Think:Act

Leading thoughts, shaping vision

Think:Act #43 09|2024 FIND YOUR PACE PRICE $19.95

TAKE YOUR TIME

How pacing yourself is good for mind, body and business

Hitting pause
Why career breaks are catching on

For humanity
Design legend Don Norman has a big to-do list

Roland Berger

"The time had come to bring food to the center of the debate. From that moment a real revolution began."

Carlo Petrini,
Founder of the International Slow Food Movement

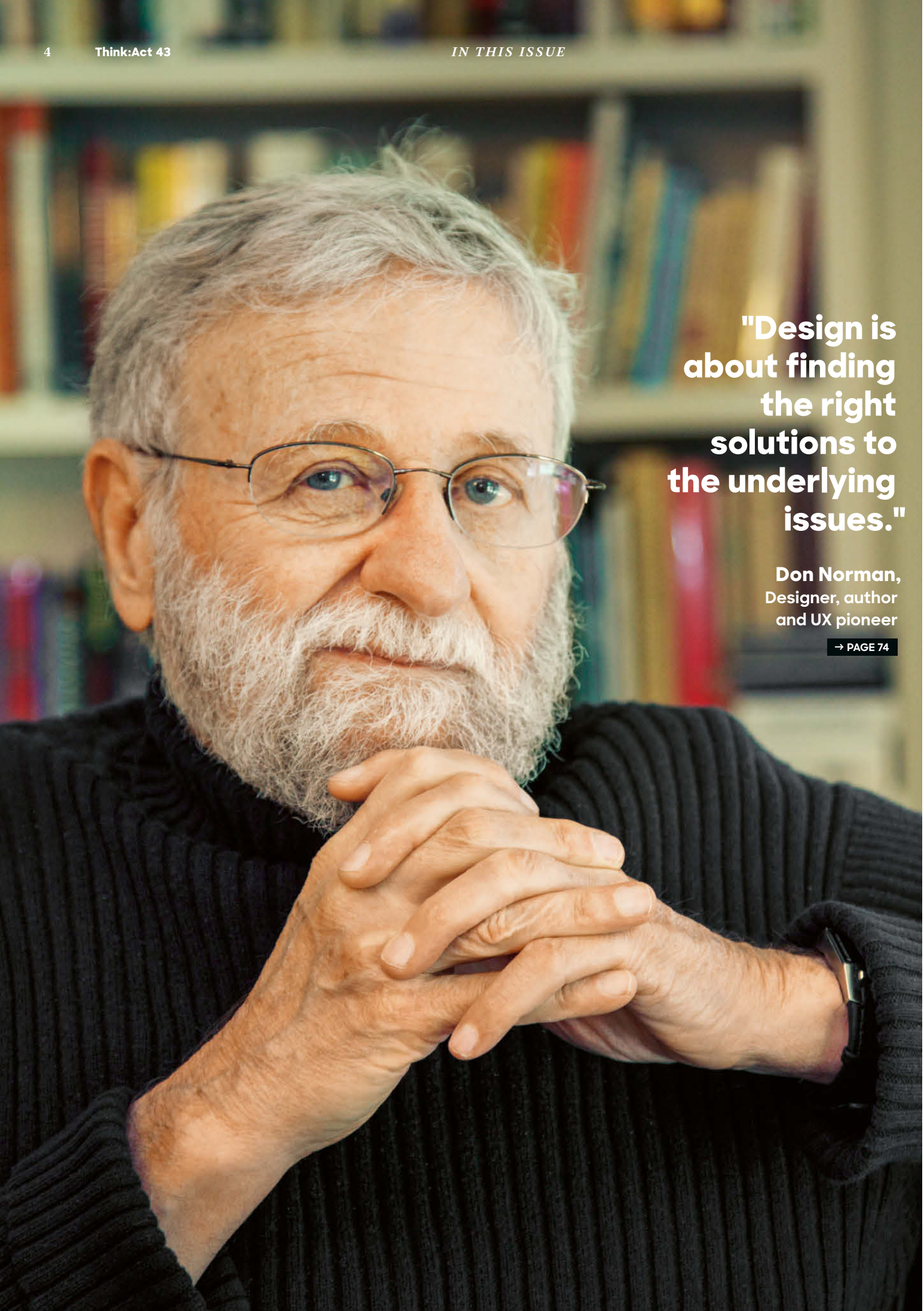
→ PAGE 48

PHOTOS: AXEL MARTENS / AGENTUR FOCUS, PHILIPP HORAK

"It's somehow deeply entrenched in the mind of society that being a pilot is a very male job."

Annette Mann,
CEO of Austrian Airlines

→ PAGE 62



"Design is about finding the right solutions to the underlying issues."

Don Norman,
Designer, author and UX pioneer

→ PAGE 74

PHOTOS: DAVID MAGNUSSON, JULIA SELLMANN

IN THIS ISSUE

PACING YOURSELF

Humans are firmly and inexorably in time's grip, and our language gives away the predicament.

We "squeeze" appointments into our "busy" calendars, "jump" on calls, "run" to meetings, get stuck during "rush" hour and are constantly inveigled to "hustle." We track and trace in ever-smaller increments what we do and what's about to show up on our doorsteps via "express" delivery and what "just-in-time" systems propel to production lines and loading docks.

All this haste might be driven by our desire to grasp something we cannot. Humans do not possess an innate sense of time. Instead, we deduce its passing from external and internal cues. Humankind literally *made* time to measure what is there to be had and conquered.

Yet not every race is won by speed alone. The secret to sustainable success, to healthy growth – and savoring or appreciating life's worthwhile moments – comes from pacing oneself, learning *when* to slow down and *when* to speed up again.

Taking your time, it turns out, is beneficial for mind, body and business. Stepping out and gaining a new perspective can be truly reinvigorating.

Think:Act invites you on a journey of well-paced discoveries and insights on what the downsides of always speeding up and the rewards of taking it slow are. So, sit back, relax and enjoy the ride.

Think:Act 43

In focus

TAKE YOUR TIME

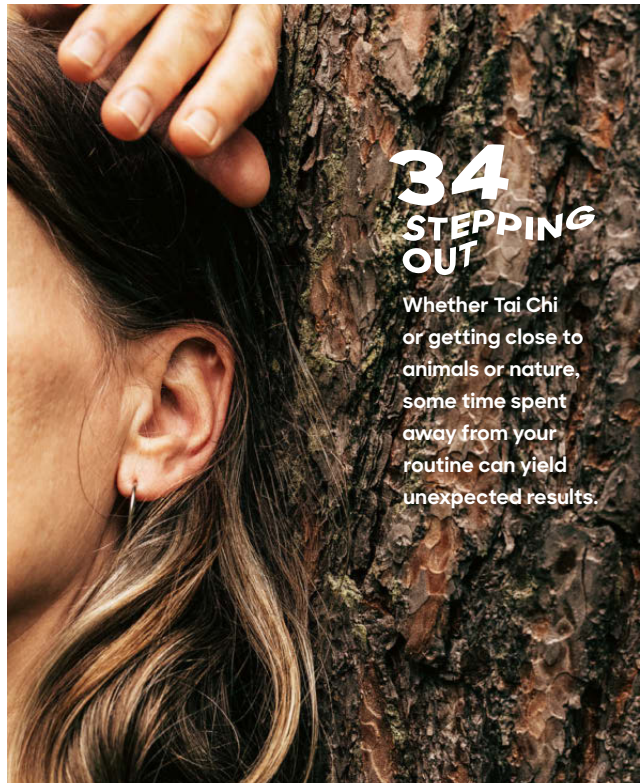
12 PACE FOR IMPACT

Academics and business leaders agree that building a sustainable organization calls for slowing things down.

FIND YOUR PACE

"The business world is going to keep fighting until they are forced to abandon hustle culture."

– Devon Price, PAGE 12



34 STEPPING OUT

Whether Tai Chi or getting close to animals or nature, some time spent away from your routine can yield unexpected results.

PHOTOS: J.E. DE LA CRUZ, JULIA SELLMANN, CURTIS BROWN

Wide angle

Think, act and stay informed

FIND YOUR PACE

Digital

Think:Act Ideas for Action

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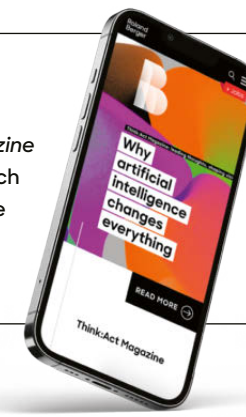


Think *in numbers*

Putting a figure on ...
WATER SECURITY

1%
OF ALL WATER
How much of the estimated 1.39 billion cubic kilometers of water on Earth is available for human use – 97% is ocean water and the other 2% is polluted or inaccessible.

6x
MORE
The approximate increase in global freshwater consumption since 1950, during which time the steepest increase occurred between 1950 and 2000, plateauing somewhat since.

2.3
BILLION
How many people live in a country that is "water-stressed," meaning it withdraws 25% or more of its annually renewable freshwater.

72%
OF WITHDRAWALS
How much of annual freshwater consumption is used by agriculture, followed by 16% by municipalities for household and service use and 12% by industry.

SOURCES:
CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, OUR WORLD IN DATA, UNITED NATIONS WATER

PHOTOS: ASCENTXMEDIA / GETTY IMAGES, COURTESY OF WILLIAM URY | ILLUSTRATION: JULIA ZIMMERMANN

Food for **thought**

How do we strike a deal, even if it seems impossible?

by William Ury

ALL TOO OFTEN in conflict situations, we react out of fear or anger and end up getting in our own way. Instead, go to an imaginary balcony – a place of calm and perspective where you can keep your eyes on the prize and see the big picture. Breathe, take a break, take a walk. Start by stopping. When confronted, we tend to dig into our positions, making it harder for the other side to get what they want. Instead, make it easier for them – easier to make the decision you want them to make. Write their victory speech in which they agree to what you want. In other words, build them a golden bridge: an attractive way forward to a mutually satisfying agreement. We usually see just two sides, us against them, battling it out for a unilateral victory. Instead, engage the third side – the people around you who can help, a team of colleagues, friends, allies and neutrals. Build a winning coalition for a positive agreement. We may not be able to end conflicts, but we can transform the way we deal with them – from destructive fights into cooperative negotiations. The key is to unlock our innate natural potential for curiosity, creativity and collaboration. Since conflicts are made by humans, they can be changed by humans.

Thin

AT A GLANCE

WILLIAM URY is a negotiation expert and the author and co-author of several books including the bestseller *Getting to Yes*. His most recent, *Possible: How We Survive (and Thrive) in an Age of Conflict*, was published in 2024.

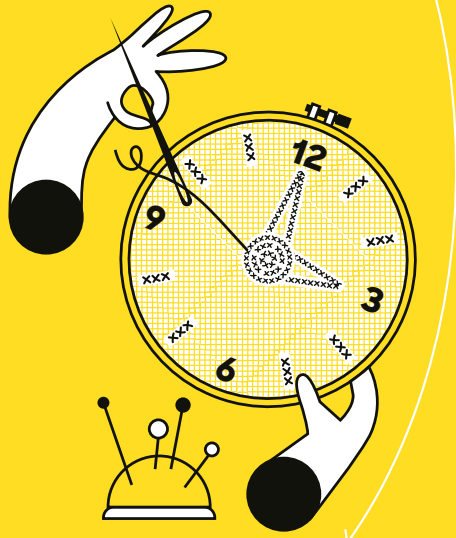
Thoughts *to live by*

"Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind."

— Rudyard Kipling,
English novelist, short story writer, poet and journalist

Re-think*ing* *buzzwords*

Get to grips with new industry lingo in a flash with our stripped-down explanations of the latest jargon.

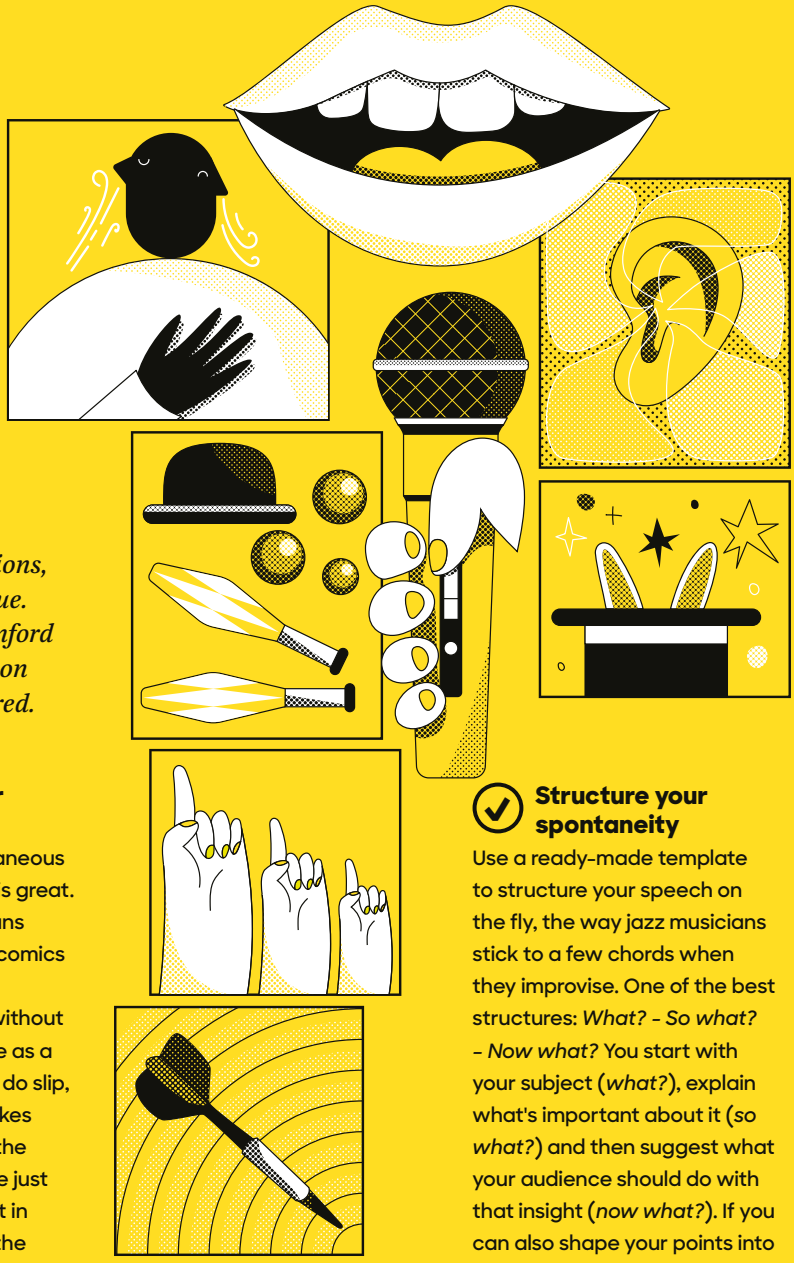


"Flexetariat"

The catchall term for a new breed of worker (and the accompanying new mindset) flagged by British author and future of work expert Julia Hobsbawm. As commercial real estate markets are reeling and employers struggle to bring staff back to the office, this emerging army of gig workers values their time as much as their freedom, heralding a permanent shift in how and how much we work.

Best practice

How to speak successfully when you're put on the spot



Speech coaching usually focuses on formal presentations, but most requests to speak tend to come out of the blue. ***Matt Abrahams****, "the communication guy" at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, offers a six-step course on how to respond spontaneously without getting flustered.*

Keep calm

Try to think of your speech as part of a conversation. Ask the audience a question so you feel you are talking with somebody. Prepare an anxiety management plan to help you cope with the event, such as *BOOM*: *Be present-oriented* – think about the present moment; *Observe* your movements – slow your gestures down; *Oxygenate* slowly – let your exhale take twice as long as your inhale; *Mantra* – think of a phrase to help you focus, such as "It's not about me – my content is compelling."

Get out of your own way

When it comes to spontaneous speaking, good enough is great. Improvisational comedians advise novice stand-up comics to "dare to be dull" – say exactly what you think without thinking of your response as a performance. When you do slip, try to think of your mistakes as the "missed takes" in the making of a film – you are just trying to make your point in a few different ways, in the same way that a film crew experiments with different approaches to the same scene.

Forget it's a speech

Try to think less about yourself and more about your audience. If you are responding to something, try another improv technique: instead of saying "yes, but" say "yes, and ..." This nudges you to listen harder to what the other person is saying. Finally, like an athlete, if you miss a shot, don't dwell on it – instead, focus on the next play.

Listen to your audience

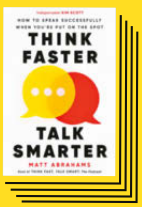
Sometimes the best way to communicate is to say nothing at all. Don't feel pressured to respond immediately to a comment. Make sure you understand your audience: ask clarifying questions, paraphrase what you have heard and if you think something important in the meeting went unsaid, say it.

Structure your spontaneity

Use a ready-made template to structure your speech on the fly, the way jazz musicians stick to a few chords when they improvise. One of the best structures: *What? – So what? – Now what?* You start with your subject (*what?*), explain what's important about it (*so what?*) and then suggest what your audience should do with that insight (*now what?*). If you can also shape your points into a story, you will find it easier to tell and your listeners will find it easier to remember.

Focus your message

A focused message is precise, relevant, accessible and concise. Of course, it's not easy to fulfill all four dimensions at once. Start with the one you think will matter most to your audience.

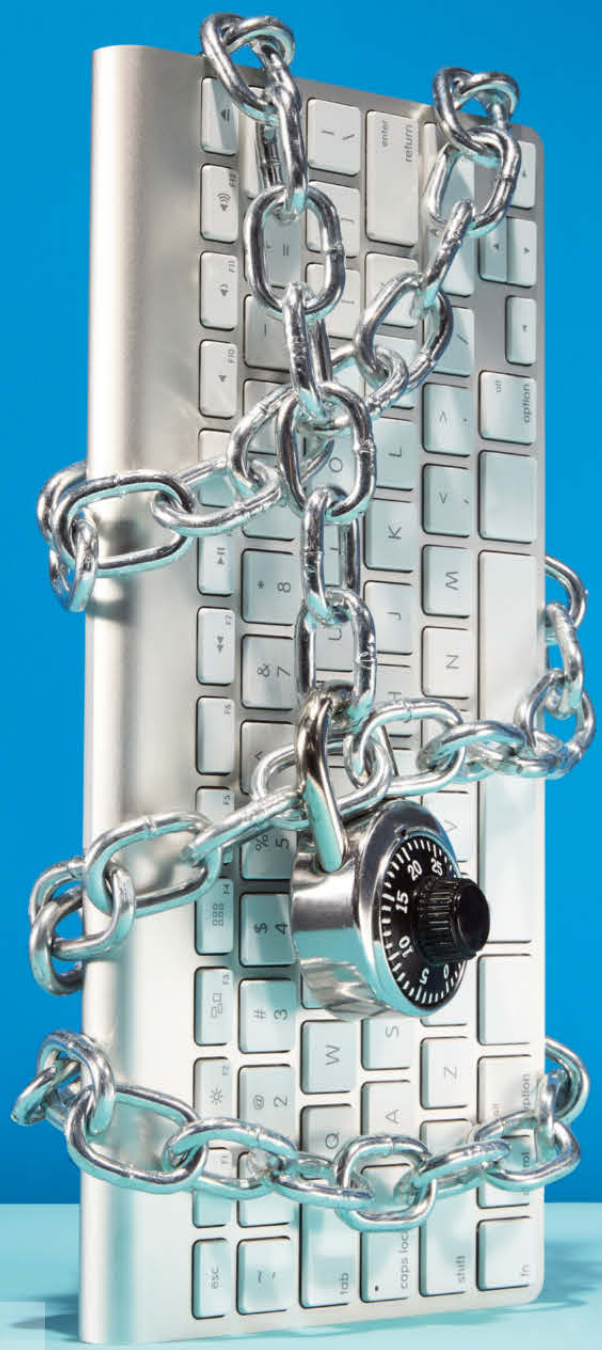


Think Faster, Talk Smarter: How to Speak Successfully When You're Put on the Spot
by Matt Abrahams. 256 pages. Simon Element, 2023.

Short Takes

Watch the whole interview with Matt Abrahams online:
rolandberger.com/en/abrahams

PHOTO: SHANA NOVAK / GETTY IMAGES | ILLUSTRATION: JULIA ZIMMERMANN



Economic impact

Underwriting the rise of ransomware-on-demand

A FLOPPY DISK, a PO Box in Panama and a demand for $189: The details of the first ever ransomware attack carried out by Joseph Popp in 1989 now seem rather quaint. Today cryptocurrency helps criminals operate outside regulated institutions to take computers or entire networks hostage, with 98% of cyber ransoms carried out over Bitcoin. A total of 4,399 ransomware attacks were tracked in 2023 – a 70% increase over 2022 – with total ransom payments that year exceeding $1.1 billion. The increase is due in part to 75% of the total value coming from transactions over $1 million, of which just 59% was paid by a stand-alone cyber insurance policy. And criminals don't even have to write the code themselves: The rise of ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS) – think of it a little like "hacking on demand" – is behind eight of the 11 most active ransomware variants. Perhaps increased security, law enforcement and scrutiny of the cryptocurrency industry will eventually beat the ransomware gangs, but for now $9 billion in gross cyber insurance premiums were written in 2022 – a figure forecast to reach up to $25 billion by 2025.

SOURCES: SOPHOS, REUTERS, WIRED, CHAINALYSIS, IBM

In focus

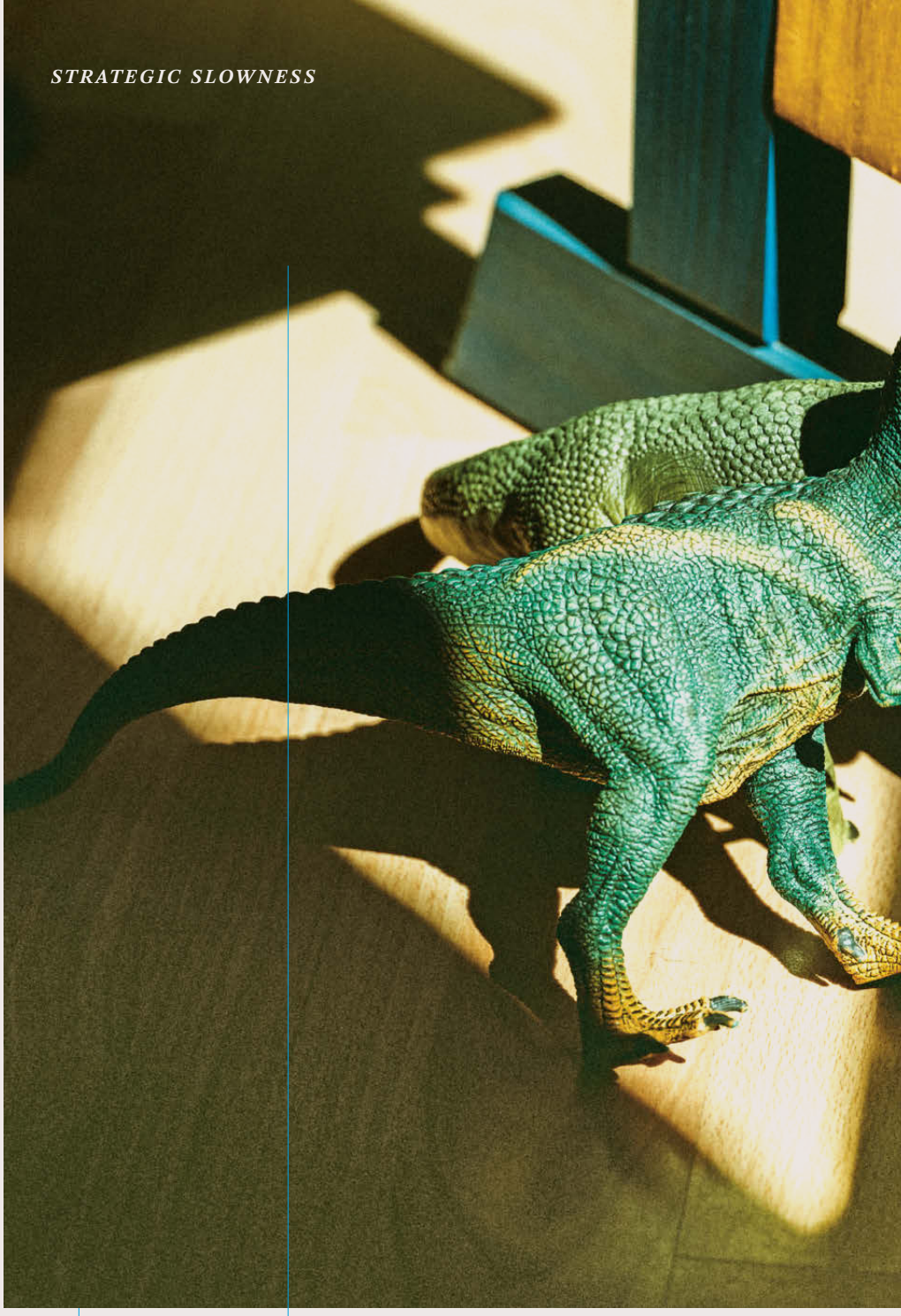
In this issue we look at how adopting a more measured approach can help a business thrive.

PACE FOR IMPACT

FIND YOUR PACE

WORDS BY GEOFF POULTON PHOTOS BY JULIA SELLMANN

IN A WORLD SEEMINGLY STUCK IN ROADRUNNER MODE AND ADDICTED TO MEASURING ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN EVER-SMALLER INCREMENTS, A GROWING CHORUS OF ACADEMICS AND BUSINESS LEADERS HAVE COME TO APPRECIATE THE COUNTERPOINT. A LIFE WELL LIVED – AND A MORE SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATION – CALLS FOR **ALTERING OUR PACE, SLOWING DOWN** AT TIMES IN ORDER TO EVALUATE AND APPRECIATE, RECHARGE AND REGROUP.

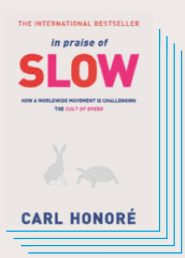


FOR CARL HONORÉ, the realization came in Rome's Fiumicino airport. He was flicking through a newspaper when the words "one-minute bedtime story" leapt out at him. "Could this be the answer?" he wondered. His then two-year-old son liked slow, meandering tales to fall asleep to, yet the writer frequently found himself rushing through the ritual, eager to move on through his never-ending to-do list. But then he checked himself: "Have I gone completely insane?" On the flight home, Honoré realized that almost everyone he knew was obsessed with packing as much as possible into every day, rushing from one thing to the next, stretching themselves to the breaking point.

He vowed to see if there might be any benefits to resisting this "cult of speed" and the resulting book, 2004's *In Praise of Slow*, details his discoveries. Two more books and a TED talk followed, but Honoré says he frequently felt like a lone voice in the crowd. Now, 20 years after *In Praise of Slow* was first published, things have changed – for better and worse. Technology has given us more "weapons of mass distraction," and the pace of life has increased further still; on the flip side, the "slow revolution" as he calls it, is spreading, prompting more and more individuals and entire organizations to pay more attention to how we pace ourselves.

In recent years, Honoré has been joined by a growing number of renowned authors and thinkers highlighting the benefits to slowing down and varying the pace. The presence of books like Jenny Odell's *How to Do Nothing*, Oliver Burkeman's *Four Thousand Weeks* and Cal Newport's *Slow Productivity* on international bestseller charts suggests a message that's striking a chord. Which isn't to say we should all pull a dramatic 180 and live life at a snail's pace. There are plenty of benefits to speed. Pushing the envelope beyond previously imagined temporal boundaries has led to world-changing, life-saving creations and discoveries, from space exploration to vaccinations. On an individual level, a fast-paced, busy life can be invigorating, giving us feelings of status, value and purpose.

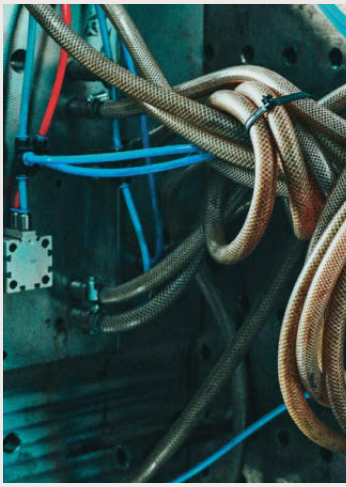
But as Oliver Burkeman reminds us, the thing about modern life is that there will always be more to do: "Constantly looking to increase your personal capacity and ability to get through more things seems to miss the point of a fulfilling and productive life," he says in an interview. At the heart of this matter is our relationship to time and how we spend it – something that has changed significantly over the centuries.



In Praise of Slow
by Carl Honoré.
320 pages.
Orion, 2004.

PART ONE

TIME AND THE NEED FOR SPEED



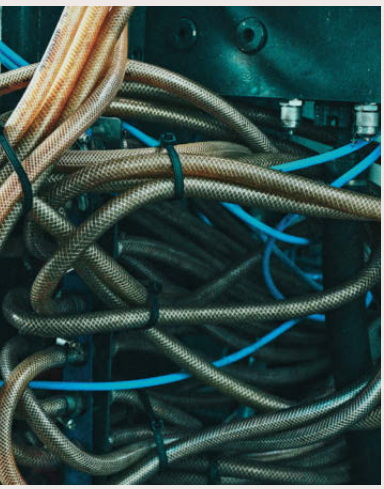
WE ARE OBSESSED with time. It's a subject that Burkeman explores in *Four Thousand Weeks*, a reference to the approximate amount of time we spend on Earth if we live to 80 years old – the idea being that 4,000 weeks sounds like a worryingly small period of time. "Arguably, time management is all life is," he writes. Yet, time management often focuses on how to get through as many tasks as possible. "The world is bursting with wonder," and yet most productivity gurus seem to have missed the idea that "the ultimate point of all our frenetic doing might be to experience more of that wonder."

It wasn't always this way. A few hundred years ago, daily schedules were largely dictated by natural phenomena like tides, daylight and weather. Then came the Industrial Revolution, and in the second half of the 18th century our relationship to time began to change. Factory owners needed a synchronized workforce and working hours became a commodity. Suddenly, time was turned into a currency to be spent – and with this shift came a growing link between speed and progress.

And so it continued into the 20th century, with landmark breakthroughs like Ford's assembly line, which cut the time it took to make a car to just 90 minutes. It's around this time that our fixation on efficiency seems to start bleeding from work into general life, writes Jenny Odell in *Saving Time: Discovering a Life Beyond the Clock*, her follow-up to *How to Do Nothing*. She references a 1925 book by social psychologist Donald Laird called *Increasing Personal Efficiency*, which is "shot through with the cultural moment's fixation on speed, mastery and a single-minded mission to cut out the useless." Suddenly, the language used by factory managers was showing up in the context of personal development.

OVER RECENT DECADES, digital innovation has upped the ante even further. In business, it's no longer hours and minutes that count, but seconds or less. Amazon established that every 100 milliseconds of latency on its website cost the firm 1% in sales. In 2006, Google found an extra half-second in generation time on its search page decreased traffic by 20%. Being slow costs money.

You probably don't need any reminding that one century after Donald Laird published →



Increasing Personal Efficiency

PART TWO THE PRODUCTIVITY TRAP

our obsession with speed and accomplishment is now firmly entrenched in both our work and our private lives. Indeed, research shows that "productivity orientation" now has a firm hold on how we spend our leisure time.

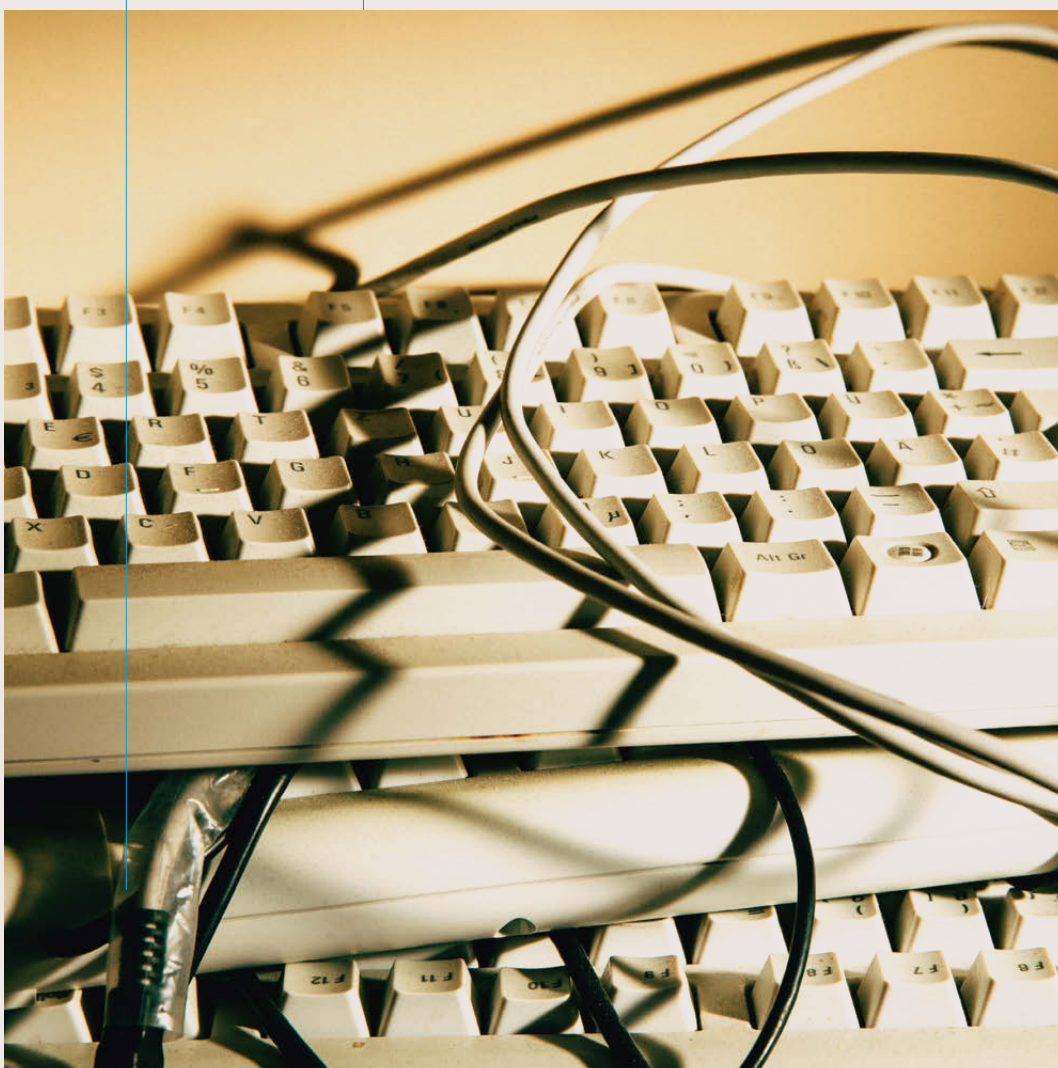
Tech may even be making us think that time is passing more quickly. Research conducted at Australia's James Cook University suggests that constant use of smartphones and computers makes us more efficient at processing information, tricking our brain into thinking that time is passing faster than it really is. While it might help us to work more swiftly, it also makes us feel more pressured.

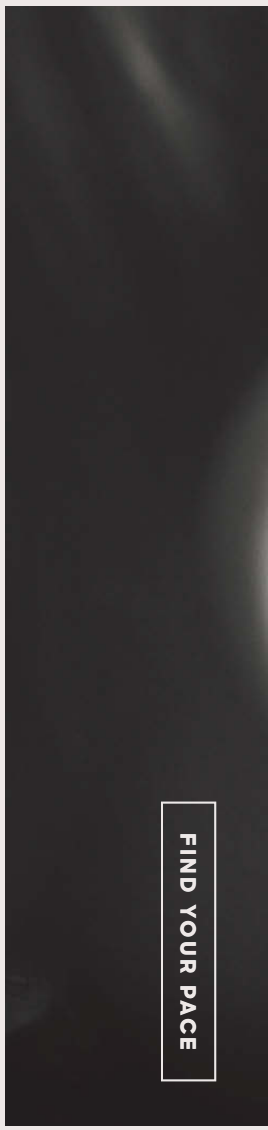
FIND YOUR PACE

It wasn't meant to be this way. Some eminent thinkers believed the quantum leaps in technological innovation shown in the 20th century would soon usher in a more leisurely pace of life. In 1930, John Maynard Keynes predicted that within 100 years, most people would work just 15 hours a week, leaving plenty of time to explore other interests. In reality, however, average working hours have changed little since the 1970s.

So instead of living the life of leisure Keynes forecasted, we currently find ourselves in a technological paradox – the geographic and (apparent) temporal freedom granted by mobile internet, smartphones, laptops, Zoom and Slack sits uncomfortably alongside the stress, distraction, overwhelm and burnout caused by constant connectivity and a flawed notion of productivity.

Burkeman, who is a self-proclaimed "reformed productivity geek," refers to the "delicious irony" of how technology offers the potential of help but actually ends up making things worse. "Technology offers many ways for getting on top of all the 'stuff' there is to do in modern life," he says (appropriately via Zoom). "So, I think there's an extra level of disillusionment that occurs when people integrate these apps and devices into their lives and then still feel overwhelmed and burned out."





NOWHERE IS THIS MORE APPARENT than at work, and particularly with office-based "knowledge" jobs. Cal Newport, a computer scientist at Georgetown University, believes this is largely due to an outdated approach to productivity. In his latest book, *Slow Productivity*, Newport explores "the lost art of accomplishment without burnout." Our current definition of productivity is broken, he argues, leaving a growing number of workers trapped with just two apparent choices: join the hustle culture or sacrifice ambition altogether.

Which poses a pertinent question: How the hell did we get here? Until the mid-20th century, productivity was a simple heuristic – grow or make a product more efficiently and increase the margins to maximize profits. But then more and more people began working in offices, performing cognitive tasks and the traditional approach to productivity no longer applied. To solve the issue, companies used visible activity as a proxy for actual productivity. This "pseudo-productivity," as Newport calls it, is largely why knowledge workers gather in offices and adhere to the same 40-hour work week originally designed to manage the physical exertions of factory labor. It's also why we experience internalized pressure to volunteer or "perform busyness" when the boss is nearby, he writes.

This has even led to busyness becoming something of a status symbol – yet another contributing factor in our apparent inability to slow down. Research by the same team behind the work on productivity orientation found that we perceive busy people (whether they actually are or merely appear so) as important and impressive. Adam Waytz, a psychologist and professor of management at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, also cites recent research that suggests people consider those who exert high effort to be "morally admirable," regardless of their output. "The systems most people work in demand productivity, growth and profit. And these systems fundamentally demand that people stay – or at least appear – busy," says Waytz.

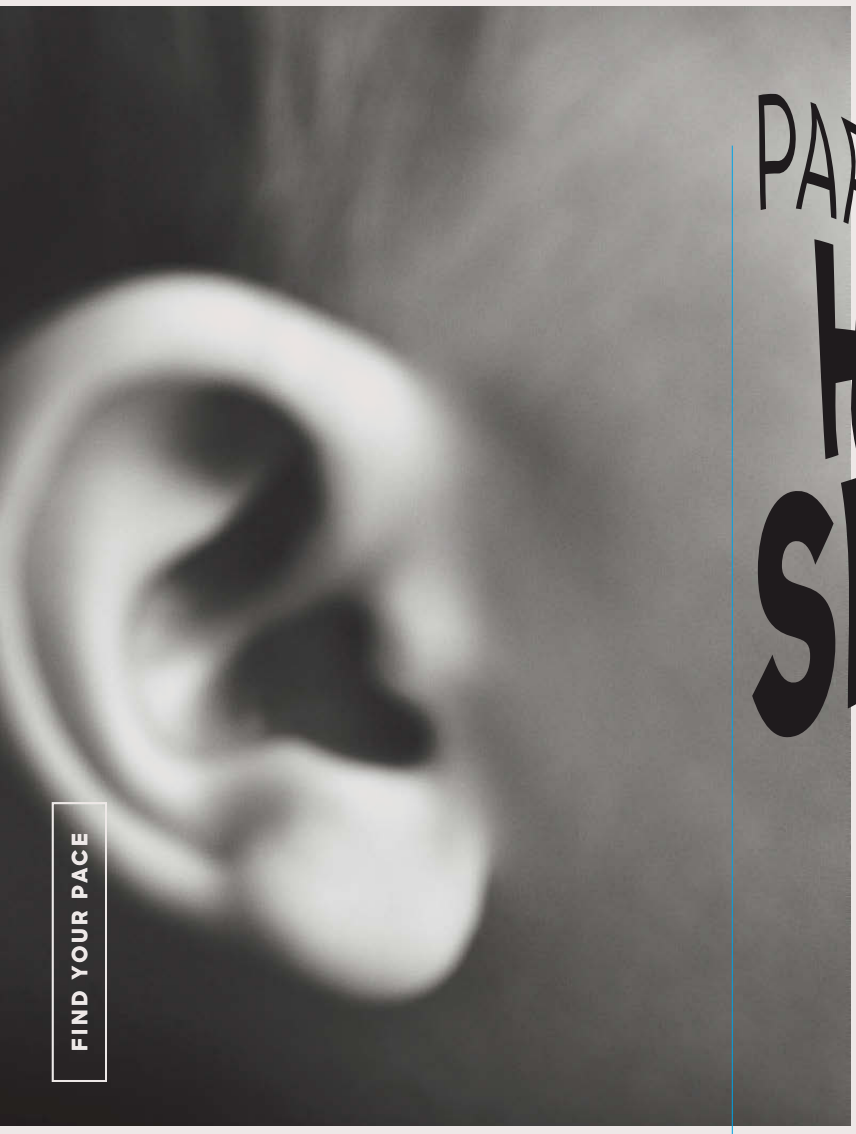
> "THE SYSTEMS PEOPLE WORK IN DEMAND PRODUCTIVITY, AND THESE FUNDAMENTALLY DEMAND THAT PEOPLE STAY - OR AT LEAST APPEAR - BUSY.
>
> **– Adam Waytz,** Psychologist and professor at the Kellogg School of Management

The thing is, all this busyness and a relentless focus on productivity isn't just bad for our mental and physical well-being – it's also not conducive to good work. A common symptom of our growing obsession with speed and efficiency is the tendency to multitask. But multitasking can reduce productivity by as much as 40%. Constantly checking emails, Slack or WhatsApp takes our brains away from what we were previously focusing on and it takes an average of 15 minutes to reorient to a primary task after a distraction. Multitasking can also create a "bottleneck" effect, preventing information from flowing from one part of the brain to another.

THE COMBINATION OF DISTRACTION and a lack of appropriate measures of productivity and effectiveness makes it harder to accomplish what Newport calls "deep work." Instead, we're more likely to tick off shallow, more concrete tasks. "It's safer to chime in on email threads and 'jump on' calls than to put your head down and create a bold new strategy," he writes in *Slow Productivity*.

But large workloads and a relentless, unvarying schedule are bad for our brain – the key tool in most knowledge sector jobs. The human brain has two fundamental operating programs: The executive control network directs it to complete specific tasks; the default mode network is our brain at rest. We need the latter to daydream, imagine, think about the past and future – and be creative. The two should work in harmony, but too much stimulation can lead to the default mode network taking a back seat as the executive function jumps from task to task.

Breaking out of this cycle and carving out time for quieter periods isn't easy. That's partly because we've become habituated to this way of living and working. When we repeatedly do and see others doing the same thing in the same way, our brains stop registering it or questioning these actions, says Tali Sharot, a neuroscientist at University College London and MIT. "Something might be causing stress, but you don't really know what it is. Habituation means the stress can decrease over time →

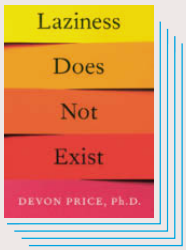


FIND YOUR PACE

PART THREE HOW TO SLOW DOWN

but still be present. It's only when you remove this thing from your life that you suddenly realize what an effect it was having," she explains.

Sometimes, dramatic or fundamental changes may be the only way to achieve this – a pandemic, for instance, or a generational shift. Devon Price is a social psychologist at Loyola University and the author of *Laziness Does Not Exist*, which looks at why, despite doing far more work than nearly any other humans in history, most of us often feel it's not enough. Now, things may finally be changing, he says. Those who have come of age since the 2008 recession "don't trust in the myths that many of us who are older were conditioned to believe in, about the value of hard work and the professional world supposedly being a meritocracy." As such, they're not equating suffering at work with morality or value anymore. Or, as Carl Honoré puts it: "Younger people are looking at previous generations and asking, 'OK, but what did you get out of your 80-hour week? You got a bad back and three divorces, right? And probably a heart condition."



Laziness Does Not Exist
by Devon Price.
256 pages.
Atria Books, 2021.

THE SOLUTIONS TO THESE ISSUES are many and varied. On an organizational level, it's important to identify the moments when it's OK to slow things down. In their new book, *The Friction Project*, Stanford University's Bob Sutton and Huggy Rao point out that "strategic slowness" can enable improved decision-making and better work as well as leaving employees happier and more fulfilled. They identify numerous occasions when smart managers should urge employees to hit the brakes. These include the time before making irreversible decisions, when solving complicated problems and to accomplish creative work. Slowing down can also lead to more ethical choices and can even help mitigate biases and stereotypes.

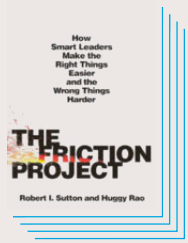
At a personal level, slowing down in the workplace could include anything from taking regular "micro-breaks" to organizing designated focus blocks, having meeting-free Fridays, four-day workweeks, vacations or even sabbaticals. Of course different things will work better for different individuals, teams, departments and companies. There's only one nonnegotiable,

and that is constantly working flat-out is no longer the answer.

Austrian designer and artist Stefan Sagmeister prefers a more extreme approach – but the principle is the same. Every seven years, the 62-year-old leaves his New York studio, where he has worked on projects with the likes of the Rolling Stones, HBO and the Guggenheim Museum, and takes a one-year sabbatical. During his time off, Sagmeister pursues other creative interests, from furniture building to filmmaking, as well as dreaming up new approaches for his commercial work.

For most business owners and managers, the prospect of stepping away from work and picking up the reins again a year later is a challenging one. Sagmeister was no exception. "I was very anxious," he recalls. "It was 1999, our studio was seven years old, the first internet boom in full swing and everyone was in the business of making lots of money. It seemed unprofessional to close for a year to try things out." He worried the studio would lose all its clients. "But none of these fears materialized."

Later this year, Sagmeister will embark on his fourth 12-month sabbatical. Each time, he has returned with new skills, ideas and, crucially, a renewed sense that his job is a calling, "rather than just work." Sagmeister believes the time frame is less important than the commitment to doing what you are truly interested in and giving yourself space to try things out. "I've now talked to dozens and dozens of people who have taken a sabbatical. Without exception, every single one of them has said it was one of the best things they'd ever done with their lives."



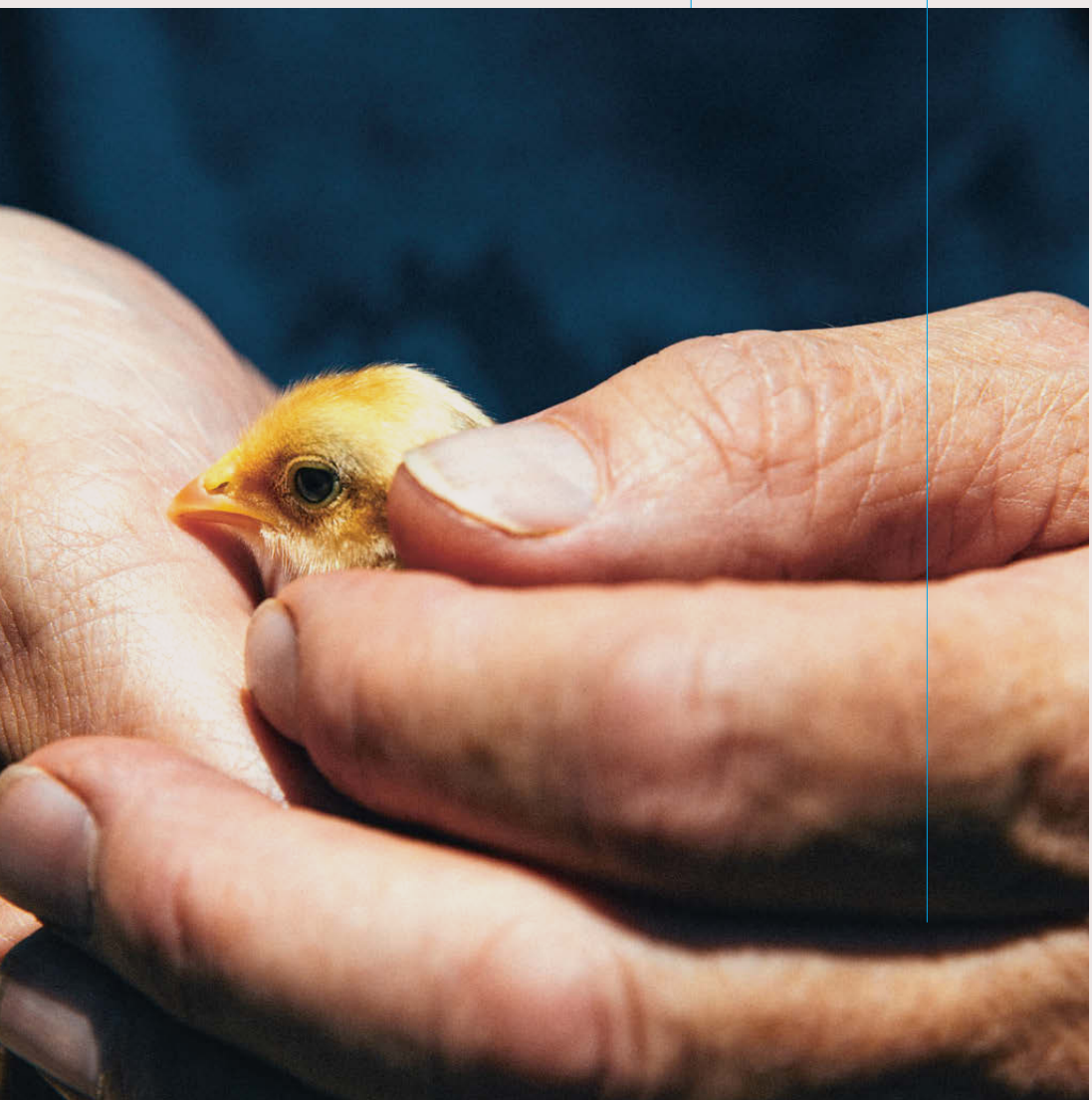
The Friction Project
by Bob Sutton and Huggy Rao.
293 pages.
St. Martin's Press, 2024.

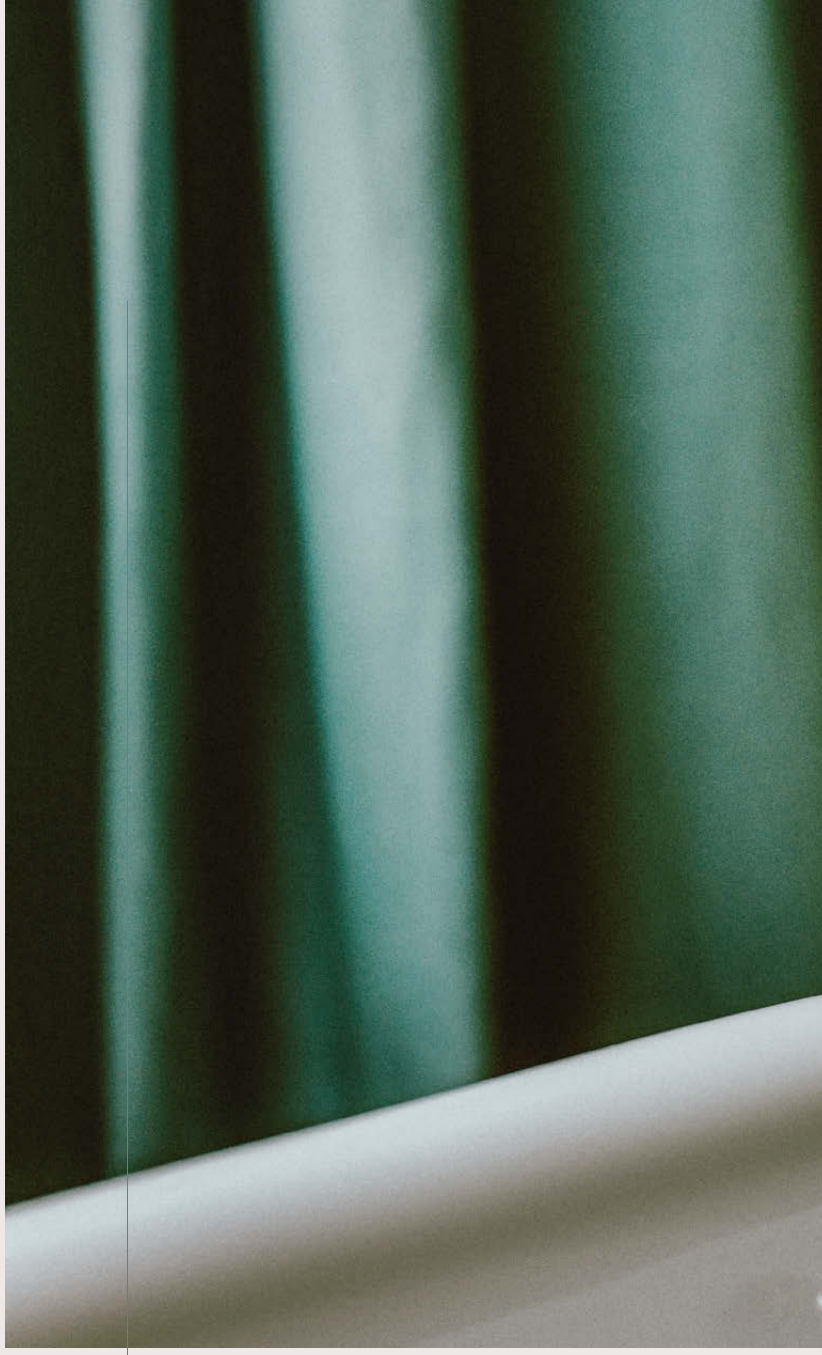
A RECENT STUDY BY RESEARCHERS from Harvard, Notre Dame and the University of Washington corroborates Sagmeister's experience, finding sabbatical-takers experienced significant, positive changes in their work and life. It's no surprise, then, that the number of employers offering sabbaticals is now on the rise, with researchers giving companies straightforward advice: "If you facilitate sabbaticals before employees are pushed to the brink, most will return with renewed energy and greater clarity about how they want to contribute."

Of course, happier, healthier staff and a more considered approach to work sounds all very well and good. But what impact does this have on the two metrics, which, for better or worse, remain top of mind for most businesses: productivity and the bottom line?

Clear and independent links between employee well-being and company performance remain thin on the ground, but there are numbers out there that support this approach. In 2019, Oxford University conducted a six-month research program with British telecoms firm BT. It found that workers are 13% more productive when happy. A further meta-analysis by some of the same researchers also found that employee satisfaction has a substantial positive correlation with productivity and a moderate one with profitability.

There's even evidence to suggest that specifically going slow can pay off. Back in 2010, a joint study by Harvard and *The Economist* found that companies which "moved fast all the time and focused on maximizing efficiency" recorded →



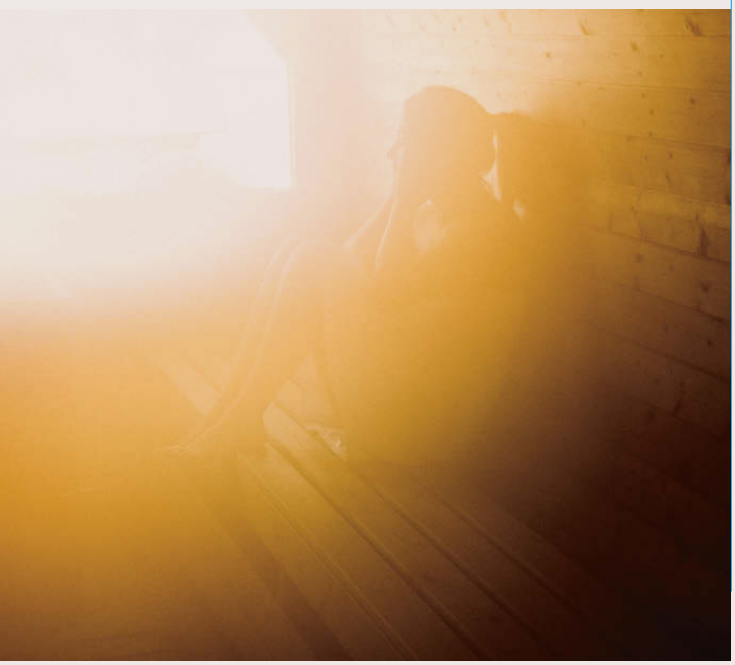


lower sales and operating profits than firms that embraced strategic slowness.

One increasingly popular method of adjusting the pace and rhythm of work is the four-day week. Businesses across the globe are experimenting with shorter weeks, with Germany the latest country to kick off an official six-month trial for select companies, joining the likes of Iceland, Spain, Belgium, the UK and South Africa. Major firms like Microsoft and Unilever have also trialed the concept in select markets. While the precise approach varies, the most common one is the 100-80-100 model, which refers to 100% pay for 80% of hours worked while maintaining 100% productivity. Less focus on hours worked and more focus on actual outcomes, according to this framework, boosts productivity.

THE FOUR-DAY WORKWEEK may not be applicable to all industries, but the evidence gathered so far is promising. In 2022, 61 UK-based organizations took part in the world's biggest trial to date. It documented how the companies reduced working hours without compromising on targets by introducing interruption-free "focus periods," reforming email etiquette and ensuring shorter, clearer meetings. Many office workers know the feeling of spending more time talking about work than actually doing it – anxiously staring at an ever-growing task list as they hop from one call to the next.

Of course, in the grand scheme of things, trials on this scale don't amount to much. But after over a century of trying to achieve as much as possible as quickly and efficiently as possible, could the tide be starting to turn? Devon Price is skeptical. "I think the business world is going to keep fighting the inevitable tooth and nail until they are absolutely forced by circumstances to abandon hustle culture. We've known since the 1980s, at least, that shorter workdays, shorter workweeks and more flexible scheduling options lead to happier workers. And still, many companies resist the idea."



> "WE'VE KNOWN SINCE THE 1980S THAT SHORTER WORKWEEKS LEAD TO HAPPIER WORKERS. AND STILL, MANY COMPANIES RESIST THE IDEA."
>
> **– Devon Price,** Social psychologist at Loyola University

Whether you are an optimist, a pessimist or somewhere in between, it's hard to ignore the undoubted tension brewing in the workplace as employees – led by younger workers – begin to amp up the pushback against the status quo. Carl Honoré, who still speaks regularly around the world on the topic of slowing down, says he hears "all the time" from CEOs and HR managers about the issue working its way up the agenda. Reactions typically go one of two ways, he says: People are either "amazed" that it's finally happening or "despair" at the complete lack of work ethic among overly sensitive youngsters.

PART FOUR
RECONNECTING WITH OURSELVES

THE FUNNY THING IS, we humans become more intentional with our time the older we get. "When we're young, we tend to view the future as being more expansive and full of possibility, whereas older folks realize that time is limited and therefore more precious," says UCLA professor Cassie Mogilner Holmes, whose book *Happier Hour* looks at the connections between time and happiness. She says the successive Covid-19 lockdowns forced everyone into an "older-person mindset," which helps explain why workers of all ages are now more protective of their time. "I think there's value for both employees and employers to identify and communicate the purpose of the work they're doing, to focus on things that are more worthwhile rather than just working hard because that's what you do."

Yet slowing down and finding a more natural rhythm for life can be a tough battle as we end up butting heads with the toughest obstacle of all – ourselves. Slowing down creates more time and space to grapple with fundamental questions around purpose, identity and whether we're living the right kind of life. This can be incredibly uncomfortable – and it's much easier to avoid deep levels of reflection when we're stuck in roadrunner mode and only sweating the small stuff. But slowing down isn't just beneficial. "It's the only way to design a life worthy of the name," says Honoré. "In recent decades, we've moved so far away from what it is to be human. It's time to slow down and reconnect with that." ■

Takeaways

☑ **HUSTLE CULTURE IS HERE TO STAY:** Our relationship to time and how we spend it has changed significantly over the centuries.

☑ **EVERY SECOND COUNTS, OR DOES IT?** The fixation on efficiency has started to bleed into general life, with "busyness" becoming a misguided status symbol.

☑ **KNOW WHEN TO SAY WHEN:** Organizations should strive to identify the moments when it's OK to slow down, from four-day workweeks to sabbaticals.

☑ **BREATHING ROOM:** Slowing down affords the individual time and space to grapple with fundamental questions around purpose and identity.

COMPANIES THAT GO IT SLOW

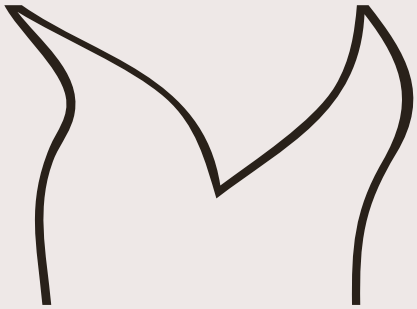
FIND YOUR PACE

ENTERPRISES DON'T ALWAYS HAVE TO PURSUE BREAKNECK GROWTH TO BUILD A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS. MANY COMPANIES SPURN THE **"GROW OR DIE"** MANTRA THAT PRIORITIZES EXPANSION ABOVE ALL ELSE AND INSTEAD CHOOSE A MORE DELIBERATE AND SUSTAINABLE PATH TO SUCCESS.

WORDS BY HELENE LAUBE

PHOTOS BY JULIA SELLMANN

FIND YOUR PACE



MONTHS BEFORE THE DOTCOM BUBBLE burst, back in 1999 technology startups were still on a tear. Most focused on rapid growth as a primary strategy: VC investments reached a fever pitch and tech stocks traded up to dizzying levels. Despite the popular approach of the era, in Chicago, the founders of 37signals decided to take an entirely different tack with their startup: to consciously limit the pace of growth instead of growing at hyperspeed. "I'm a fan of growing slowly, carefully, methodically, of not getting big just for the sake of getting big," Jason Fried, co-founder and CEO of what was then a web design firm, told *Fast Company*. Fried and his co-founder David Heinemeier Hansson were instead driven by a desire to build a sustainable, consistently profitable business while maintaining control over their product, culture and work-life balance. This approach also allowed them to focus on what they considered most important: creating excellent products and providing exceptional value to their customers.

A quarter century later, 37signals is still going strong, with paying customers in more than 160 countries. The web design firm has turned into a software company best known for developing software-as-a-service (SaaS) products such as the project management platform Basecamp and the email service Hey. Fried and Hansson have no intention of changing their approach. On the contrary: Their underdog mindset persists. They still pursue measured growth and keep challenging much larger tech companies such as Asana or Salesforce.com-owned Slack with their tiny, fully remote team of about 70 employees spread out across five continents.

According to Fried, their company could be much bigger and have hundreds of employees if they wanted to. "Our revenues and profits support that – but I think we'd be worse off," Fried said in the interview with *Fast Company*. What's more, to this day, 37signals has, in its own words, "no investors, no board of directors, no eyes on an exit." As Brian Bailey, head of product strategy, explains in an interview over Zoom from his home office in Austin: "We want the best for people – not only get the most out of people." The company is not "obsessed with a specific metric" that it's trying to reach or specific goals. "We are just trying to build a business that we love, that's sustainable and that's profitable every year." For 37signals, profitability means freedom. That is the "fundamental premise" that the founders build their business on. "As long as we're profitable, we do not have to ask other people for permission," Hansson told a podcaster.

37signals demonstrates that highly successful companies don't always have to pursue the more familiar model of "growth at all costs and a fast ramp-up" in order to build a sustainable business.

> "WE WANT THE BEST FOR PEOPLE – NOT ONLY GET THE MOST OUT OF PEOPLE.
>
> **– Brian Bailey,**
> Head of product strategy at 37signals

In fact, there are plenty of cautionary tales, and especially in the tech world which is littered with hypergrowth companies that have yet to show profits or that grew too fast and crash-landed. There are, however, also many companies that deliberately chose a more measured approach and focused on a slow build to reach critical mass.

GOING FOR SUSTAINABLE, PROFITABLE GROWTH can enable companies to build a stronger, more resilient business that is better positioned for long-term success in a rapidly evolving marketplace. They can ensure they have the necessary infrastructure, resources and systems in place to support their growth over the long term without compromising on quality. And while rapid growth can compel businesses to take on debt or stretch their resources thin to fuel expansion, a more measured approach allows them to grow at a pace that is financially sustainable, minimizing the risk of failure. It's also more feasible to build strong relationships with customers, suppliers and other stakeholders over time, and to adapt and respond to changes in the company or market more effectively.

What's more, a strategy of controlled expansion and varying the pace doesn't have to come at the expense of product innovation. The 37signals founders, who are known to treat the company as something of a lab for innovative workplace practices, invented a methodology they call "Shape Up." It asks all teams including software developers to consolidate their work designing, developing and shipping software into six-week cycles focused on a small number of clear goals. Each cycle is followed by a two-week cool-down period in which employees can recharge and regroup by fixing small problems and take time to consider what to tackle next.

74%

How many high-growth internet startups will fail as a result of premature scaling, based on data from over 3,200 technology startups.

SOURCE: STARTUP GENOME

THE CULT OF SPEED in entrepreneurship has come under increased scrutiny in recent years as owners and investors have begun to realize the potentially detrimental impact on a company's long-term value. According to Robert Sutton, a Stanford Graduate School of Business management professor, what he calls "strategic slowness" will "be the key to success for innovative leaders and companies" in 2024. "Knowing when and how to slow down and fix things is the path to enduring financial success, building healthy workplaces, and staying out of jail, too," Sutton replied to a journalist when asked to identify the "next big thing" for 2024.

However, Harvard Business School Professor Thomas Eisenmann doesn't see a general slower-growth trend taking hold – except for more caution when it comes to hypergrowth that leads to "dysfunctional consequences for society" or unsustainable hypergrowth in cases like the failed flexible workspace provider WeWork [see box p.26]. "But I don't think that 2024 is a year where venture capitalists are thinking in new ways and hoping for slower growth – they want growth," says Eisenmann in an interview.

It's important to recognize that there are some structural attributes of a market that force a business to grow quickly, adds the expert in growth strategies for startups and author of the book *Why Startups Fail*, in which he examines how too-fast →

FIND YOUR PACE

growth is a problem for many companies. One attribute is network effects where customers attract other customers. An example is Zoom. When more businesses, schools and people in a social group adopt a videoconferencing platform, more nonusers will have to use it or will be incentivized to use it in order to communicate with the social group. "If you don't invest in fast growth in a business like that, you're going to be left behind," says Eisenmann.

THERE ARE PLENTY OF EXAMPLES of companies from sectors other than tech who chose measured growth. Many not only survived but thrived. One is the sneaker brand Hoka, founded in 2009 by two French trail running enthusiasts and former employees of French sports equipment manufacturer Salomon. The company was sold in 2012 to California-based Deckers Brands, which eschewed a larger distribution footprint for its bulbous sneakers in psychedelic colors until it was ready. Hoka became the fastest-growing sneaker brand in history, breaking the billion dollar mark in sales in 2022 – growing fast by moving more slowly than its success would have made possible. "Could we grow faster? Yes," said CEO Stefano Caroti, who was then Deckers' chief commercial officer, in an interview with *The Wall Street Journal*. "Is that good for the long-term health of the brand? No." Hoka's executives are still pacing themselves and realize that trying to win every single consumer is often how a company loses its identity.

78%

How much the stock of Hoka's parent company, Deckers Brands, increased in 2022, the year the sneaker brand hit the billion dollar sales mark.

SOURCE: BUSINESS INSIDER

Japanese fashion brand Uniqlo, for its part, chooses to ignore fashion trends and sticks to its core offerings, planning everything a year in advance – contrary to the holding company's name Fast Retailing. The Tokyo-based company's "LifeWear" is inspired by the most classic clothing designs to provide apparel that lasts from the initial purchase to a life of wear. Unlike fast-growing fast-fashion chains like Zara or H&M, Uniqlo clothing isn't made to be tossed out but to serve as affordable quality clothing that can be worn for years. "We don't chase trends. People mistakenly say that Uniqlo is a fast-fashion brand. We're not," Fast Retailing founder and CEO Tadashi Yanai said in an interview with *Business Insider*.

IN AN ARGUABLY EVEN FASTER INDUSTRY, iconic American fast-food chain In-N-Out Burger has chosen to go it slow since 1948. The Southern Californian company has focused on growth primarily on the West Coast and a slow expansion eastward to Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Idaho, Oregon and more recently Texas and Idaho. The company that has long been heralded as the "it" fast-food restaurant by its legions of fans now operates more than 400 locations in eight states. Despite customers begging for locations on the East Coast, the company has declined.

The number one reason is logistics. In-N-Out has a strict policy of serving its food fresh. Therefore, all locations must be within 300 miles of its patty-making facilities in California and Texas. A large-scale expansion would require a massive amount of upfront capital, unless it franchises its restaurants. And Lynsi Snyder, In-N-Out president and the founders' granddaughter, has made it clear that the privately owned company will "never" franchise its restaurants or go public.

Yet In-N-Out is inching further east. The company has announced plans to open an eastern corporate office and several restaurants in Tennessee. The first restaurants in the Nashville area should open in 2025. With this $125.5 million expansion, In-N-Out is diverting from its 300-miles strategy. Per Snyder, these locations will be supported by In-N-Out's Texas meat facility almost 700 miles to

THE IMPORTANCE OF PACE

The speed at which you approach your goal can launch your success – or it can set you up to crash.

37signals

The software firm relies on breaks after intense six-week development periods. According to Brian Bailey, the company's head of product strategy, this period is long enough to develop some good rhythm and make meaningful progress, but short enough that teams can see the end from the beginning and not burn out.

wework

Fueled by venture capital, WeWork grew aggressively, amassing nearly 800 locations in 39 countries. In early 2019, it was worth $47 billion. But later that year, swift growth at the expense of profits led to the ousting of the CEO and the derailment of the initial public offering. In November 2023, WeWork filed for bankruptcy.

> "COULD WE GROW FASTER? YES. IS THAT GOOD FOR THE HEALTH OF THE BRAND? NO.
>
> **– Stefano Caroti,**
> CEO of Deckers Brands

the west. But she hinted that the Tennessee expansion will be followed by future restaurant openings in Washington and New Mexico, taking the private company into uncharted territory.

ON THE OTHER END OF THE SPECTRUM, many companies in traditional industries have focused on quality over quantity. In the case of cheesemaking, this is only partially a matter of choice, because an essential component of making good quality cheese is patience. "While the rewards are many, the business requires focus, strategy, commitment, patience, passion and lots of long hours," said Jill Giacomini Basch, co-owner and chief marketing officer of the Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese Company, an artisan cheesemaking company that grew out of a family dairy farm north of San Francisco.

For ten years, the company focused on making only one type of cheese – blue cheese. Only in 2010 it introduced Toma, a more subtle cheese. Eventually, slowly, the Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese Company expanded its offering to five different types of cheeses flavored by sea air and forest-lined marshes. According to Giacomini Basch, she and her sisters are first and foremost stewards of the land and animals in hopes of maintaining it for future generations.

Pursuing more deliberate instead of breakneck growth – whether it be in cheese or burger making, sneaker or software production – benefits companies by ensuring quality, helping to maintain financial stability, fostering adaptability and building strong relationships, ultimately leading to sustainable success in the long term. Or, as 37signals' Brian Bailey puts it: "Why can't more companies find the level of company that they want to be, find that level of sustainable growth for them and be satisfied with that? Why does it always have to be more, more, more?" ■

Takeaways

☑ **DELIBERATE DECELERATION:** A highly successful company can be grown at a slower pace than its maximum potential.

☑ **A FRESH LOOK AT FRESH PRODUCTS:** Following a strategy of controlled expansion and varying the pace doesn't come at the expense of innovation.

☑ **BEWARE OF HYPERGROWTH:** Scaling too fast can lead to financial instability and business failure, with sometimes dysfunctional consequences for society.

FIND YOUR PACE

HOW WE MADE TIME

WORDS BY **GRACE BROWNE**

PHOTOS BY **JULIA SELLMANN**

FROM SUNDIALS TO ATOMIC CLOCKS, FOR MILLENNIA HUMANS HAVE TRIED TO **TURN TIME INTO AN ASSET** TO BOOST THEIR POWER, PRESTIGE AND PRODUCTIVITY. WHILE WE CANNOT SENSE TIME, WE ARE ALL BEHOLDEN TO MEASURING AND MANAGING IT, WITH LASTING IMPLICATIONS FOR THE OFTEN-HURRIED WAY WE WORK AND LIVE.

FIND YOUR PACE

DROVES OF DELEGATES from an array of countries came together in Washington, DC to discuss a very important matter: time. The 1884 International Meridian Conference was held to decide on a way to synchronize clocks around the globe. The attendees needed to land on a common prime meridian, so that geographical and nautical charts could be laid out in a consistent way, as opposed to the slightly chaotic, ad hoc manner in which they had been decided before. The 41 delegates from 25 nations ended up landing on Greenwich Mean Time as the international standard – and still, to this day, the heart of timekeeping lies in East London. Although the international standard time was later changed to Coordinated Universal Time, or UTC, in 1972, the late 19th century conference marked the beginning of a standard used to set time zones across the world.

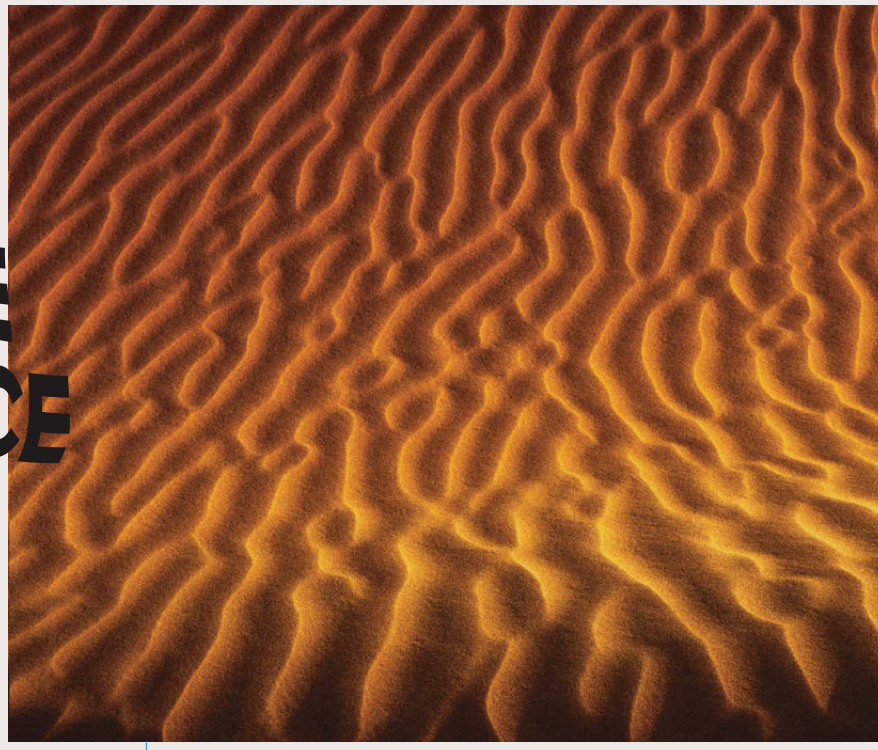
Not everyone was happy about this. A decade later, on February 15, 1894, 26-year-old French anarchist Martial Bourdin attempted to detonate a bomb at the Greenwich Observatory, although the bomb went off prematurely and he died in the process. While his reasons were unknown, it's thought that Bourdin was aiming for the clock at Greenwich – the clock to rule all clocks – as a symbolic attempt at dismantling the strict world order that clock represented.

This kind of chafing against the political power of the clock has persisted throughout history. The first sundial in Rome mounted in 263 BCE was met partly with joy, partly with anger and indignation, as detailed in David Rooney's book *About Time: A History of Civilization in Twelve Clocks*. "From the moment Valerius revealed his sundial at the Forum, Romans were forced to live their lives by the clock. And this new temporal order was sweeping civilizations across the world," the former curator of timekeeping at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich writes.

In his book, which strives to untangle how time has affected humanity since its inception, Rooney makes an argument that, since timekeeping devices were invented, whether that be sundials or water clocks or, later, mechanical clocks, "they've been used by some people to exert control over others." Timekeeping has served as a double-edged sword, both regulating and constraining human existence. With the coming of the Industrial Revolution, that control only ramped up. According to Kevin Birth, a professor of anthropology at the City University of New York, industrialization triggered an explosion in the use of clocks as factory managers needed a way to better regulate labor. They implemented clocks in more exploitative ways too.

FACTORY MANAGERS BEGAN TO EMPLOY what were called engine clocks, which had two dials: one dial kept reading time, which is the time we're used to, and the other dial worked exactly the same, but it sped up or slowed down or stopped, based on the rate

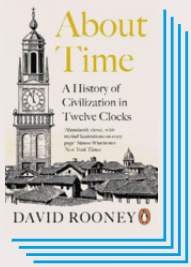
> "THE CLOCK GAVE A VISIBLE FACE AND VOICE TO THAT SENSE OF ALIENATION."
>
> **– David Rooney,**
> Former curator of time at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich



at which the mill machinery was working. "So, basically, whenever the workers took a break, that clock stopped. Whenever they slowed down their working, that clock slowed down," says Birth.

The changes inflicted by hourly or daily wages – as opposed to piece-rate or task-oriented work – were profound, says Rooney in an interview. Farm work may have previously entailed an arduous task like bringing in the harvest; this meant you had to work as long as it took, whatever day or week or month it was. But that also meant when the work was done, it was done. Hourly wages, on the other hand, meant workers were constantly made aware of the seconds ticking by. The way in which clock time imposes a linear nature on time – always marching on – directly infringes on the cyclical, or sometimes chaotic, rhythms of nature, with potentially disastrous effects.

While work may have always felt oppressive for employees, "what the clock did in the factory system gave a particularly visible face and voice to that sense of alienation," Rooney says. The transition from agrarian rhythms to the relentless beat of the factory clock marked a seismic shift in human experience. Capitalism forced time to become a means of value, to be tracked and exploited, rather than just something that passed by regardless. Its current apogee are atomic clocks that keep time so precisely that satellite communications, GPS systems and financial markets depend on them.

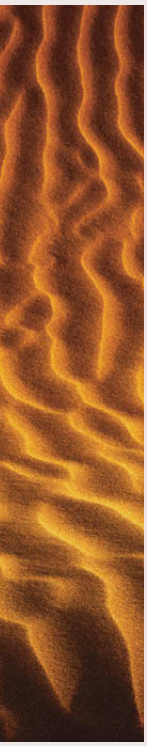


About Time: A History of Civilization in Twelve Clocks
by David Rooney.
336 pages.
Penguin, 2022.

THE IDEA OF TIME as a precious commodity was cemented with Puritan work culture – that by wasting time, it's God's time that you're wasting, and therefore sinful. That sentiment was reinforced in capitalistic terms with the infamous aphorism "time is money," coined by Benjamin Franklin.

But the idea of time being something that can be "wasted" – when you think about it – is absurd, Rooney argues. Nevertheless, that concept has only grown and become ever more firmly entrenched. With the rise of knowledge workers as we moved away from the factory floor to office cubicles, the burden of being economical with one's time shifted from manager to employee. "Productivity, for the first time in modern economic history, became personal," as Cal Newport, an American academic and author of *Deep Work*, recently wrote in *The New Yorker*, dissecting the problems with what he calls "productivity culture."

In turn, a behemoth of an industry has sprung up to offer a way of wrangling back control. The time management business, which takes the form of gadgets, apps, meal replacement shakes and self-help books, promises to help us make the best use of our always-limited supply of time. Companies and universities now offer time management courses to employees and students. Some stalwarts of the time management community include Tim Ferriss' 2007 book *The 4-Hour Workweek:* →



FIND YOUR PACE

Escape 9-5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich. The book, with its undeniably enticing promise, was a smash hit, and hung out on the *The New York Times* bestseller list for seven years. In the book, Ferriss, an entrepreneur, promises to teach readers how to escape the crushing relentlessness of the 9 to 5. Although it contains classic time management maxims such as "work smarter not harder" and the use of time blocking, Ferriss' biggest lesson is to outsource your work to low-wage workers – not the most accessible, let alone equitable, life hack. Productivity, for the first time in modern economic history, became personal.

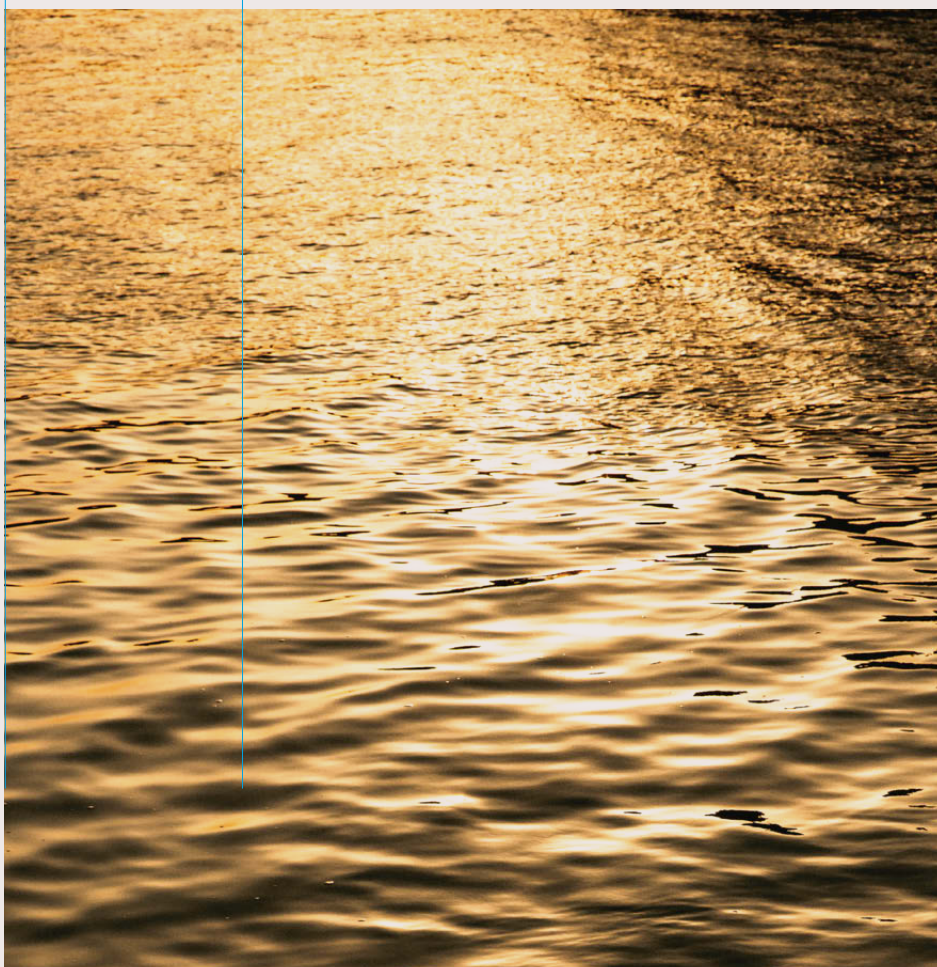
What all the various books, hacks and apps have in common is the unproven promise that time is ours for the mastering, if only we tried hard enough. Indeed, the rise of time management techniques has had the effect of ingraining the idea that by not maximizing time, we've done something wrong, says Rooney. "We seem to have convinced ourselves that there's no merit in sitting and just thinking or going for a walk without it being programmed in or doing nothing – we think it's a sin."

TO MAKE MATTERS MORE COMPLICATED, the way in which we perceive time passing is not always sensical and highly subjective. Why does a boring workday feel like it stretches on for eternity, and how do the hours zip by when we're having a merry time with friends? And as we get older, time seems to speed up, the years flitting by.

For many, the pandemic profoundly warped their sense of time passing. Confined to their homes, many people reported experiencing strange things happening to their perception of time. One study conducted in April 2020 questioned people about how they were experiencing the passage of time during lockdown. For some, the lockdowns passed by achingly slowly. This tended to be most true for those older, more socially isolated. Younger, more social people reported the time as flying by. For those working at a desk in their living room for days on end, a 2023 study found that remote workers experienced time passing more slowly.

Despite the tyranny of the clock, the body experiences time in odd ways. We have sensors for many facets of human experience: heat receptors for heat; pain receptors for pain. But there are no time receptors. "The question is, how is it that this primate can make sense of these kinds of things without having anything in their bodies specific

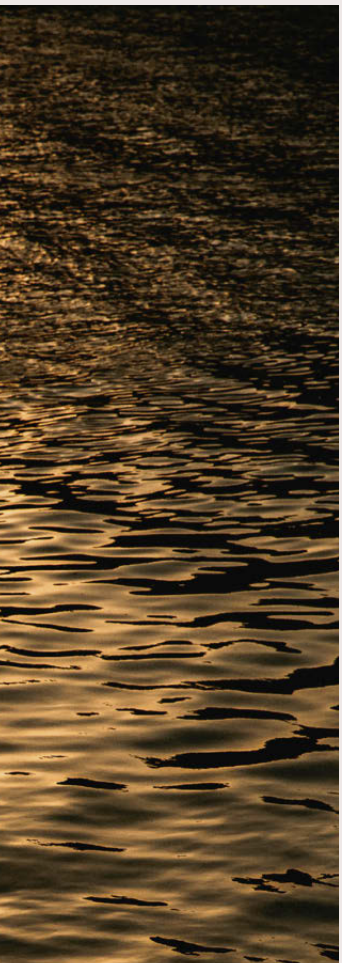
> "WE HAVE TO RECOGNIZE THE CIRCADIAN CYCLES – AND ADAPT OUR WORK HABITS TO THAT."
>
> **– Kevin Birth,**
> Professor of anthropology at the City University of New York



for it?" asks Rafael Núñez, a professor of cognitive science at the University of California, San Diego, who studies embodied cognition. "How is it that we're able to anchor the experience of temporal experiences, and then, in an organized fashion, express temporal experience and share it with other community members?"

THAT'S WHERE HUMANS DIFFER from other creatures. We don't just perceive time, we try to dissect and decipher it. There's a reason why time is the most used noun in the English language. But how do we talk about a concept as abstract as time? One way of investigating how humans experience time is by studying how they speak about it. Núñez and others have discerned that humans largely make sense of time through evoking the concept of space. We evoke the future as being in front of us, talking about "the week ahead of us" and refer to an upcoming event as something we "look forward to," and so on.

But not everybody employs metaphors to describe time in the same way. A 2010 paper from Núñez documented the way the Aymara people, a group of Indigenous people scattered across Peru, Chile and Bolivia, spoke about time in their native tongue. The Aymara view the past as if it is in front of them, while the future lies behind them. Núñez has speculated that this attitude to time may have contributed to the perception of the people's conquistadors that they were uninterested in progress. It's not just evident through their language: The gestures the Aymara make also signify how they view time. When talking about a time in the past, they motion in front of them; they point backward when speaking of something happening later.



Increasingly, researchers are also finding that we don't all conceptualize time in the same way. "If we really look at human history, and we get a little bit outside of the industrialized world, then you start to realize all these variations that may have existed for thousands of years," says Núñez. Other cultures have been found to rely on event-based time intervals, meaning they conceptualize time through the duration of an event. Research has found that the Amondawa language in the Amazon communicates time through expressing the passage of seasons or night and day, rather than metric time – potentially due to their lack of time keeping technology.

THE IDEA THAT WE CAN EXPERIENCE TIME as being squandered may once have seemed totally alien to society. As timekeeping – a luxury once afforded only to the wealthy – became democratized, we've never been more aware of it, says Birth. Humans today are peculiar in that they're more synchronized than ever. Our smartphones automatically change time zones when we travel and jump back or forward an hour for Daylight Savings.

However, Birth says, the way we abide by the clock can go against the embedded rhythms of the natural world. Humans possess their own inbuilt clock – also known as the circadian rhythm. Orchestrated by light and dark, it instructs the body when to feel sleepy and when to feel alert, when to eat and how fast for your hair to grow. But it gets instructions from night and day, not an arbitrary man-made clock system. Failing to follow these natural rhythms can have deleterious consequences. Just look at the uptick in car accidents that happen the day after the clocks change. "We have to recognize that we're human beings with human bodies and recognize the circadian cycles – and adapt our work habits to that," says Birth.

As capitalism has succeeded in harnessing time as a means of value and productivity, the rhythms of human existence were profoundly reshaped, perhaps at the expense of natural harmony and overall well-being. But there's always a chance the pendulum may swing back. ■

HOW TIME'S TICKED

1500 BCE
The earliest known shadow clocks, or early sundials, as well as the earliest known water clocks are developed in Egypt and Babylonia.

600 CE
The first incense clocks are built in China, which operate on calibrated burn times, much like its contemporary, the candle clock.

1100 CE
The mechanical complexity of the astrolabe starts to reach new heights as inventors of the Islamic Golden Age further refine the astronomical device.

1250 CE
Building on Islamic science, an early escapement (a new gear mechanism for clocks) is designed in Europe, ushering in the modern era of timekeeping.

Takeaways

☑ **TIMEKEEPING IS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD:** Measuring hours and days has always served to regulate and constrain the human existence.

☑ **TIME IS MONEY:** Capitalism turned time into a commodity to be tracked and exploited, rather than being something that just passed by regardless.

☑ **COMING TO YOUR SENSES:** Humans lack time receptors, yet we are driven to master it, often ignoring biological rhythms.

AN ART IN ITSELF
Balance and flexibility are physical benefits of martial arts like Tai Chi, yet the real challenge may be integrating these skills with the mind.

Wenyan-He | wusoul.de

DOING TAI CHI MIGHT LOOK LIKE A SLOTH DOING KUNG FU, BUT IT'S **A POWERFUL SET OF MOVEMENTS** THAT CAN UNLOCK A SPECIAL INNER CALM.

WORDS BY MARK ESPINER

PHOTO BY JULIA SELLMANN

STEPPING OUT

FIND YOUR PACE

I'VE NEVER DONE a martial art and as I haul myself up the four flights of stairs to a somewhat hidden gym in central Berlin, I am rather trepidatious about taking on Tai Chi as a novice. I set out my aims to the teacher Wenyan He. She says I ought to learn some Kung Fu too. I must look terrified, because her face lights up with a broad grin. This small but energetic martial arts master runs courses in Berlin, having competed at the very highest levels in the sport in China's national team.

She began when she was just 10 years old, inspired by the flying superheroes in Kung Fu movies and thinking that if she learned it, perhaps she could fly too. She wasn't too disappointed when she couldn't take to the air. Now, her Tai Chi teaching draws on her Kung Fu experience. She tells me that Tai Chi is just slow Kung Fu, and "although Tai Chi's movements look slow," she says, "it will bring muscle and balance strength to the practitioner, and you will experience the meaning of attack and defense from each movement." She talks about how it grows your self-confidence. Just a short lesson and I know what she means.

Tai Chi has drawn a diverse following, ranging from tech giant Palantir's CEO Alex Karp to the late rock star Lou Reed, who became a devotee to the practice in later life. And as I slowly learn the Kung Fu moves and then apply them to Tai Chi with a newfound dedication to holding the poses, to keeping my balance, I find that I uncover inside myself an inner calm and novel focus that demands all my attention – a sense of clarity that is just the right antidote to the hectic pace of city life. ■

FIND YOUR PACE

THE FOREVER FIRMS

WORDS BY BENNETT VOYLES

PHOTOS BY JULIA SELLMANN

NOT ALL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IS **FAST-PACED AND EPHEMERAL**. SOME COMPANIES STAY IN BUSINESS FOR CENTURIES OR EVEN MILLENNIA, AND AS EXPERTS HAVE DISCOVERED, SUCH LONG-LIVED FIRMS HAVE A FEW TRAITS IN COMMON. STUDYING THE SECRETS OF FOREVER FIRMS MAY GIVE OTHER VENTURES SOME POINTERS ON HOW TO STAY IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL.

FIND YOUR PACE

MOST COMPANIES don't last very long. Fewer than half of publicly traded companies survive on the exchange more than 11 years – roughly the life expectancy of a big dog – and only a handful live longer than the average human being, according to statistics compiled by Geoffrey West, a theoretical physicist and professor at the Santa Fe Institute. But unlike human beings and their best friend, there are exceptions to the rule. Consider Nishiyama Onsen Keiunkan, a hot springs spa in Hayakawa, Japan, that has been treating guests to a satisfying soak since 705 CE. Or Staffelter Hof, for which 862 was a very good year – its vineyard in the German state of Rhineland-Palatinate opened for business. And although rare, Nishiyama Onsen and Staffelter Hof aren't alone: A 2008 Bank of Korea study found the world had more than 5,500 companies over 200 years old – 56% of them in Japan, 15% in Germany and 4% in the Netherlands.

A decade ago, when employees were being encouraged to "move fast and break things," such long-term survival might have been viewed as just a slow-motion failure – a succession of opportunities left to rust. But now that sustainability and resilience have emerged as important goals for business, the lives of exceptionally old companies may be worth a closer look.

The sustainability experts

Old-old companies tend to have a few things in common beyond a lot of birthdays. While some, like Staffelter Hof, once belonged to monasteries, most of today's old-timers belong to families. They tend to grow very slowly and have fewer than 300 employees. Some have a sustainable comparative advantage, such as Nishiyama Onsen's hot springs, or a special relationship with their customers, like that of Marinelli Pontifical Bell Factory, a church bell foundry in Agnone, Italy, whose main →

FIND YOUR PACE

> "STORIES ARE NOT A FORM OF MARKETING ... THEY CAN BE ENORMOUSLY POWERFUL."
>
> **– Jim Collins,**
> Author of *Built to Last* and *Good to Great*

customer is the Roman Catholic Church. The foundry, which was established in 1339 (at the latest), was granted the special privilege of using the papal coat of arms on its bells by Pope Pius XI a century ago.

Often, old-old companies are very risk-averse. "They're typically not ambitious," says Geoffrey West, author of the 2017 book *Scale: The Universal Laws of Life and Death in Organisms, Cities and Companies*. A very old Japanese inn, for example, "doesn't want to become Best Western and have copies of itself all over the world. That's not what it has in mind. It just wants to go on providing the service they have ad infinitum, whereas that's not what most companies want to do."

There is even an international association comprised of around 50 family companies which are more than 200 years old called Henokiens, named after Enoch, a Biblical patriarch who reportedly lived to the age of 365. One of its members is The Van Eeghen Group, a Dutch company founded in 1662. Its chairman, Duco Sickinghe, says that most of the other companies in this group "are very much focused on their core values, core business and persistence."

Profit tends not to be top of mind for very old companies. This was true at least for Van Eeghen – the Amsterdam-based trading firm began trading in wool and linen, shifted to North American real estate in the 19th century and now deals in functional ingredients, such as nutritional supplements. According to Sickinghe, his family's company often gave away a lot of the money earned over the years. "Whenever they had too much money, they gave it away. They were Baptists, and Baptists don't like to keep money," he explains. "Money smells."

Not all these owner families are religious, but the old-old do tend to have some kind of strong commitment, according to Morten Bennedsen, a professor of economics at the University of Copenhagen. "They're loyal to something. Some of them are just loyal to the family or the business

THE "FOREVER" FUNDAMENTALS

What it takes to grow a company into one for the ages.

↘ **Plan for peaceful transfers of power.** As a rule, old-old companies tend to have worked out a stable system for transferring from one generation to the next.

↘ **Understand who you are.** Old-old companies often have a clear sense of their identity, which family members pass on from one generation to another.

↘ **Figure out who cares about you.** "You always should ask the question, if we disappeared, who would miss us?" author Jim Collins says. "If you have a really good answer for that question, that's a cornerstone."

↘ **Build for the long term ...** A long-lived company is good at building systems and training leaders.

↘ **But focus on now.** Duco Sickinghe of the Van Eeghen Group, who is also managing partner and executive chairman of Fortino Capital, a venture capital and private equity firm, doesn't ask companies for their 10-year plan. He wants to know what they intend to do next week: "Companies that do well every week will do well long-term."

legacy. Some of them are loyal to their communities. Some of them are loyal to countries," he says.

New values are added from time to time as well. After seven years as a management consultant, Claudio Stefani returned to his family's company, Acetaia Giusti, a maker of aged balsamic vinegar in Modena, Italy. But after getting offers from private equity companies for his family's 400-year-old firm, suddenly he realized that he wanted to hang on to the company so he could make sure his employees were treated well. "I actually realized that my purpose was their well-being," he recalls. For Van Eeghen, one of those core values is taking care of their customers. "We don't own anything," Sickinghe says. "If you don't talk to your customers, they may forget you."

The customer is sometimes right

Old-old Japanese companies, however, see their relationship with the customer differently, says Yoshinori Hara, a professor at Kyoto University's Graduate School of Economics. "In Western hospitality, the customer is superior, better than the service provider, but in Japan ... the customer and the service provider are equal," he explains. "The service is designed to encourage people to know more about the value of the hospitality and understand the essence of the intrinsic value of the hospitality."

In Japan, old-old companies also tend to also have a very clear statement of purpose that helps them navigate, according to Hara. For example, he notes a traditional flower arrangement company that works under the motto "life is limitless," a philosophy that the company interprets to mean that whether it operates in Japan or a foreign branch, it only works with local plants and makes arrangements that last even as the flowers dry. Hara argues that such key values are one reason Japan has so many long-standing businesses and traditional cultural practices. Having this clarity enables a firm to decide which elements of its business are changeable and which should be unchangeable.

22 YEARS

The amount of time after which 75% of public firms, out of a group of 100 which all listed in year one, will have dissolved.

SOURCE: THE SANTA FE INSTITUTE

East or West, such a sense of legacy seems to be important to ancient firms. "All of these very old family businesses have idiosyncratic stories of their businesses, and many of them really think about their business strategy today in relation to what their forefathers or their foremothers did generations ago," Bennedsen says.

Jim Collins, co-author of the 2004 book *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, agrees that stories can be a very important part of a company's identity. "Stories are not a form of marketing. They're a form of conveying the existential roots of a company and its highest aspirations," he says. "They can be enormously powerful and enormously useful for younger companies, for midstream companies, and then especially over the very long arc of truly enduring great companies." ■

Takeaways

☑ **BUILT FOR THE AGES:** Long-lived firms tend to grow very slowly, have fewer than 300 employees and a sustainable comparative advantage.

☑ **FOCUS ON CORE VALUES:** For very old companies, profit is often not top of mind compared to loyalty to the founding family, community or the business legacy.

☑ **THE CUSTOMER IS NOT ALWAYS RIGHT:** Many forever firms adhere to a clear statement of purpose that helps them navigate pressures to change.

FIND YOUR PACE

THE POWER OF THE PURPOSEFUL PAUSE

ONCE DREADED AS A CAREER KILLER, A GROWING NUMBER OF EXECUTIVES ARE OPTING FOR AN EXTENDED BREAK, ONLY TO **COME BACK RESTORED AND REINVIGORATED** FOR BETTER AND SOMETIMES BIGGER ROLES. BUT STEPPING OFF THE TREADMILL REQUIRES SOME SOUL-SEARCHING AND STRATEGIC PLANNING TO YIELD THE DESIRED RESULTS.

WORDS BY NATASHA D'SOUZA

PHOTOS BY JULIA SELLMANN

FIND YOUR PACE

DAISY AUGER-DOMÍNGUEZ found herself involuntarily pressing pause on her career. In 2018, she was the senior vice president of talent acquisition at Viacom and overseeing a restructuring exercise at the company – during the course of which she realized her role was being eliminated. "As an immigrant, I had never not worked, and so much of my identity was wrapped up in the fact that I'd worked for these tremendous global brands like Disney, Google, Moody's," she recalls. "At 44, this was my first time not having a job, and while it initially unnerved me, I also realized I had the luxury of a financial safety net by exercising the remaining 11 months of my executive contract."

Instead of immediately looking for her next role, Auger-Domínguez decided to take a break and "think more expansively about what I could be doing in my career." The decision turned out to be a game-changing turning point for the people and culture leader. She secured a book deal during her career break and went on to write her first book, *Inclusion Revolution: The Essential Guide to Dismantling Racial Inequity in the Workplace*. Most recently, she was global chief people officer at Vice Media before embarking on her second career break in August 2023.

Once seen as a major setback in an executive's trajectory, a career pause is increasingly considered a power move as more senior leaders strategically step off the treadmill amidst a wider post-pandemic societal rethink on a number of topics, including ambition, impact and purpose in one's career. "Post-Covid, people are evaluating their lives and their work through a significantly different lens," explains Catherine Rymsha, author and lecturer in managerial leadership at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. "The Great Resignation reflected a shift by professionals choosing to take more control of their career choices and trajectories. Even executives, especially those skewing closer to Gen X, now think of a career as a squiggly line as opposed to a defined, sequential progression within one company or industry that plays out over decades," says Rymsha.

Tankut Sensurucu, partner at Egon Zehnder, a global leadership advisory firm, agrees. "There is an evident shift in the last 10 years when it comes to executive openness to taking a career break or a sabbatical. Younger generations exhibit a dramatically different approach to work-life balance and career development, and these considerations are permeating the executive ranks."

According to Sensurucu, a sabbatical today is "the equivalent of a holiday 30 years ago, when there were no smartphones and it was a true vacation." He goes on to add that it is a lot more challenging to be an executive today, because many people in these types of leadership positions are so overwhelmed with external input that they often don't have the necessary quiet time to disconnect and reflect. "When you consider that professional athletes who are trained for peak performance at game time have distinct periods for rest and recovery in their calendar, shouldn't our executives, the equivalent of a corporate athlete, have that opportunity too?" he wonders.

53%

The percentage of people who felt that a break made them better at their job after they restarted their careers – which 51% of hiring managers in the same survey believed was possible at any time.

SOURCE: LINKEDIN

PRESSING PAUSE ON PURPOSE

Sensurucu notes that most executives who are interested in a sabbatical are typically those who have already successfully achieved certain key career milestones and established credibility in their company and industry. They have also often met their financial goals or a certain socio-economic status and are now

keen to pursue self-actualization and to explore new ways to grow and develop. Coming from this standpoint, the decision to take a step back from the professional stage can be driven by many reasons, including family responsibilities, health (physical or mental), skills development, travel, volunteer work or pursuing a passion project.

Take James Raybould, who chose to press pause after a 12-year tenure at LinkedIn – a company he had joined pre-IPO and in which he'd risen to the ranks to lead 100+ person teams in a principal product leadership role. His year-long pause, says Raybould, was triggered by a number of factors – the loss of a close friend a few years earlier, feeling his learning curve flattening at LinkedIn, realizing his children were at an age when he could still meaningfully spend time with them, while also acknowledging that he could financially ride out a year without income. Raybould used his career break to primarily spend time with his young children and train as a cold-water marathon swimmer, a deep-seated passion since his teenage

> "PEOPLE ARE EVALUATING THEIR LIVES THROUGH A DIFFERENT LENS."
>
> **– Catherine Rymsha,**
> Lecturer at the University of Massachusetts Lowell

FIND YOUR PACE

years, and take on a few fractional executive roles. "I designed my time away to allow for plenty of new stimuli and realized how much I enjoyed having this level of flexibility and intellectual variety. After my career break, I knew going back to full-time professional monogamy was not for me," shares Raybould, who now works as a fractional executive for two artificial intelligence startups alongside a yet undisclosed initiative with LinkedIn and other projects.

Former Googler and author of *Pause: Harnessing the Life-Changing Power of Giving Yourself a Break*, Rachael O'Meara, says she sought a paid leave of absence from the company so that she could rebuild her confidence, reconnect with her career purpose and rethink the kind of corporate leadership role that would suit her best. After her three-month break, she returned to Google where she continued to work for over a decade. She contends that a career pause should be normalized in the workplace in much the same way sabbaticals are in academia. "A sabbatical is practically mandatory for tenured professors. →

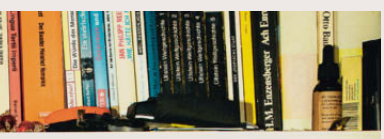
> "YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU MIGHT DISCOVER."
>
> **– Tankut Sensurucu,**
> Partner at Egon Zehnder

FIND YOUR PACE

Why shouldn't that be the case in other industries?" asks O'Meara.

Life-changing events such as the loss of a loved one or even a near-death experience also create an inflection point. Sensurucu was 35 and rising up the ranks at Coca-Cola when he lost his father. "It suddenly shifted my perspective on life, career, the world to the point where I couldn't be fully present in my role," he recalls. Sensurucu created a flexible work schedule for almost two years before moving to Egon Zehnder.

The inherent power of a pause is becoming more apparent in recent years as executives from a cross-section of age groups, typically 40 and above, model the many ways to embrace one (or more) purposeful career breaks while still building a solid career trajectory. Auger-Domínguez credits her first pause with allowing her to be more generative in the way she creates value from her expertise – by giving her the space and impetus to go launch her consulting practice, writing and speaking. "Much like younger generations, we are now going to see more executives weaving in and out of independent work, fractional work and salaried full-time roles," she says.



46%

The percentage of hiring managers who believe candidates who have taken career breaks undersell the skills – and especially valuable soft skills – they gained during their time away.

SOURCE: LINKEDIN

DISPELLING THE NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF PAUSING

Ex-Googler O'Meara cautions that many executives get caught in the pause paradox, knowing it can be beneficial for them, but fearing backlash or being stigmatized for taking a break on their C-suite trajectory. Conventional norms around excellence and performance, it seems, still end up crippling top performers from taking a beneficial career break. Sensurucu adds that it takes courage, too: "My observation is that executives don't just fear being labeled as 'not good enough,' there's also fear of the unknown. You don't know where that experience might take you and what you might discover about yourself along the way."

Pausing at the peak of your career or after a significant achievement might be perceived as losing interest in your career or momentum, notes Auger-Domínguez, stressing that this is why being intentional and strategic in designing

a pause is crucial. "Everyone else will have an opinion on why someone else is taking a career break. But as long as you have meaningful outcomes from your pause and can clearly frame what led you to take a break at that point in time, the right folks will understand."

The potential negative perception from a pause appears greater with women, a group that is already more prone to career interruptions since maternity leave remains the most common form of taking a break. A 2022 global LinkedIn survey showed that as many as 64% of women have experienced a hiatus throughout their career journey. Thus, breaks can have a major impact on women's careers, leadership and economic stability. Auger-Domínguez also wants to highlight how societal expectations and conditioning impact each of the genders differently. "When women take a career break, for the same reasons as a man, there are still societal norms which saddle women with the lion's share of the household and caregiving responsibility. So, although she's taken a pause, she doesn't have the same opportunity for self-exploration or professional recalibration as a man might, which ultimately impacts women's overall career trajectories."

Regardless of gender, hitting pause affords benefits that go beyond the professional. "I think we are arriving at the tipping point of understanding that a career break isn't just beneficial to career longevity but to human longevity as well," says O'Meara. She alludes to the stress that comes with a demanding executive career and it contributing to a number of diseases and chronic conditions. "If we are not able to reset our course, we are not going to be the best leaders we can be." ■

Takeaways

☑ **SHIFTING PRIORITIES:** Executives increasingly consider a career pause as a power move instead of a career killer.

☑ **PERFORMANCE RESET:** Just like professional athletes have distinct periods for rest and recovery, so should "corporate athletes."

☑ **DISPELLING NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS:** Too many leaders, especially women, still fear being stigmatized for taking a career break.

DESIGNING A POWERFUL AND PURPOSEFUL PAUSE

A well-designed pause can allow executives to operate at their energetic and creative zenith. Here are five aspects to making a career break meaningful and transformative:

1. **Know your "why":** Define the "why" behind a career pause and let that guide how you design your break. Is it burnout? Skill stagnation? Lack of purpose? This clarity becomes your compass.

2. **Learn to embrace "un"-structure:** Start with a blank canvas before crafting an intention or specific structure, especially if you are pressing pause owing to burnout. Try activities that allow the mind to wander: read, paint, hike, write, play music. This isn't about being "productive," it's about being restorative.

3. **Adopt a framework:** A radical sabbatical revolves around asking yourself three key questions: What would need to be handled for you to slow down? If you could slow down, what could be possible for you that isn't right now? As you consider this time in service of what's next, what would support you?

4. **Get some guidance:** Many executives choose to work directly with an executive coach or mentor during this time in order to do deeper work. You may also choose to enlist a close friend or family member.

5. **Set a duration:** A sabbatical longer than one year may raise concerns with a hiring company. But if you have a clear and compelling reason for a longer duration, that can be addressed during your next interview.

RUNNING WITH THE HERD
The bonds we create with animals can have a profound effect on how we see our role in relation to those around us.

Rilana Vorderwülbecke
rilana.eu

STEPPING OUT

SPENDING TIME IN NATURE WITH ANIMALS CAN TAKE YOU INTO A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT PACE OF LIFE AND **SENSE OF COMMUNITY** AND LEADERSHIP.

WORDS BY MARK ESPINER

PHOTO BY JULIA SELLMANN

RILANA VORDERWÜLBECKE is not a horse whisperer. Rather she's an interpreter of horse whispers. In the Brandenburg countryside, an hour or so's drive from Berlin, her pack of Icelandic ponies has a special pen and all-year-round paddocks. "This breed of horses doesn't need stables," she says and then, as if reading my mind about the harsh winters here, adds that in their native Iceland they roam outside all year long, their long coats (and each other) keeping them warm. The herd leader, she says, looks after the group. That community instinct later makes itself apparent.

Rilana's process for people to spend time with horses in order to gain a different perspective on their lives has four parts. First, she introduces me to the sugar-brown, shaggy-coated Gædingur and shows me how to groom him. As my hands brush his coat, I feel a strange bond. He looks me in the eye as if to say "slow down." I can feel myself easing to the horse's heartbeat. We set out on a short walk together, but it isn't quite clear who is leading whom. This is "horse time" ... a few minutes expand to feel like hours.

Time warps even more in the third stage, where Rilana encourages us to go into a large circular pen. Gædingur and I inhabit the same space – under a wide dome of sky – moving away, back and forth, as if tentatively making friends; coming and going. At last, we stand close together. "Look," says Rilana. Over my shoulder I see the rest of the herd curiously looking over the fence at us both. A supportive community. In conclusion, Rilana works through what has taken place. It's indescribable, but certainly a huge perspective shifter: a kind of horse-drawn courage. ■

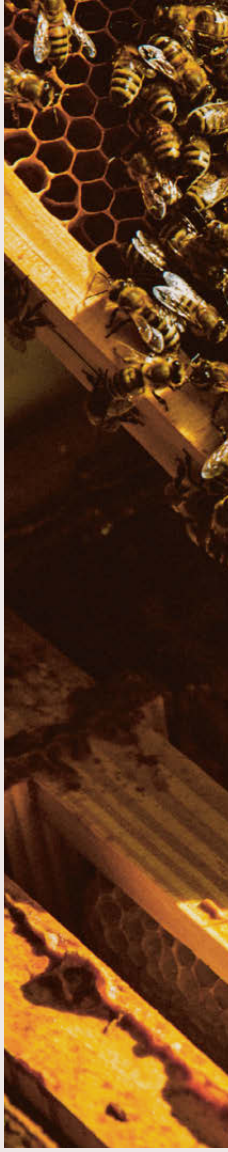
FIND YOUR PACE

FIND YOUR PACE

FROM SLOWFOOD TO SLOW-WASHING

WORDS BY FARAH NAYERI PHOTOS BY JULIA SELLMANN

THE GLOBAL MOVEMENT TO DECELERATE HOW WE PRODUCE AND CONSUME THINGS HAS BEEN AROUND FOR FOUR DECADES, WITH MIXED RESULTS. WHILE ITS CORE TENETS KEEP MAKING INROADS FAR BEYOND FOOD, QUESTIONS AROUND **AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY** PERSIST AND SOME COMPANIES ARE HIJACKING THE "SLOW" LABEL FOR MARKETING PURPOSES.



WHEN MCDONALD'S OPENED its first restaurant in Italy in March 1986 – right next to the Spanish Steps in Rome – it was met with howls of revulsion all around, not to mention a lawsuit by the fashion designer Valentino, whose atelier was next door. Yet the most stinging and enduring critique came from the Italian journalist and activist Carlo Petrini. He staged a spectacular protest at the McDonald's restaurant's inauguration and served plates of spaghetti al dente to passersby.

Petrini then went on to launch the "Slow Food" movement. In a manifesto, he urged "homo sapiens" to "regain wisdom and liberate itself from the 'velocity' that is propelling it on the road to extinction," and to trade the "tediousness of 'fast food'" for "the rich varieties and aromas of local cuisines."Nearly four decades later, the "slow" prefix is being appended to everything from fashion, beauty and home decoration to cities, marketing and manufacturing. It is capturing the zeitgeist as more and more voices ring out against capitalism and its damage to the health of human beings and of the planet.

"Slow" has now become synonymous with sustainable and green – and businesses big and small are adopting the adjective to signpost their respect for ethics and the environment. "In the capitalist system, time is literally money. Speed is a mark of success – living life in the fast lane – and even intelligence. If you call someone 'slow,' it can be perceived as an insult," explains Joanne Lee, an associate professor at the University of Warwick in the UK, who teaches a "Slow Movement" module together with her colleague Elisabeth Blagrove. "The slow philosophy asks us to reset our relationship with time and advocates a cultural shift towards an overall slower pace of life and towards more mindful, ethical, sustainable patterns of consumption," she adds, noting that the pandemic was an important driving force behind that philosophy.

Lee acknowledges that the slow movement is sometimes criticized for being "elitist or even hedonistic" and "a choice available only to those who have the time and money." Another criticism lodged against it: that the moniker slow has, in some cases, "become a bandwagon, or a marketing tool, perhaps in a similar way that companies use 'greenwashing.'"

The godfather of the trend is, of course, Petrini, with the Slow Food movement that he launched nearly four decades ago in Rome. What does he think of the way in which his movement has spread? "It's a sign of the times," Petrini says in an interview. "All of the interest that today revolves around these issues indicates that the road we took was the right one, that our message prevailed. It was no longer acceptable to consider food as something disconnected from our lives and marginal. The

> "ALL OF THE INTEREST TODAY INDICATES THAT THE ROAD WE TOOK WAS THE RIGHT ONE."
>
> **– Carlo Petrini,**
> Founder of the International Slow Food Movement

time had come to bring food to the center of the debate, because ultimately food is a crucial focus in our daily lives, where health connects to culture and relationships connect to pleasure. From that moment a real revolution began."

NOTING THAT THE AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY accounts for around one-third of all greenhouse gas emissions, Petrini recalls that the Slow Food movement was also "ahead of its time" in warning of the risks that agricultural production posed to the health of the planet, to biodiversity and to local economies and cultures. "Starting from food, we have pursued crucial challenges in the field of environmental sustainability, social justice especially in the agricultural field, the protection of biodiversity and the cultural appreciation of local gastronomy." The basis of the International Slow Food Movement is "think global, act local," the 75-year-old author and activist adds. "This insight allowed the association to spread and take root within the social fabric of over 150 countries around the world."

With its prescient campaign, however, comes the responsibility to stay relevant. "If the Slow Food movement wants to stay in the front line, it will have to evolve again and focus its network on the fight against global climate change," Petrini warns. "Everything must be revolutionized: the way we travel, the way we shop and consume, the way we generate and use energy." And he has high hopes for younger people picking up the baton: "Among the new generations, the sensitivity toward environmental and social sustainability is growing."

RANKING THE MOST POLLUTING industries on the planet, fashion is another big one. It accounts for a tenth of all global greenhouse gas emissions and uses more energy than aviation and shipping put together, according to the United Nations. The Spanish brand powerhouse Zara alone produces 450 million garments a year.

Amid growing public awareness of the human and environmental cost of clothes, new and existing brands within the industry are adopting the adjective "slow." Even global fast-fashion chains are starting "slow" and sustainable fashion lines (albeit small and limited ones). Fashion brands are feeling the pressure to be more ethical and ecological, and more transparent about where their garments are made, by whom, and in what kind of working conditions.

It's in this highly competitive environment that smaller brands such as Encircled are trying to foster change. The Canadian slow-fashion brand specializes in a category of apparel it labels "wander leisure": elegant athleisure designed for travel but also for everyday life. It was set up by Kristi Soomer in 2012 who, in her previous career as management consultant, felt the need to travel lighter. She was "frustrated with the lack of versatility and lack of comfort in women's clothing, specifically for travel," she recalls.

Soomer invented a piece that could be worn eight or more different ways and her brand evolved from there. Encircled's top-selling product today is a pair of dressy sweatpants that can be worn to work. Now with →

14%
MORE CO_2

The rise in global greenhouse gas emissions produced by agriculture between 2000 and 2021, with livestock accounting for slightly more than half of the increase.

SOURCE:
FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

an annual turnover in the $2.5 - $3.5 million range, all of the brand's production takes place in Canada, at factories less than 20 kilometers from the studio. The majority of the fabrics are biodegradable, eventually returning to the earth, and garments are made in small batches. "We're not producing a zillion pieces and then landfilling something if it doesn't sell," explains Soomer. The brand launches roughly two products a month. Compare that with the Chinese fast-fashion e-retailer Shein, which launches thousands of items a day. "One of my biggest goals is to get women to actually wear our clothing and keep it for a really long time," because "we don't need that much stuff," Soomer explains. But "breaking through to the consumer and getting the consumer to shift their mindset around fashion" is a massive challenge, she adds, because even high-income consumers tend to buy a large number of fast-fashion garments every quarter, many of which they never wear.

FIND YOUR PACE

BEING A SLOW-FASHION BRAND "is really about slowing down your consumption and exploring how these products are made and really considering every purchase before you do it," says Soomer. A recent Encircled customer survey showed that those criteria are valued. The number one reason why people buy from Encircled are its ethics and sustainability. "Ten years ago," Soomer points out, "that would not have been the case."

To be sure, Encircled customers also tend to belong to higher-age and -income brackets, because price tags differ from off-the-rack items at Zara or H&M. The brand's sweatpants cost $157 and a blazer or dress can cost upward of $200. The clothes last longer, but they also cost more.

12.5 BILLION

The estimated number of kilograms of CO2 emissions that would be saved annually by a 50% reduction in new clothing purchases in the UK alone.

SOURCE: OXFAM

The same is true of Beaumont Organic, a fashion brand headquartered in Manchester, England. A linen dress advertised on the site this spring was priced $374, while a pair of cotton trousers was priced at close to $200. The brand was set up in 2008 by Hannah Beaumont-Laurencia and produces just two collections a year of 70 pieces each. The aim is to "educate consumers that you really only need to buy one or maybe two pieces per season, if that," she says. All products are made within a 30-mile radius of the town of Braga in Portugal, by certified factories employing people who are paid a living wage. The garments are transported to Manchester by car. Beaumont-Laurencia bemoans a lack of transparency when it comes to defining "slow fashion." She says some high-street brands are launching ethically and sustainably produced fashion lines identified by the adjective "slow," but these labels are "not genuine because they're not doing it across the full business" and "a lot of it is a commercial act."

One advantage is that they're raising awareness of the perils of fast fashion and helping educate the public. Because when it comes to consumer behavior, "there's still a massive gap in society" between those who are "still very much shopping in Primark and H&M," and those who are "at least dipping their toe" in slow fashion and "starting to feel the benefits. It's a long game to convert that bottom half, who are still very price-driven," according to Beaumont-Laurencia.

BEAUTY IS ANOTHER SECTOR in which the adjective "slow" is taking root. Globally, the beauty and personal care industry is huge, by some estimates worth $646 billion in 2024 and growing steadily. Yet more than 120 billion units of plastic packaging are estimated to be produced each year by the industry. Breaking that mold is not easy. Kindred Black is a plastic-free artisan skin and body care brand set up in 2015 by two women, Jennifer Black Francis and Alice Kindred Wells, who previously worked for a handbag brand. At Kindred Black, oil-based products and scents are made of pure ingredients, come in bottles and vessels handmade in a glassblowing

> "IT'S REALLY ABOUT SLOWING DOWN YOUR CONSUMPTION AND EXPLORING HOW PRODUCTS ARE MADE."
>
> **– Kristi Soomer,**
> Founder and CEO of Encircled

factory in Mexico, and are typically priced at more than $100, if not $200.

Francis acknowledges that Kindred Black is a luxury product aimed at a luxury consumer. "I can sit here on my soapbox and talk about it all, but I'm also then offering you something that's $165, or whatever the price may be. I wish the product was more accessible," she says. "But when I have to buy small quantities and am working with farmers and glassblowers, and I'm not going to try to talk them down on their pricing, it's almost impossible to get a more accessible price point."

The ethos of Kindred Black as well as other slow-beauty brands is to offer long-lasting quality products that don't come in polluting packaging, and that can be kept and used over a long period of time. That ethos is one that is completely at odds with the behavior patterns of 21st century consumers. "At the same time that you have people like us saying this, you have the Kardashian culture, and that culture is just: 'keep buying and keep spending and keep adding to yourself and trying to make yourself different and better,'" Francis explains. "That's a wave to come up against that sometimes feels very hopeless."

Concerns around high prices and accessibility raise the question whether businesses committed to the ethos of slow will eventually take over and chase away the fast way of doing business in the global economy? Most certainly not, concludes Lee of Warwick University. "We live in a fast world, in a fast capitalist system with increasing demands on us, and I don't see that going away anytime," she says. "I don't see our society as a whole moving back to a completely slower way, because it would require a complete revolution, a complete dismantling of the structure." Instead, slow and fast "will coexist," she explains. "Individual people and businesses will have their own ways of accommodating slow within their lifestyles." ■

Takeaways

☑ **THINK GLOBAL, ACT LOCAL:** Launched in Rome in 1986, the Slow Food movement is now active in more than 150 countries.

☑ **GROWING BEYOND FOOD:** Going slow has also taken hold in the fashion and beauty industries, but words often need to be followed by actual change.

☑ **SLOW AND FAST WILL COEXIST:** Companies and consumers are still trying to find the best way to adopt the slow philosophy.

FIND YOUR PACE

ONCE UPON A TIME, there was a little girl who lived near the woods. Whenever she felt sad or lonely, she would go to her grandmother. "You need to spend some time with the trees," she would say. And the little girl would go off into the forest. After playing with the leaves and standing in the shade of the huge trunks, she'd come back happy and joyful. It sounds like a fairy tale.

But it's true. And in more ways than one. That little girl was Doreen Palke. Now she's an experienced guide and teacher of the health benefits of spending time with trees, a practice called Shinrin-yoko ("forest bathing"), which originated in Japan partly as a response to Karoshi ("death by overwork"). Science backs up the health benefits of spending even a few hours in the trees with tangible improvements to the immune system as well as other measurable and positive side effects. Great British actor Dame Judi Dench is a firm advocate and sponsor of the practice.

It's raining when we meet at the beginning of our three-hour bath in the forest outside Berlin, but Doreen invites me to listen to the raindrops on the leaves for a few minutes. It is immediately soothing. Our forest walk is punctuated by some short exercises to tune in to the environment. She asks me to pick a spot and soak in the landscape before closing my eyes and painting the scene in my mind's eye. We walk on to a forest clearing where she tells me to collect leaves and use them to make a mandala picture on the ground – a meditative and restorative process. I feel positive for days. She tells me the effects can last for up to a month. If you try this out, I hope you too will live happily ever after. ■

ON A FIELD DAY
You needn't identify as a tree hugger to tap into the stress-reducing side effects of some time spent among the timbers.

Doreen Palke | doreenpalke.com

STEPPING OUT

THERE ARE PROVEN HEALTH BENEFITS TO **FOREST BATHING** OR SPENDING TIME AMONG TREES AND A GUIDED PROCESS CAN HELP UNLOCK THEM.

WORDS BY MARK ESPINER

PHOTO BY JULIA SELLMANN

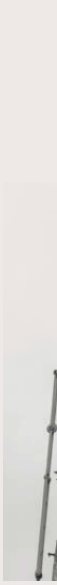
FIND YOUR PACE

THE CYCLE OF MONEY

WORDS BY MICHAL LEV-RAM

PHOTOS BY JULIA SELLMANN

WHEN IT COMES TO EVALUATING SUCCESS AND FINANCIAL RETURNS, WE HAVE BEEN CONDITIONED TO THINK FASTER IS BETTER. IT'S A MISCONCEPTION THAT MAKES FOR SOBERING ANALYSIS WHEN THE UPTIMES COME TO A HALT. AS IT TURNS OUT, **A SLOWDOWN ISN'T ALL BAD**, OFTEN LEADING TO INTROSPECTION, MORE THOROUGH INVESTMENT DECISIONS AND NEW INNOVATION CYCLES.



SILICON VALLEY BANK, the so-called "financial partner of the innovation economy," issued the kind of seemingly mundane announcement that banks are notorious for on March 8, 2023: "SVB Financial Group Announces Proposed Offerings of Common Stock and Mandatory Convertible Preferred Stock," read the headline of the jargon-filled press release. But the banal delivery masked a development that was anything but routine. SVB started as a regional bank in California in the early 1980s. Over the decades, it became the go-to financial institution for many startups and venture capital firms across the globe. Fast-forward to the early 2020s, when the Covid-19 outbreak caused a huge uptick in usage of many tech tools, and SVB had been on a particularly lucrative tear. During the pandemic, its high-flying tech industry clients deposited so much money into the bank that its total assets ballooned to $212 billion by the end of 2022, up from $116 billion just two years before.

In turn, SVB invested some of that money in what were considered "safe" financial products like US Treasuries and mortgage-backed securities. But as interest rates rose, those investments became much riskier, losing value precipitously. Meanwhile, the bank's customers were also facing an increasingly bleaker reality. By early 2023, the pandemic era tech boom was deflating, and so were the balance sheets and valuations of many startups, leading to a decrease in deposits to the bank and an increase in withdrawals. In short: SVB was in a bad place. Just how bad? The company needed to raise around $2 billion in order to plug a similarly sized financial hole.

The opaque press release, therefore, was SVB's way of telling the world that it too had been forced to make a withdrawal of sorts – raising capital so it could survive. The news spread like wildfire, and so did the panic. Over the course of just one day, customers tried to withdraw $42 billion from their accounts. By March 10, just two days after the press release was issued, the run on SVB had forced the US government to take it over, representing one of the biggest bank collapses in history. The entire ecosystem seemed to be impacted. The →

same "innovation economy" SVB had helped power for so long now stood at near paralysis. "This is an extinction-level event for startups," Garry Tan, the CEO of Silicon Valley incubator Y Combinator, said in a Tweet the same day that the government took over SVB.

THE BLOW FELT EXISTENTIAL for many smaller tech companies, some of whom couldn't make their payroll in the days following the bank's collapse. But the truth is that as painful as SVB's demise was to this ecosystem, the tech industry's party had been winding down well before. What's more, the uptimes weren't all good. And the ensuing downtimes? They aren't all bad. "It wasn't a recipe for strong, sustainable growth," Kyle Stanford, the lead venture capital research analyst at PitchBook, a firm that tracks the global capital markets, says of the sky-high startup valuations seen at the height of the industry's Covid-19-era surge. According to Stanford, during this frenzied period with a record volume of large deals, investments were being made so fast that investors weren't taking the time for adequate research. "Now it's a more stable market," says Stanford. "And investors have time to do their due diligence."

The industry's dramatic ups and downs are nothing new, with the dotcom bubble that formed in the late 1990s and its subsequent burst in the early 2000s as the most-talked-about example. But there's always been a natural ebb and flow to the overall economy too, with business cycles of all sorts encompassing both expansions and contractions. Yet somehow, people and corporations, by extension, think of a slowing financial system as faulty and a fast-growing system as optimal. This simplified view misses some nuance: Nothing is all good or all bad – even when it comes to the economy. And even when it comes to the innovation economy.

$3 TRILLION

The total value of the European tech ecosystem at its 2021 peak. After a reduction of around $400 billion in 2022, it had bounced back to nearly the same level by the end of 2023.

SOURCE: ATOMICO

JUST LOOK AT EUROPE. The State of European Tech Report, issued annually by London-based VC firm Atomico, took a gloomy turn late last year. It stated that European startups were on track to raise just $45 billion by the end of that year, about half that of the year before. "The poor economic environment since the end of 2021 has caused a lot of pain and so it is no surprise that the number one concern among respondents was access to capital," wrote its authors. But there were some silver linings: Early-stage investments (for up-and-comers, which also tend to be smaller checks) had actually stayed relatively stable amid the slowdown, which was mostly driven by a decline in so-called "megarounds" – funding rounds of $100 million or more.

Megarounds had become commonplace in 2021, when nontraditional investors like hedge funds and private equity firms entered in search of hefty returns. These deals were huge, and they were also hurried. As PitchBook's Stanford tells it, it wasn't unheard of for a founder to receive an offer to invest on a Friday afternoon and be told they had to sign by Sunday. "There were too many investors – and too many companies," says Stanford. It was obvious that the frenzied era of fundraising and gargantuan startup growth wouldn't last forever.

FIND YOUR PACE

It was also obvious that the sky-high valuations given to some companies would seem even more unrealistic when that moment came. Sure enough, as the party wound down in 2023, many companies who had raised megarounds were left flailing – and many nontraditional VCs just left.

The departure of such big money from the innovation economy seems like a negative, but many say that megarounds had a detrimental effect on the overall industry. Deal-making had become so much more competitive, and huge deals, therefore, were happening at breakneck speed. This process has slowed down significantly. The 2023 Atomico report found that, as of late last year, investors were taking 10 additional hours to research each deal, compared with the year before. "The emphasis has shifted from explosive growth and quick returns to building enduring companies," it stated. "Founders must prepare themselves for the long haul, driven by a sense of purpose and mission, which in the long run, could bring positive outcomes."

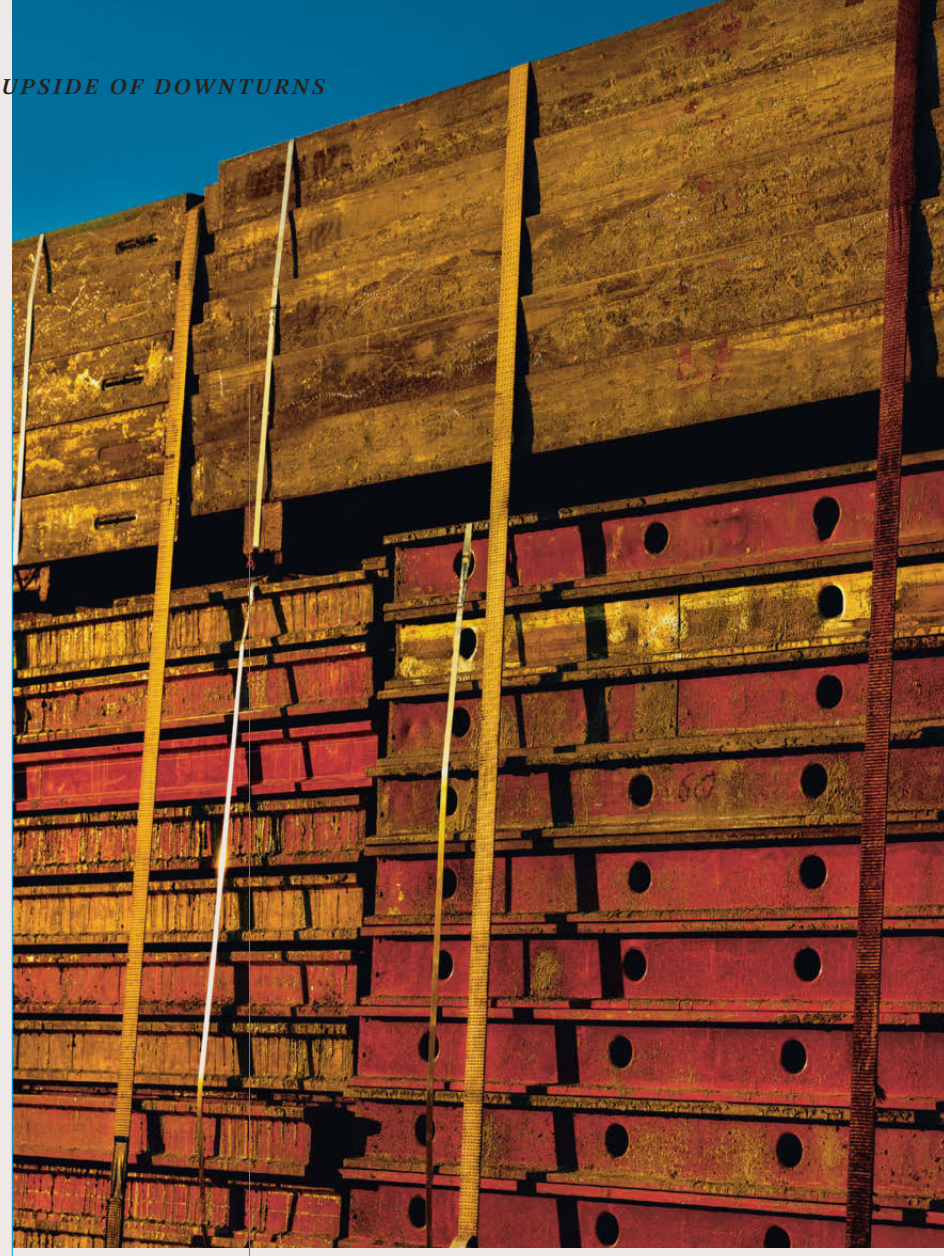
THIS SAME PHENOMENON is taking root globally, across all innovation hubs. But rather than a failure, the slowdown in fundraising can be seen as a reset, a move toward more rigorous investing criteria – companies that are positioned to make money for the long term. A return to fundamentals can be painful: Times of famine have real consequences that can impact people's lives and livelihoods. But all phases of business cycles have benefits. Many economists have pointed to the "cleansing effect" of recessions for decades, making the case that downturns force a reallocation of labor from less productive companies to more productive players.

Back in the 1930s, Austrian political economist Joseph Schumpeter opined that recessions can promote "creative destruction," or dismantling established processes à la how Henry Ford upended the status quo in auto manufacturing but ultimately created a boom in car sales. His theory helps us look at a slowdown in the cycle of money in a very different light: Can a catastrophic event like SVB's demise and a contraction in the innovation economy actually lead to more innovation?

As it turns out, yes. Some of the biggest and most impactful technology companies were birthed in tougher economic times: Bill Gates started Microsoft in 1975, during the 1970s energy crisis, and some of today's most well-known tech brands, like WhatsApp, Uber and Airbnb, were founded in 2009, during the Great Recession. And currently, we're seeing an →

FIND YOUR PACE

> "NOW IT'S A MORE STABLE *MARKET AND* INVESTORS HAVE TIME TO DO THEIR DUE DILIGENCE."
>
> **– Kyle Stanford,**
> Lead venture capital analyst at PitchBook



explosion of artificial intelligence companies, even as many already-established companies struggle to raise additional rounds. "It's been a tale of two different worlds almost: AI and non-AI," says Tanay Jaipuria, a New York-based investor with Wing Venture Capital. Jaipuria, who focuses on investing in AI-powered applications, says the potential benefits of AI are generating lots of excitement – and, of course, investors, who are piling money into startups in the space even during a more general downturn in the industry.

ALL THE PROS AND CONS ON BOTH SIDES of the economic cycle don't just impact the bottom line – they also affect individuals. That's probably why some players have chosen to step on the brakes. Steve Schlafman spent over a decade as a New York-based venture capitalist surrounded by peers and friends in the same line of work, all of them vying for coveted "general partner" roles. But Schlafman's trajectory took a different turn after he addressed an addiction, got sober and started to meditate as part of his healing process. "I was a lot more aware of my inner state," says Schlafman. "I was sitting in these meetings and realizing I didn't really care about all of this."

FIND YOUR PACE

The former investor quit his job and decided to shift into a lower gear. His new venture is aptly named Downshift and is a program for "high performers in transition." Schlafman's ethos, he says, "isn't that we slow down in perpetuity. It's that slowing down at times allows us to be more intelligent about how to move forward." In his new line of work, Schlafman is advising founders through their own transitions, helping them to slow down as they assess their next move. Often, they're coming to him suffering from extreme burnout after years of moving at breakneck speed.

Indeed, things move so fast in the innovation economy that we keep coming up with new vocabulary to describe the pace. First, there was hypergrowth, and now, blitzscaling is the term for the "lightning-fast path to building massively valuable companies," which is the literal title of a 2018 book co-written by entrepreneur and investor Reid Hoffman.

Blitzscaling, to be sure, has a time and place – as will whatever comes after. But sometimes the best ideas come not from constant movement but from introspection, taking the time to observe the systems that work and those that don't. The next big startup? It could be the product of hustle culture. But it could also be incubating in the mind of a founder who is currently meditating on an innovation that could change the world. ■

3 IN 1 DOLLARS

The amount of investment capital that AI startups attracted in the US over 2023 amid an overall decrease of 30% for the year in venture capital funding.

SOURCE: REUTERS

Takeaways

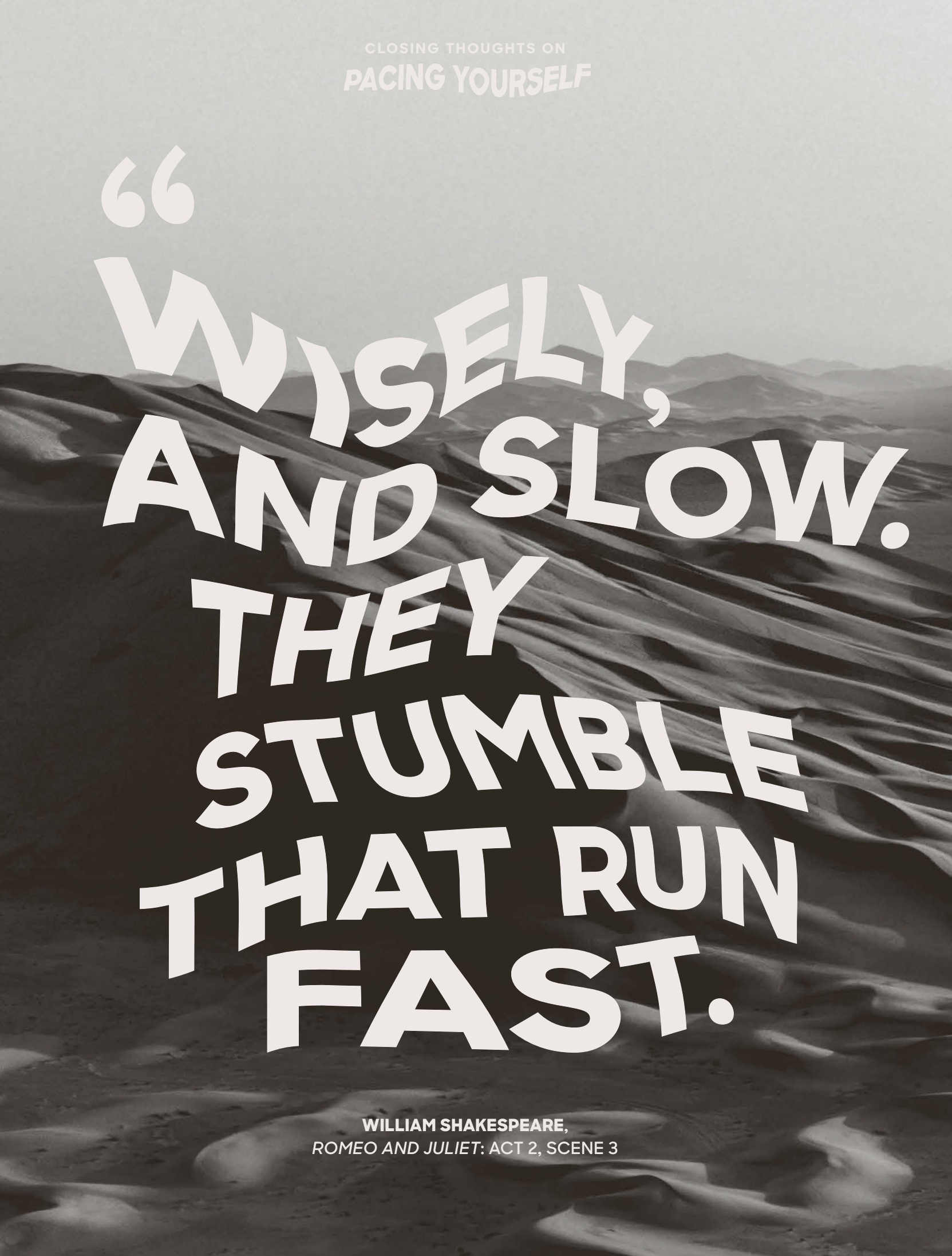
☑ **DOWNTIMES ARE NOT ALL BAD:** Slowdowns such as the tech industry's boom and bust cycles allow investors to perform proper due diligence.

☑ **PICK LONG-TERM WINNERS:** When funding dries up, the emphasis shifts from explosive growth, megarounds and quick returns to building enduring companies.

☑ **CREATIVE CONSTRUCTION:** Some of the biggest and most impactful technology ventures were launched during tougher economic times.

CLOSING THOUGHTS ON

PACING YOURSELF



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
ROMEO AND JULIET: ACT 2, SCENE 3

Wide angle

Read on for diverse insights into the wider world of business and ideas.

Giving women more runway

Annette Mann is one of only a few women around the world leading a major airline. The CEO of Austrian Airlines tells ***Think:Act*** *how she is seeking to bring more diversity to her senior ranks as well as Austrian's cockpits and why travel by plane is here to stay.*

BY ***Emanuele Savettiere*** PHOTOS BY ***Philipp Horak***

ANNETTE MANN IS AN OUTLIER. A woman CEO in an industry dominated by men, Mann exudes confidence and is eager to help other women follow in her footsteps. The Lufthansa veteran, now CEO of Austrian Airlines, is actively creating opportunities to encourage other women to succeed in the aviation industry. That involves active measures to increase the number of opportunities for her peers to make their professional accomplishments seen and heard. In this interview, Mann elaborates on just how she is helping women at Austrian Airlines gain greater visibility, a prerequisite for climbing the career ladder, and her strategies to improve gender diversity and inclusion, such as shared leadership roles and new working models. Mann, who steered Austrian Airlines through Covid-19-induced turbulences, is also taking another challenge head-on: making aviation more sustainable.

ON A TRUE COURSE
In her role as CEO, Annette Mann is focused on helping women achieve more visibility in aviation and working toward industry-wide sustainability.

Only 7% of the CEOs at the world's top 100 airlines are female, according to a 2022 statistic. Why are there so few women in top roles in aviation?
That's a very good question that is hard to answer. I've always felt quite comfortable in aviation, but I have a hypothesis. Many large airlines have been around for decades. And when you look at the history of airlines, although it's a service industry, there was originally a very strong focus on →

engineering and operations. And so, lots of careers came out of that background with typically fewer women in these roles. That might probably be the reason why today there are still so few of us. However, I feel that's rapidly changing because most airlines fully understand by now that we're not building airplanes. Aircraft are our most expensive production factor, but we're in the service industry, meaning it's about people and hospitality. The types of roles and backgrounds you see going up the career ladder are changing. There's no reason why there shouldn't be more women, and I hope more and more are encouraged to join.

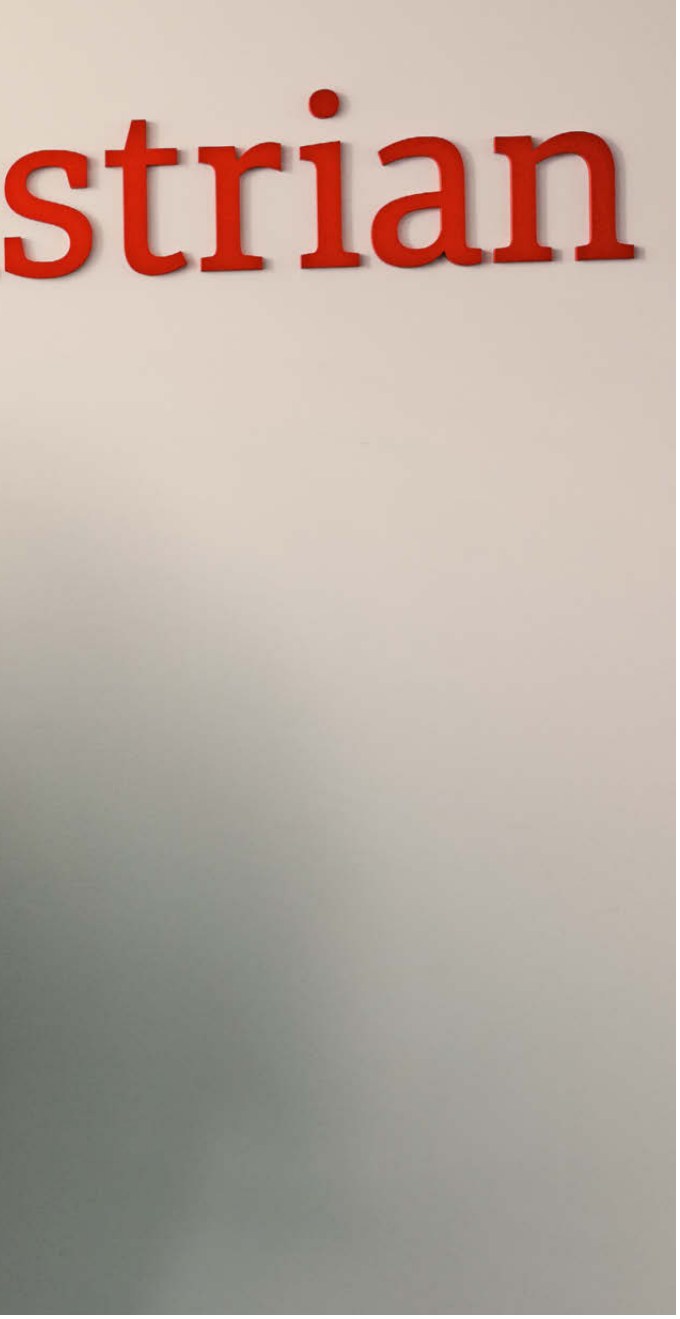
What about your own experience in aviation? What can you share from your own journey to the top?
I have honestly never spent much time thinking about being a woman in my job. At the very beginning of my career, I worked in product management on the A380 team of Lufthansa. In that role, it was amazing how I could interact with totally different types of people – from the crazy, fancy design guy all the way to the nerdy engineer designing some little piece of the cabin. I learned early on how to communicate and also translate between totally different types of people. I think that helped me throughout my whole career. If you're a good communicator, that lets you address gender and diversity issues as well.

What are you doing to encourage more women to take up important roles at Austrian Airlines?
Let's look at women very early in their career when they don't have leadership responsibilities yet. We try to encourage them early on to take jobs which also involve some risk and give them visibility. Too many women are still a bit too idealistic. They're taking jobs where they work hard, and which are important but probably not so visible. We really try to encourage younger women to do something where others can actually see and feel their work, and where they learn to make decisions and take risks. Being more visible is super important at such an early stage.

Can you give me a specific example?
For example, our communications, public affairs and sustainability team has a high percentage of women, and we let them directly work with and interact with the board – same with HR or controlling. They present on topics which are very relevant for the company, learn constantly and

"We really try to encourage younger women to do something where others can actually see and feel their work. Being more visible is super important at such an early stage."

– Annette Mann



are seen by senior managers. Another example is that we actively nominate female talents for awards and scholarships. There's a young woman in our operations team who just got promoted to team lead and won a scholarship at the WHU (Wissenschaftliche Hochschule für Unternehmensführung), one of the most renowned universities in Germany, and we support that to help her connect to larger networks.

Then there's the issue of women getting into their first leadership positions in their late 20s and early 30s, a time when it's often also about having a family. That's why we have several shared leadership roles or tandems of two women or a man and a woman sharing the job. It works really well and makes it easier for them. We also have many different working models to support women in that stage of their career, because otherwise they might drop out or go somewhere else.

Annette Mann

Since joining the Lufthansa Group in 2003, Annette Mann has held a number of strategic and operational roles. She was responsible for various product-related areas until 2020, including developing and implementing Lufthansa's current first class services and as vice president of product management at Swiss Airlines.

Most recently, she was in charge of corporate responsibility at Lufthansa before taking on the top job at Austrian Airlines in March, 2022.

This interview was conducted at the Global Peter Drucker Forum.

What about female pilots?
Still difficult. We would love to have many more. It's somehow so deeply entrenched in the mind of society that being a pilot is a very male job. Many women also still think, "Oh, it's hard later on to square the work with having a family." Well, female pilots actually say it works, so we try to have our female pilots visit schools or hold events where people can learn more about being a pilot. By the way, it's not just women that think they can't do it – being a pilot still has the image of being an elite job. Many men think, "Okay, if I'm not wealthy I cannot do this because first I'll need $100,000 to complete the training." But that's not true anymore. You need less than $10,000 at the beginning, which actually makes it cheaper than a lot of other educational endeavors.

Before coming to Austrian Airlines, you headed sustainability at Lufthansa. How are the things you learned there shaping how you approach your new role?
The sustainability role was a fantastic time to dig into that topic. Whenever I have conversations or read articles, I'm surprised how little knowledge there is about sustainability. It seems that everyone talks all day long about sustainability, but hardly anyone can do something basic like distinguish between emissions reduction and compensation. I'm so grateful that I was able to learn so much because, in my current job, hardly a day goes by without needing that kind of knowledge for being on panels, doing interviews or being questioned by employees and customers – also for steering the right topics. It's a tricky topic where, if you're not well educated, you're quickly on a slippery slope.

Aviation is among the top most energy-intensive industries. What are some of the concrete things airlines can do to minimize their carbon emissions? Will the use of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) be a scalable solution?
In aviation, there are three ways to reduce CO_2 emissions. One, buying new planes. Every new plane consumes about 20-25% less fuel than the one it replaces. The second thing is to fly more efficiently. We need policies for that, because so far every European country still has its own air traffic control which leads to a lot of detours. You could easily unlock 10% in reductions by just organizing European airspace more efficiently. Fuels are the third aspect. In theory, you could →

run the world's 27,000 aircraft with sustainable aviation fuel. But where does this SAF come from? Lufthansa Group – which Austrian Airlines is part of – has about 15 different partnerships all over the world exploring different technologies. We have contracts with some companies that guarantee we will buy certain quantities if they invest in producing SAF. But it's still tough. Europe very much works through pressure and regulation, while the US handles it a bit smarter by motivating companies and offering tax credits. Europe was the front-runner for a long time, but now the US has taken over because they're just faster in scaling up, which makes us a bit jealous.

There's a growing tendency among consumers to avoid flying where possible in order to minimize emissions – and especially in Europe. As a company, how are you dealing with that?

That's simply not true. People are talking about flying less, but a recent study of German airports showed that especially young people fly more than ever. Fifteen years ago, the percentage of people up to the age of 30 who flew was 21%. Now that number is 29%, so it grew by nearly 40%. We do see a decline in business travel by 20-30%, but it's overcompensated by private demand. What is actually changing is the structure of our customer target groups. We have a higher share of private travelers – still a lot of tourists, but more and more people traveling for friends and family reasons. And there's also a new kind of business hybrid travel. Remote teams meet in different places. So if you're a remote team in Europe, you meet, for example, three days in Barcelona in one month and two days in Hamburg the next month.

46%

The percentage of German 18- to 34-year-olds who listed flying as their preferred mode of vacation travel in a 2022 survey.

SOURCE: YOUGOV

Are there any interesting lessons in sustainability that you've taken from some of the other airlines around the world?

There are always some details you can learn from others. But I do believe that Lufthansa Group is one of the front-runners. We have been the first airline group in Europe to commit to science-based targets. No other airline has that many different partnerships around sustainable aviation fuels or as deep an understanding of it, and that is because Lufthansa Technik is also part of our group. Lots of other airlines come to us and ask us how we do it.

You joined the company when it was still dealing with the setbacks brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic. What measures did you have to take to get things back on track?

I started in Vienna while the Omicron variant was still around. However, there was hope for the next summer because the vaccines were effective. What we tried to do – and it worked – was to prepare as much as possible to fully exploit summer demand in 2022. Due to the pandemic, we had lost about 20% of our staff and we still had airplanes in storage. Operations-wise, everything was running at a really low level. So, we hired early on, put all the planes back in active duty and we used our strong relationships with airports and air traffic control to master getting from 10% of operations back to 80-90% of operations. While it was really tough flying in the summer of 2022 in Europe, Austrian Airlines did quite well. We were number five in terms of punctuality and had a really good performance, and that helped us to have a record quarter in Q3. It allowed us to repay and refinance the state aid we had received, and we have been growing ever since.

"We have to create products where people are actually having fun buying greener. That will be a huge challenge for the next few years."

– Annette Mann

A PRECISE LANDING Annette Mann developed a broad spectrum of experience at Lufthansa Group before becoming the CEO of Austrian Airlines in 2022.

What are your plans for the future of your airline? What do you see as the major areas for growth and how are you planning to develop them?

We have a huge program coming up to replace our fleet with the latest technology. We started with taking delivery of the fifth A320neo, and from this year onward we will replace our entire long-haul fleet with Boeing 787 Dreamliners. In terms of operations, our customer structure is changing. We also have to become more resilient because the world gets more and more volatile. It's really about understanding customers and their needs, for instance how to sell more sustainable or greener tickets. We have to create products that people actually want. If it's just about idealism, not too many people are willing to pay more. We have to create products where people are actually having fun buying greener – and this will be necessary for our transformation. That will be a huge challenge for the next few years.

What other sustainability-related considerations should we keep in mind?

Making business travel more sustainable still suffers from some misconceptions. When I sit on panels or talk to businesses, people often tell me they are prepared to pay for an extra night on the road to avoid flying. They are not aware that, especially on shorter routes, it's cheaper to pay the add-on for sustainable fuel instead of paying for a hotel. Travel is not simply black and white: It's not just a choice between a car with a combustion engine or going by train, for instance – there's the electric vehicle in between. When it comes to flying, alternatives exist, too. Take a business trip from Munich to Hamburg. If you go by train, it takes you a long time and you cannot avoid spending an extra night in Hamburg. I promise you, this additional night at a hotel is more expensive than paying the 100 bucks extra for sustainable fuels. Most people haven't understood that yet. ■

MAKING AN ENTRANCE
RambaZamba's full company of disabled performers has been building an international reputation for inclusive theater since 1991.

PHOTO: PHILIP ZWANZIG

Inclusion is not an illusion

A groundbreaking theater show in the US has put working with people with neurodiversity and other disabilities center stage. Like similar productions in Europe, it demonstrates the benefits of embracing diversity go beyond the artistic. Business, too, is learning to take a fresh approach.

BY **Mark Espiner**

PHOTO: MARIANNE CRANE HERE

SOMETHING MAGICAL and transformational happens in *How to Dance in Ohio*, the 2015 HBO documentary which follows a group of young adults living with autism and Asperger's syndrome. If you are looking for a lesson in how society can benefit from inclusion and reaching out to an alienated community, it's a good place to start. But there are wider-reaching themes that this film touches on which could apply to the workforce. It shows how an imaginative approach to understanding disability and neurodiversity could be a valuable asset with positive knock-on effects for those who embrace and enhance them.

In the documentary, young men and women all present different facets of life on the spectrum. Some experience feelings of extreme social anxiety, disturbance and profound awkwardness. At the instigation of the group center's inspirational leader and coordinator, they are offered the chance to have a prom, complete with all the highs and lows and expectations of romance that come with such an event. The resulting journey reveals bonds of friendship and spiritual growth as well as opportunities for leadership and self-reliance – valuable outcomes which also offer positive implications for the participants' work environment.

It's a beautiful and moving true story. And so it's not surprising, perhaps, that it was taken to the stage. The dramatic stakes of the characters as they approach the Big Day all play a part in the hit 2023 Broadway musical of the same name. In a decision which embraces the idea of inclusion, the show is cast with autistic actors playing the characters. This approach has been hailed by some as a game-changer in the arts world. It is certainly a first for Broadway in terms of inclusion and representation. There is a rallying, oft-repeated political cry from the disabled community about representation that excludes them: "Nothing about us without us." And this Broadway show makes good on that promise.

DESPITE WHAT CRITICS HAD TO SAY about the show itself (its staging, music and choreography did not necessarily wow reviewers), the landmark nature of the musical is its portrayal of a disability underscored by lived experience. That kind of authenticity helps to change audience perceptions about a community of people. It also shapes the whole arts landscape, and perhaps, in turn, society as a whole.

While it may be a first for Broadway, it isn't a first for the arts in general to find ways to embrace disability. Some theater companies have in fact been working for decades in bringing disability-led creative projects to life.

> "Normal actors have a lot of fear. But with disabled actors, it's all about fun and possibility: That creates a space without fear."
>
> **Jacob Höhne,** Artistic director of RambaZamba

One such company is the UK's Vital Xposure, which has pioneered projects and research in the area for more than a decade. Its general manager Foteini Galanopoulou has consulted for many arts organizations on how to embed inclusive practices across their operations and worked on inclusive design and accessible tourism for cross-European programs. She is passionate about the role the arts can play in offering a voice and an example for inclusivity. "Theater is a very direct representation of society – it reflects and more importantly informs and affects public awareness," she says, adding that it can help change the way people think.

Her big takeaway from working in inclusivity on projects both large and small is the pressing need to try to be inclusive without falling for the fear of

"It goes without saying that you unleash talent when you remove the barriers that were there before – it is a more vibrant and vivid creative process."

– Foteini Galanopoulou, General manager of Vital Xposure

PHOTOS: PHILIP ZWANZIG, REHAN JAMIL, ANDI WEILAND

making mistakes or getting it wrong. "Becoming inclusive is a conversation. Things change, people change, contexts change," Galanopoulou says. "We all learn. If something doesn't work, our door is open. Some might fear a potential backlash, but I believe that the learning is ongoing. You need to be open about the change," and then change accordingly as inclusivity needs or demands change around you. "It goes without saying," she adds, "that you unleash talent when you remove the barriers that were there before – it is a more vibrant and vivid creative process."

Galanopoulou's views find resonance in Berlin theater company RambaZamba, which has a verified track record in creating startling performances rooted in lived experience for decades. It employs a full company of 30-35 actors all with special needs or disabilities, including those with Down syndrome, cognitive impairment and physical disabilities. The cast sometimes work alongside able-bodied actors as guests including well-known – in Germany at least – performance artists.

*IN THE SPOTLIGHT Whether a classic like **One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest** (bottom right) or original productions like RambaZamba's **Aerocircus** (left) and Vital Xposure's **Quiet Rebels** (top right), theater is helping to place the conversation around inclusivity front and center.*

THE STARTLING TWIST according to RambaZamba's artistic director Jacob Höhne is that this process unleashes the talent of the able-bodied actors as much – if not more so – as of those with disabilities. "The biggest thing I noticed," says Höhne explaining his first impressions of the rehearsal process with able-bodied and disabled actors working together, "was there was no fear on stage. Normal actors have a lot of fear – sometimes there is tension, too. They feel they have to be cool or do everything right, so there is a lot of stress. But with disabled actors, it's all about fun and possibility: That creates a space without fear." That unique atmosphere, he says, is really special, and he recalls how one (able-bodied) guest actor was so surprised by the open and fearless rehearsal process that he did things he had never done before.

That leads Höhne to discuss what is a more applicable point for other workplaces embracing inclusivity. Because his actors can't read, he has to take them through the story and rehearsal in a different way. This involves reducing the elements of the plot to their foundational points, finding simplicity in complexity, clearly communicating the →

"Autistic people often do not follow the fashions, but want to think things through for themselves, from first principles. This can lead to innovation."

– Simon Baron-Cohen, Director of the Autism Research Centre at Trinity College, Cambridge

narrative with actions and without using text. The approach opens up a different kind of discourse and conversation in the creative process, he says. "I guess what business can learn from us – from a company such as ours and our process," he says with enthusiasm, "is that people with disabilities can do it. If you give them the possibilities and you go with them, it can work. It might need more time, but it can work."

DISABILITIES CAN EVEN BE AN ADVANTAGE to employers and businesses. Simon Baron-Cohen, professor and director of the Autism Research Centre at Trinity College, Cambridge, found strong links between autism and abilities for attention and detail, for example in software development and IT. But it isn't the only field where autistic people can thrive. "Lots of people are receptive to extending the concept of inclusion to people who are neurodiverse," he says. "I served as an advisor to the Spectrum Art Award that only considers artists who self-identify as autistic. It's revealed a lot of talent and helped autistic artists' careers," he says. In addition, Baron-Cohen has collaborated with Universal Music to encourage the creative industries to embrace neurodiversity and autism.

But progress in bringing more of those with such disabilities into the workplace in general has, in his opinion, been slow. "Some estimates are that up to 85% of autistic adults may be unemployed and have poor mental health which is an indicator that as a society we are failing autistic people." Yet the barriers to getting those into work could be lower with just a few mild interventions, he insists. "Employers should ask autistic job applicants or employees 'What do you need?' Often these reasonable adjustments are not expensive and would demonstrate the employer is not discriminating against autistic people," he says.

Inclusion could also bring about competitive advantages. "Autism is not just a disability, it is also a difference, and some of those differences are strengths or even talents," Baron-Cohen explains. "Examples include a preference for depth over breadth, perfectionism and excellent attention to detail and memory for detail and a strong interest in and aptitude for pattern recognition. Autistic

A LEADING ROLE
The documentary ***How to Dance in Ohio****, as well as its subsequent musical theater adaptation, sparked a new wave of autism awareness.*

PHOTO: CURTIS BROWN

people often do not follow the fashions, but want to think things through for themselves, from first principles, to answer the 'why' and 'how' questions. This can lead to innovation, especially when the autistic person is supported within a team with a range of cognitive styles."

THERE ARE CLEAR INDICATIONS that such recruitment guidelines are being followed in the tech industry. Neil Barnett is the director of inclusive hiring and accessibility at Microsoft, and he created and leads the company's Neurodiversity Hiring Program. A key part of Microsoft's process in bringing in those with autism or neurodiversity was the interview. It underwent significant change to become more inclusive. As Barnett puts it: "Microsoft created an alternative hiring process that acts as a differently shaped 'front door' to identify and welcome neurodiverse candidates." The program's goal was to provide a more embracing hiring method that allows talented individuals to showcase their skills and bypass some of the traditional interview obstacles.

Provisions included steps such as providing questions ahead of interviews as well as scheduling flexibility and ensuring prospective employees were aware of what accommodation would be available to them. "We expanded the scope of the program in 2021 to encompass all neurodiverse talent alongside autism," he adds." This approach appears to be implementing some of the changes Baron-Cohen outlined and it has had a positive effect, according to Barnett. "We have found incredible talent. The hiring approach of 'screening in' talent can drive real impact," he says. "The benefits of inclusive hiring practices set both candidates and interview teams up for success."

THERE ARE MORE BENEFITS to promoting inclusivity and diversity, as Baron-Cohen indicated, in that inclusion can turbocharge innovation – and not just as a result of hiring neurodiverse workers. In an impassioned plea for more inclusivity, deafblind US disability rights advocate Haben Girma wrote in the *Financial Times* about the consequences of embracing differences and the unforeseen positive consequences it can bring. She cited tech pioneer Vint Cerf, who is hearing-impaired, and asserted that his disability influenced his work developing the internet.

Back in the 1980s, deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals like Cerf were searching for a good alternative to communicating over the telephone, and so the computer scientist spearheaded the creation of the first commercial email service to help overcome this obstacle. The benefits of email are of course not limited solely to the hard of hearing but the entire world.

The main by-product of putting disability and diversity at the center of work seems to be success, whether it is in innovation or productivity or in other unforeseen benefits. The Broadway success of *How to Dance in Ohio* demonstrates how far the arts can be out in front to lead society and business. The representation of disability by those with disability doesn't simply highlight a cause or signal some kind of social issue. Rather it shows a new opportunity to develop, enhance and grow. And if business can take that kind of storytelling lesson to heart and implement it, too, the benefits could be huge for everybody. ■

Innovations driven by inclusion

Curb cuts
Wheelchair-accessible curbs are so common today that the "curb cut effect" refers to disability-friendly innovations that also benefit the wider population.

Speech-to-text
Now ubiquitous, voice recognition and speech/text conversion has its origins in assistive technology.

Auto-complete
Those suggested words while you're texting are based on tech designed by Walter Woltosz to help people with ALS, like his mother-in-law (and Stephen Hawking), communicate.

Touchscreens
First developed by FingerWorks for those with dexterity impairments, Apple bought the technology in 2005.

THOUGHT LEADERS SERIES

A *TÊTE-À-TÊTE* WITH

Don Norman

Legendary designer Don Norman taught generations to keep an unflinching focus on their products' user. Now, approaching 90, the polymath is urging his peers to take charge and help solve humanity's pressing problems.

BY ***Steffan Heuer***
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ***Nigel Buchanan***

Human-centered design is the concept you are most famous for. How do you define it, and what was practiced before you introduced that notion?
Much of the world we live in has been designed – not by today's design profession, but by people over the history of civilization. And I mean all of it: The objects we wear, live in and rely on as well as the ideas, beliefs, laws and customs that govern our lives are all artificial. If you look at the history of design, it really started out as artists making tableware more attractive. That was Wedgwood, the British company. Designers were thought to be good at making things more attractive. The whole field essentially was an adjunct of industry to improve sales and profits through appearance. The way I got into design, I was a psychologist and cognitive scientist studying memory and attention, looking at why people made errors. I was called in when the accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant happened in 1979. We were asked to explain why the operators made such horrible errors. We determined that they did the best job they could, but the plant was badly designed, almost as if to cause errors. That led me to think you have to understand how people use technology. It turned out that industrial designers, psychologists and computer scientists were working on the same issues. As we started to talk to each other and work with each other, our ideas merged into what is now called human-centered design.

Designers like you were and continue to be instrumental in creating compelling, irresistible objects and services. How much responsibility does your profession carry for the downsides of capitalism, such as consumerism, waste streams and environmental degradation?
Designers are at the heart of many of the problems that we face in the world today, but I don't blame designers. Designers are victims as well, because the whole field exists as a middle ⟶

Available online
Watch the video interview with Don Norman online:
rolandberger.com/en/norman

The godfather of UX

Don Norman became the first user experience architect at Apple Computer in 1993 and ran the company's Advanced Technology Group before starting his own firm in 1998. Since 2014, he has headed the University of California, San Diego's Design Lab. His latest book, *Design for a Better World*, was published in 2023. He has established the Don Norman Design Award to honor early-career designers whose work enhances society.

level of the infrastructure to do what they're asked to do: We help companies succeed. That means we have to help them increase their sales and profits.

Perhaps the idea of what design should accomplish has been false all along ...
Designers have always been proud of their craftsmanship, but it's a narrow education. If you go to a traditional design school, you may be trained in the history of design, but not the history of the world or different cultures, politics or business. Second, the design school is very seldom considered the most important one. It's usually lumped in with art or architecture. But designers are neither. Artists are creating for themselves, while designers are creating for other people. That's a big difference in the mindset, and yet many designers think they need to come up with things that are unique and original. The notion of trying to make something always original is what creates all the waste instead of making something incrementally better every year. Design is about finding the right solutions to the underlying issues.

Your book *The Design of Everyday Things*, which delves into the essence of human-centered design, is a classic. What made you decide to write another book as you approach 90?
I started thinking back over my career and what contribution I could make because the world is a mess. It's getting worse and worse, and almost every technology that exists is changing rapidly. Today's world is dominated by what's left of modernism, where technology, science and economics rule. We overemphasize measuring everything, even things that cannot be measured, which turns almost all aspects of life into abstract, meaningless numbers. True, my books have made things easier to use and understand. That's important, but it's not going to change the world. I realized the problems are well known – even the solutions are well known, but very few people are using them. Why is that? The problem is human behavior.

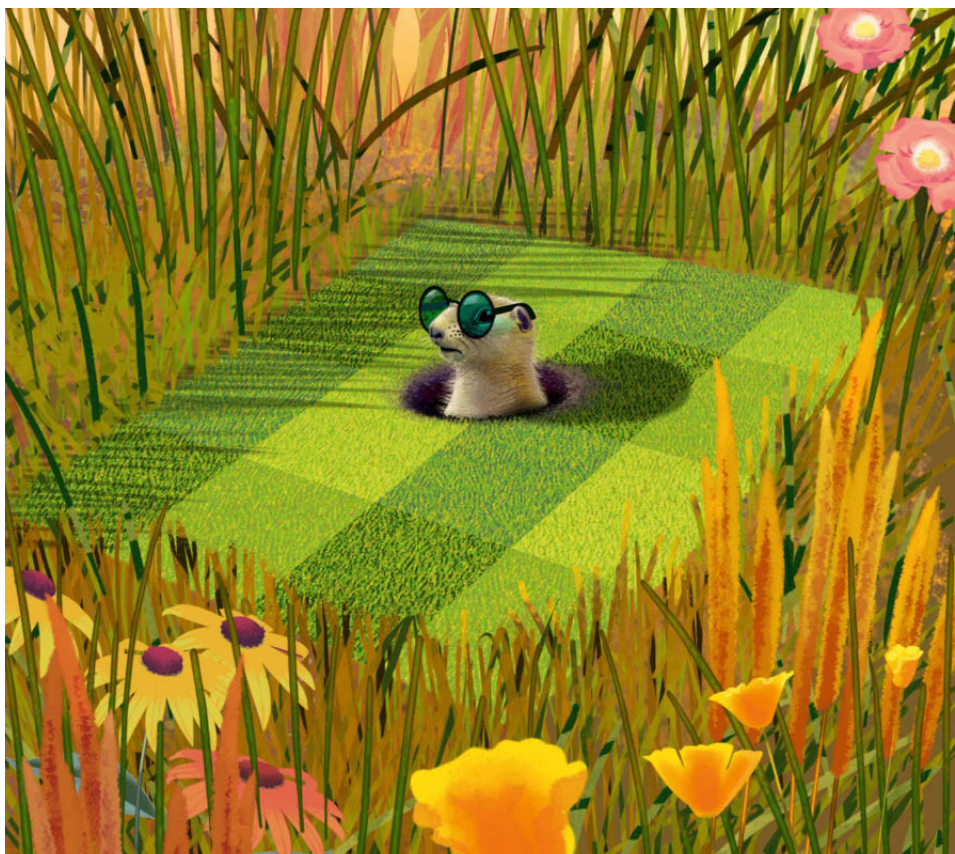
Your new mantra is humanity-centered design. What differentiates it from your previous approach?
In my book *The Design of Everyday Things*, I talked about four principles of human-centered design. Today, I am saying those principles are wrong. They still may be the best way when we're making something for millions of people, but what's left out is the problem of sustainability, or what economists call externalities. When we make these beautiful objects, when we select materials and do the mining to extract them, do we wonder about the impact on the environment? What about the manufacturing process that pollutes the air and the business model that wants people to buy new products every couple of years? We also make it difficult to repair and replace parts, leading to mountains

The artificial naming of the gopher as a pest

1 **The gopher is a reasonable being**
A gopher is not trying to ruin your manicured lawn with its holes – it is simply living as it has evolved to do. It is being its natural self.

2 **The garden you see is designed**
People like grass trimmed. And people don't like animals, "pests" (or other plants, i.e. "weeds"), that disturb this environment.

3 **Consider the world's ailments**
How many problems can be reduced to a fundamental issue of liking naturalness, but only as long as it doesn't interfere with how we see things?



of electronic trash all over the world. Every digital product, too, has to come to life on a physical product which we need to purchase and which requires energy. On top of all that, we devise systems that are addictive, attracting your attention at all times. Human-centered design only focused on the person actually using something. Going forward, we have to think about the impact on the entire planet, or what I call humanity.

Are designers ready to heed your call to take the whole picture into account?
I think design is very much undervalued and could be one of the critical fields to do things better. But designers themselves are not ready because they have a powerful method but don't know specific topics. Designers are usually stuck in the middle of a company. How many CEOs of large companies came from design? I think the answer is zero. How many chief design officers exist in large companies? Perhaps 20. Why? Because usually engineers get promoted and go off and get an MBA degree. Only some designers have begun doing that, but as you get promoted, you stop working in your field and instead your job is to make the company succeed. There is a second challenge. Today, we also have to understand how our products impact the world, including politics. Designers and artists hate business and politics, but you're not going to make a major change in the world without changing the political scene. In short, designers are responsible for the mess we're in, but at the same time it's not their fault. It's how they were brought up and trained. They don't have the power to make a change. Not yet.

To what extent is this a generational problem? Have we just reached a point where a new crop of designers will come in and move beyond this blind belief in modernism and technology?
It is a trend, but it's not necessarily because younger people are coming along. It's because society has finally reached a different understanding of all these issues, which are not really new. Prompted by climate change, storms, floods and droughts, we're beginning to see the impact of all the harm we've done, and that's driving change.

What can companies do to address the problem? Is it just about giving designers the proper role and more power?
I think it's up to the design profession. How do you stop destroying the environment? The solution is called the circular economy, which is basically copying nature where everything that grows eventually dies and becomes the basis for new growth. That insight changes the nature of a company. If you are a designer who wants to use biologically recyclable or reusable materials, you need to tell the executives: We're doing it wrong. But you can't just complain. Executives want you to come to them with solutions. But the circular economy isn't a solution – it's a concept. You have to show them how to implement the circular economy and how much it will cost. If you design things that are easy to repair and will last, my sales will go down. You have to address how the company will continue to stay in business.

Have designers been able to come up with solutions that mesh with your ideas and still appeal to business leaders?
I think there's a wonderful solution that designers should be experts at. It's called systems and service design. If you change the model from building things for sale to building things as services, you might have a whole new, lifelong job, because any product is actually a service. I buy a cup because it's a service to me: It holds water and keeps it cool or it keeps my coffee hot. A camera is wonderful, too, because it offers me experiences that I can relive. The same is true for the engines on big planes. Companies like Rolls-Royce and General Electric no longer sell the engines – they sell you flight hours and service options. To become a great designer, you must be a good businessperson first and, for societal benefit, you must become an expert in the way cultures operate. ■

> **"Executives want you to come to them with solutions. But the circular economy isn't a solution – it's a concept."**
> **– Don Norman**

Bad design is not inevitable

If something seems logical and sensible, that may just be the way it was when you were born – a construct, not a natural fact. To change our way of being means to effectively change almost everything: the structures of how we live and behave as well as the things we make.

Prepare to be recaffeinated

Now that the new working-from-home routines have taken hold, what will it take to get everybody back to the office and be productive? Threats? Praise? A raise? How about a good old cup of joe ...

BY **Bennett Voyles** ILLUSTRATIONS BY **Changyu Zou**

HOW DO YOU GET PEOPLE to come into the office? In the pre-pandemocene, it was easy: You fired them if they didn't. Today, managers are trying various blends of promises and threats, with mixed results. But CEOs who haven't resigned themselves to a slippered workforce may have one last card up their cuffed sleeve: a cup of coffee. In one recent survey of 2,050 US workers by OnePoll for Flavia (a beverage equipment provider that admittedly has an interest in promoting beverage consumption), nearly half said a free beverage was the perk that would lure them in from home – and for two-thirds of that group, hot coffee was the drink they had in mind.

On the face of it, it's hard to see why a cup of coffee would be so tempting. It's not as if it were hard to get: It's estimated that humanity drinks 2.25 billion cups of the bitter black liquid every day. In the US, people drink more coffee than water (both tap and bottled), according to the National Coffee Association, spending about $1,000 per person per year. Europe is equally in thrall to the drink. After all, Italy is viewed as the home of fancy brews and the inventor of the ubiquitous cappuccino.

Then again, coffee does seem to be something of a miracle drug when it comes to worker satisfaction and productivity. Feelings about coffee are so strong that even looking at a picture of a cup of coffee can make us feel more alert, what experts refer to as physiological priming. "People often encounter coffee-related cues, or think about coffee, without actually ingesting it," according to Sam Maglio, an associate professor in the department of management at University of Toronto Scarborough and the Rotman School of Management. Maglio found in one study he co-authored that even such an imaginary cup can still have real effects: "People who experience physiological arousal ... as the result of priming and not drinking coffee itself see the world in more specific, detailed terms."

And once we're clutching that hot cup, coffee can even change group dynamics and make work appear more satisfying. Take it from the experts at the Coffee Center, a multidisciplinary institute at the University of California, Davis. Together with researchers at Ohio State University, they ran two experiments involving group settings. Groups that drank coffee before undertaking a task rated their team's contribution – and their own – higher than a second group that imbibed after the task →

was completed. To dive deeper into whether the perceived productivity boost stemmed from the caffeine or the act of consuming coffee together, the researchers ran a second experiment where the control group drank decaf. Turns out that members of the caffeinated group stayed more on topic than their peers and contributed more in discussions.

Working under the influence

How much of those effects are mere correlation or show real causation is another question. But regardless of the precise nature of the psychological or physiological attraction, people have associated coffee with work for at least 300 years. During that time span, coffee beans have become one of the world's most beloved legal drug delivery mechanism. Today, they are grown in more than 70 countries and keep an estimated 125 million people employed.

Although tea, hot chocolate and coffee were all popular when they were first introduced to the British Isles in the 16th and 17th centuries, coffee was always considered the preeminent business beverage. People liked the idea of a sociable drink that made you alert rather than drunk, according to Brian Cowan, a professor of history at McGill University and author of *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse*. Tea and chocolate had those properties too, but tea was more closely associated with women and domesticity, while hot chocolate had a reputation as a pleasure drink, even an aphrodisiac.

The rise of the coffeehouse played an important role in associating coffee with work. There were very few offices before the Victorian era, and the British often used the coffeehouse as a kind of coworking space. Some coffeehouses became associated with particular professions and lines of business. Lloyd's Coffee House, for instance, eventually evolved into a global exchange for maritime insurance. Stock trading and auctions went on at other coffeehouses, while politicians and theater people had their own haunts. Doctors even met their patients in the coffeehouse, according to Cowan.

Whether the task at hand is to debate, diagnose or delegate, coffee could be just the thing to get productivity buzzing, but only in a communal setting like the office. "Coffee is a product that stimulates sociability, which is why [we] like to drink it in places where [that] is represented much more than at home," says Moreno Faina, director of the Università del Caffè in Trieste, Italy, a school sponsored by the illycaffè coffee company that trains growers, baristas and coffee lovers.

A GROWING BUZZ
Psychologists and neuroscientists are discovering more and more evidence that coffee helps open doors to better social connections, including at work.

In fact, some say the communal aspect of a coffee break is what's important, not the cup. Take it from Robin Dunbar, a professor emeritus of evolutionary psychology at the University of Oxford best known for Dunbar's Number – a theory that humans are hardwired to maintain social relationships with no more than 150 people. He insists it's the face-to-face aspect of a coffee break that matters. "I think our experience of Zoom meetings during lockdown persuaded us that Zoom coffee worked OK with family, worked for a bit with friends and by and large didn't work for colleagues," he says. "That was because of the way the dynamics of natural conversations constrained interaction in Zoom environments."

Neuroscientists have now indeed documented measurable evidence that the faces we see on video calls have less of a stimulating effect on the brain

> "Coffee stimulates sociability, which is why we like to drink it in places where that is represented much more than at home."
>
> – Moreno Faina, Director of the Università del Caffè

than if we see them in real life. One of the study's authors, Yale neuroscientist Joy Hirsch, described Zoom as "an impoverished social communication system relative to in-person conditions."

A blended approach

Which brings us back to the way coffee could be the perfect lubricant to get office life moving again – and with our neurons firing at full capacity. It's well documented that companies are struggling to bring employees back to their desks, even for a few days a week. Office vacancy rates in the US hit an all-time high of nearly 20% at the end of 2023. Companies, then, need to find ways "to make the work environment more socially engaging so that people want to come into work," Dunbar says. "Organizations work well when the relationships between workers are personal and social. We then do things out of obligation to each other, rather than because the people in the C-suite tell us we have to."

This doesn't necessarily mean coffee is the only way to build and nurture those relationships – it's just one of the most powerful ideas that has percolated through society. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, for instance, big industrialists encouraged connections by building workers communal facilities, such as social, tennis and philosophical discussion clubs, according to Dunbar. "Things like tennis probably wouldn't work so well now, so we have to think more creatively," he adds.

One caffeine-free possibility is a singing group, "because singing together bonds groups of strangers very quickly," Dunbar explains. As an example, he points to the formation of hospital choirs in Norway, where they have been shown to reduce staff illness rates dramatically, and in South African government offices, where choirs helped integrate the bureaucracy when apartheid ended. Some of Dunbar's colleagues have theorized that humanity developed music precisely because singing, playing and dancing can kick-start social bonding, giving us an evolutionary edge over animals that didn't play as well with others long before the invention of the filter or the French press.

But beware: before you shell out five figures for a new Victoria Arduino Black Eagle espresso machine, make sure your employees don't just show up to sip some joe on your dime and slip away. Workplace experts have been quick to flag a new phenomenon they call "coffee badging." It's shorthand for employees who can't resist the siren song of a steaming cup but just come in to swipe their badge, pick up a free cappuccino and then slink straight back home. On the other hand, if a coffee-badging break helps your team to bond – or even get their work done – maybe the sophisticated double shot is still worth the investment. ■

24 hours

The minimum time frame over which study subjects displayed improved performance in memory recognition tasks following a dose of 200 milligrams of caffeine, the equivalent of about two cups of coffee.

SOURCE: JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

Guided by gratitude

Veteran food executive Niren Chaudhary explains the values that define his leadership and how they were shaped by the loss of his two daughters.

INTERVIEW BY **Emanuele Savettiere**
ILLUSTRATIONS BY **Julia Zimmermann**

Available online
Read the extended interview with Niren Chaudhary online:
rolandberger.com/en/chaudhary

Niren Chaudhary is chairman of the board of Panera Brands, the fast casual restaurant company behind Panera Bread, Caribou Coffee and Einstein Bros Bagels. This interview was conducted at the Global Peter Drucker Forum.

↘ How can leaders impact the complex contexts in which we live and operate?
Leadership is a privilege because it gives you the opportunity to be a force multiplier for good. By that I mean to have an impact, not only on the enterprise value creation, but also on unlocking dreams of people that work in the company, serving the community, protecting the planet. To do all of that, leaders have to inspire trust and be trustworthy. They need to have clarity of values.

↘ Where does one come into these values?
We get them from our parents, from our spiritual practice, and most importantly, from our life experiences. One of the most profound life experiences has been the loss of my two daughters: Aisha, who passed away when she was 18, and Tanya, who passed away when she was eight months old. Aisha was 13 when she was told she had five years to live. She made every single day count, every moment magical and added this very unique perspective of life. Her story is one of courage, gratitude and generosity. These are the three values I have embraced. From the loss of my daughters, I have learned to become a more humanistic, more empathetic, more compassionate leader.

↘ A lot of businesses find that compassion is an easy thing to talk about when times are good. How can you hold on to those same values when times get tough?
It's always harder to stand behind your values when times are tough. That's when you really get tested. Whether it is good times or bad times, you can make tough decisions, but you can always do it with compassion and care, whether it's for customers or employees. ■

PHOTOS: ALEX GAGNE, COURTESY OF FARAH NAYERI & GEOFF POULTON, GIULIA DALEY

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OLIVER BURKEMAN,
AUTHOR OF *FOUR THOUSAND WEEKS: TIME MANAGEMENT FOR MORTALS*

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