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In Praise of the Pause

Why embracing the space between tasks makes you a better leader

French composer Achille-Claude Debussy once said, "Music is the space between the notes."

Well then, leadership is the space between the tasks. *The white space in an M.C. Escher drawing, if you will.* A leader's ability to approach that space with intention is what will ultimately transform a high performer into an inspirational leader.

According to the 2010 Global Workforce Study by Towers Watson, the world could use some more inspirational leaders right now.

"Employees want leaders who are competent and inspiring, and question leaders' current abilities in both areas," the study reports, raising the question: "Are leadership development programs focusing on the right things?"

Chances are, you've received training on the "hard skills" required to drive results for your company, but have you developed the skills to move from high performer to great leader?

Leadership is not simply what you do, but *how* you do it. How you *show up*. Whether you know it or not, you are engaging in a trust-building exercise with your employees every day. It's up to you to approach each interaction with an intentionality that conveys both confidence and competence.

The first step in being more intentional is to recognize the opportunities to do so. Are you plowing through your schedule focused solely on each individual task, or are you considering how the pieces of your day fit together? Are you leaving touch-points with employees to chance or are you planning for each as an opportunity?

Expanding your purview beyond the daily tasks will help you begin to embrace the space between them—to pause, let others in, and be deliberate in the way you tackle what's next.

Ten Times to Press Pause

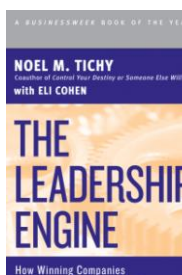
Taking time to pause requires you to be deliberate in order to resume motion. (We're guessing that wasn't covered in your leadership training curriculum.) Becoming more intentional starts with the most basic tasks. Here are ten great moments to pause:

1. Before writing your to-do list. *Ask yourself: What's most important? How do I align my activities with our organizational and team priorities?*

2. Before entering your team meeting. *Consider: What do I want to say? What does my team want or need to know?*
3. During your team meeting. *Create moments for your employees to step into, to engage you as a leader, ask questions and contribute ideas.*
4. While telling a story. *Remember, leaders should be storytellers. A good storyteller knows that a well-placed pause can be just as important as a carefully crafted sentence.*
5. Before closing your office door. *Think about the message a closed door will send. How will you make sure the team knows you're still accessible if they need something?*
6. Before giving someone feedback. *Ask yourself: What specific behavior or action do I want to commend or call out? What is my expectation?*
7. Before getting feedback. *Ask yourself: How will I use this information to be a better leader? What questions will I ask to gain additional insight?*
8. Before voicing disagreement in a discussion. *Consider: Do I understand his/her position? Am I legitimately adding to the discussion or solution, or trying to advance my own agenda?*
9. After hearing important news. *Reflect: Do I understand it? Can I translate this effectively for my team?*
10. Before leaving for the day. *Ask: Who will I thank today? What behaviors or contributions will I recognize?*

Our Take On It: Commentary and opinion on the books that shape our thinking

THE BOOK: *The Leadership Engine*



Noel Tichy's leadership classic picks up where too many other management experts leave off: with the details. Rather than setting forth a unique set of leadership best practices, *The Leadership Engine* concentrates on teaching leaders how to put simple-in-theory concepts in place.

The book's premise is straightforward: in the best, most successful companies, leadership development is not an idea that can be outsourced or even delegated to HR or Organizational Effectiveness. It is the leaders themselves who do the leadership development. These leaders have a "teachable point of view" and invest the time and energy into teaching it.

Tichy asserts that "Winning companies value leaders, not just at the top, but at all levels... They have cultures that expect and reward leadership, and they actively put time and resources into developing them."

Case studies of notable leaders fill the book and illustrate how a "teachable point of view" (the ability to draw from personal experiences and relate them to other's) is not only a skill which builds other leaders, but a skill to pass on.

Tichy believes that "A leader's greatest contribution to an organization is the ability to develop other winning leaders." The strongest leaders are most known for their ability to teach, and developing others is their legacy.

There are dozens of ideas to mull over in this book and you'll likely find yourself gravitating to different sections (including the useful 100-page workbook) at different moments in your journey as a leader.

Recommended for:

- Mentors
- Leaders at any stage of their career, at any level of the organization
- HR leaders making the case for a deeper organizational commitment to leadership development