king harm, even though his men were urging him to do otherwise.

Saul should have been focused on his real enemies instead of the threat he thought David was to him. But because Saul was consumed with his obsessive agenda, he couldn’t stop and think all that through. His pace clouded his vision and made him vulnerable—and it nearly cost him his life.

SOMETHING’S GOTTA GIVE

Trying to sustain an unhealthy pace over an extended period of time is an enemy to our teachability because it erodes the margin of your life and, as we said before, the margin is where the good things happen.

Without margin, creativity stops.

Without margin, fresh ideas don't emerge.

Without margin, conversations that produce breakthroughs don't happen.

Without margin, you don't have the ability to grasp anything new.

Without margin, teachability dies.

A few years ago, I flew into a city in the middle of the United States to consult with a young organization my team had been coaching for about eighteen months. The leaders were hungry, teachable, and ready to learn everything they could from our time together. After spending a couple of days meeting with their leadership team and seeing for myself all that they were doing, the time came for our final debriefing session before I headed to the airport to fly home.

A few minutes into unpacking my thoughts, however, I noticed the looks on their faces and the glances they kept giving to each other. The look on their faces said, "This is overwhelming." And the glance they gave each other said, "There's no way we can do all this and keep doing everything else we've got going on."

I stopped the meeting and sat down, "You know I love you guys," I said, "and you clearly have a desire to learn and grow. But honestly, I think your biggest problem is that you're trying to do too much. The best thing you can do is cut about one-third of your goals for the next two quarters and just scale back to a more reasonable pace."

The minute I said that, I could see the relief settle over them. They immediately recognized that what I'd said was true.

Their pace was killing them.

ARE YOU DOING TOO MUCH?

Is it possible you're doing too much? Are you going too fast? Quoting again from my friend Brady's book, "Speed is the single greatest threat to a healthy life." Let that sink in for a second before you (ironically) rush right past it.⁴

And I would add that speed is the single greatest threat to your teachability. You will never get where you want to go if you're moving too fast and doing too much. You must slow down enough to be able to learn what you need to learn so you can become what you want to become.

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Often in our hurry-up lifestyle, we mistake movement for forward progress. Having a lot of commotion in your life doesn't guarantee there's a lot of progress. If you don't believe me, just watch a toddler for three minutes. Constant movement, little forward progress.

Are you doing a lot of moving but not gaining traction toward your goals? That's yet another reason to consider the pace of your life. Have you left some margins where growth can happen?

Just because you *can* do something, that doesn't mean you *should* do it. Not every good thing is necessarily the best thing. Only those things that lead you into a better version of you are the best things for your life. If you do too many good things but neglect the best things, you'll never end up in the best place you want to be.

COMBATING BUSYNESS

To improve your teachability, you must learn to combat busyness and control your pace. How? I'm going to suggest three simple—though not necessarily easy—strategies.

Combating Busyness Strategy #1: Turn It Off.

Let me start with a question: When was the last time you sat for ten minutes in silence?

If the very thought of that freaks you out, then this strategy is one that you desperately need.

At least once a day you need to silence your world. No phone. No email. No screens. I challenge you to turn it all off for at least ten minutes every day. No noise. No music. Nothing but yourself and the quiet.

Just sit. Let your mind wander. Let your thoughts drift. You'll be amazed at what you hear in the silence. Silence and contemplation are lost values in the noisy, hurry-up world we live in.

Got that? Unplug once a day for at least ten minutes.

Now, once you've built that into your day, start thinking about weekly.

Here's another question: When do you take a day off? If your answer is "When I need it." Or "When I can," you're in trouble. You need to start taking a day off every week. And I don't mean staying home to catch up on emails or take care of home projects. Doing something that refreshes you, something that recharges your batteries and doesn't feel like work will do more for your productivity, your teachability, and your happiness than you can imagine.

One of the greatest traps we fall into is believing we're too busy to take a regular day off. What a mistake. You will miss your

full potential every time when you ignore this valuable principle.

You probably saw the next step coming: carve out time to turn it all off on a quarterly basis. In our work with high capacity leaders we always teach them that once a quarter they need to take a “personal inventory day”—an entire day when they get out of the office and do a self-assessment of their entire lives. (This is in addition to the regular weekly days off.) Rising above your life every three months will give you perspective on your pace that you can’t see otherwise.⁵

Finally, in terms of turning it off, you’ve got to disconnect yearly. My wife and I are borderline fanatical about taking a once-a-year “Mommy and Daddy only” vacation. We look forward to that time together because it is the one time all year where it’s just the two of us being a married couple. Not work colleagues. Not parenting partners. Not cohabitants. We are husband and wife, and it’s awesome! And when we arrive at our secret, undisclosed location, we always lock our cell phones in the hotel safe for the entire week!⁶ I can’t tell you what a difference this schedule of ‘turning it off’ makes for us. We always come back with a new level of margin in our lives.

Combating Busyness Strategy #2: Cut Stuff.

Let’s say your doctor called you in tomorrow and said, “You will die if you do everything that you have scheduled on your calendar for the next six months.” And what if he or she then demanded that you cut one-fourth of the commitments from your calendar?

No excuses. No exceptions. You can’t leave the doctor’s office until a fourth of all of your meetings, events, and responsibilities are canceled.

What would you cut? It's like the lifeboat game for your calendar. Someone has to get thrown overboard, so who goes?

Now, here's the trick to a healthy pace. Save yourself the doctor visit and just play the lifeboat game with your calendar now. Get ruthless and cut out a quarter of your commitments. And if you can't bring yourself to do it, then hand your calendar to your spouse or a colleague and let he or she do it. In a worst-case scenario, give it to your mother-in-law and let her have at it. She may be the only one who will tell you the truth about your pace.

Any of those people would love to whittle down your calendar for you—because your busyness is killing them too. And somebody's got to do it. Your teachability and your success are at stake.

Combating Busyness Strategy #3: Stop Taking Yourself So Seriously.

I have one final question for you. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much fun are you having in your life right now? Keeping an unhealthy pace not only destroys your teachability, but it also destroys your joy. The busiest people you know are *not* having the most fun. They're struggling just to stay upright.

So in addition to slowing your pace a bit, what do you need to introduce—or reintroduce—into your life to start having more fun? What hobby do you enjoy that you can't turn into a job? What can you do consistently that fills your tank and helps you enjoy life more?

In my world, fun is not optional, it's essential. And here's the coolest part, the next time you are smack dab-in the middle of doing something you truly love, something both fun and fulfilling, notice your level of teachability.

I guarantee you it's sky high.

CONCLUDING THOUGHT

Life is too short and you have too much potential to squander it by living at an unhealthy pace. You can't finish the race if you burn up your engine.

So slow down. Enjoy the ride. Remember that you only get to do this once.

An unhealthy pace will roadblock your teachability, and a lack of teachability will keep you from living the life you want to live.

And like the title of the book says,
Teachability truly is the key to everything.

NOTES

1. If you love your team the way I love the Rays, you understand.
2. Brady Boyd, *Addicted to Busy: Recovery for the Rushed Soul* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2014), 44.
3. I mean, if you like sunshine, beaches, palm trees, and awesomeness, then yes, Florida is the place to be.
4. Brady Boyd's *Addicted to Busy* again—also page 44.
5. Wayne Cordeiro introduced a great self-assessment tool called the “twelve dials” in his book, *Leading on Empty: Refilling Your Tank and Renewing Your Passion* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2009). I highly recommend both the book and the twelve-dials tool.
5. If you're a parent, you may be thinking, “But what about my babies at home? What if there's an emergency?” Of course, we give a number of where we'll be to whoever is taking care of the kids (usually their grandparents). We just don't want to be bothered with texts and Twitter and the phone stuff that feels like our normal life.

