

# Pauses Really Do Refresh

BY KEVIN CASHMAN

**I**N OUR HECTIC 24-7 GLOBAL LIVES, is it any wonder that we go on vacation and find ourselves envying the guy running the scuba shop on the beach? We've all been there: checking out the real estate in a resort spot and wondering, "Maybe I could slow down the pace a bit and live here. ..." It is not surprising that this idea frequently surfaces. Our hyper-performance and hyper-connectedness push us, and those around us, to the limit physiologically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. We persist, through alternating doses of heavy caffeine and light cabana time. Unfortunately, the low dosage of down time rarely restores us for the unrelenting and escalating demands.

As a result, for most leaders, the work-life balance ideal has become increasingly more important *and* more difficult to achieve. Our days

are like a full-out sprint that rapidly becomes a triathlon of meetings, metrics and mania.

If leadership means crossing boundaries and helping others to go beyond what is typical or average, then how can we, as leaders, transcend the conventional notions of career-life balance to create a new way of living and leading? This is no easy task. A new way requires a new mind-set, a new approach and new multidimensional behaviors. Is it possible that our pushing and pressure have become counterproductive, especially when complexity and importance escalate? Take a moment to consider a fresh, counterintuitive way of leading: *to step back, to pause in order to refresh ourselves, inspire others and catalyze new possibilities.* Try these Transformative Pauses to energize yourself, your team and your organization to move from transactive management to transformative leadership.



Illustrations by KATIE EDWARDS

## Transformative Pause One:

### Pause to Push the Boundaries.

**H**ow often does our vision narrow to the immediacies of the moment, nearly forgetting our longer-term strategy and compelling purpose? The next time you feel the restrictive pull of managing the short term, take a deep individual and collective breath and pause to consider:

- **What is important to our customers?**
- **How can we see this from a new perspective?**
- **What would be the optimal long-term approaches?**

Stepping back from the immediate situation to address the bigger context of self, others and innovation may be the key to inspiring yourself and others to realize new potentials.

Steven Baert, head of human resources at Novartis, the global life-sciences company, shared an aligned way of looking at this: “As results-driven leaders, we must have something to counterbalance all this nonstop action and striving. Developing an inquisitive, thoughtful approach to complex, important issues harnesses our drive by consciously serving our people and patients in a more purposeful manner. As strange as it sounds, slowing down helps us to speed up to what is significant and let go of what is not.”

## Transformative Pause Two:

### Multiply Energy to Generate Sustainable, Differentiated Value.

**N**ineteenth-century philosopher-poet Ralph Waldo Emerson understood this dynamic when he posited, “The world belongs to the energetic.” Leaders multiply energy to fuel strategy, awaken mission and inspire followers to create unique value. Interestingly, when we are multiplying our energy and that of others,

we are equipped to face volatility, unpredictability, complexity and ambiguity because our vitality and resilience are bigger than the challenges we confront. Energized leaders “flip” the turmoil, transforming volatility to vision, unpredictability to understanding, complexity to clarity and ambiguity to agility.

A hard-charging CEO with whom we worked nearly did not survive the personal and organizational chaos he was facing. A series of health, relational and business crises captured his attention and awakened a new commitment to energy management. He first attended to his own vitality by dropping 25 pounds, getting fit, taking real vacations and restoring his resilience. After this was established, he provided incentives to employees who joined their newly built fitness center. He ensured his top people took vacations or got docked on their bonuses. He established a culture of healthier off-sites and began to have walking meetings rather than keeping participants confined to their chairs. Commenting on this three- to four-year journey, he said, “I honestly do not know where my energy came from before. Clearly, I was running on fumes until my vehicle, my body, crashed.” Sustainable leadership becomes more possible when we proactively build up our own energy and then multiply it in others.

## Transformative Pause Three:

### Generate Energy by Sharing Compelling Stories.

**W**hen our energy is calm, focused and above the fray, we are more on top of the challenges and “the game” slows down, as it does when a great athlete is fully “in the zone.” When our energy is low or manic, everything seems on top of us and “the game” speeds up and starts to slip away.

Using inspiring stories to

illustrate values, purpose and appreciation is a crucial language for multiplying sustainable energy and drive in an organization.

I was recently conducting a keynote in Europe with the chairman and CEO of Bayer CropScience, Liam Condon, and his top 100. Practicing “Stories as the Language of Leadership,” Condon told his life/career story and explained how it aligned so precisely with the purpose-driven story of the organization: “Science for a Better Life.” You could have heard a pin drop in the room. The authenticity and relevance of the stories—personal and organizational—energized and inspired an experienced senior team. Take a pause and consider the power of the language of leadership: authentic, relevant, purpose-driven stories.

## Transformative Pause Four:

### See Purpose as Elevating Performance to New Heights.

**A**s leaders, we rise or fall in relation to our sense of purpose-fueled energy, that unshakable awareness that in the midst of crazy difficult challenges, we will prevail and make a lasting difference. While even great leaders like Mandela or Gandhi experienced moments of low energy, what they sought to contribute was stimulated and magnified by the same crises and challenges that threatened to destroy them.

What is the purpose that would most energize and inspire you and your organization to elevate together and serve something bigger now? Ludwig Hantson, CEO of Baxalta, the bioscience and pharmaceutical spinoff of Baxter, has rallied himself, his team and his organization around the customer-centric theme of “Sparking Life.” Nearly everything in the organization is part of this purpose to foster and extend life. The energy in the corporation has risen to new heights because the new reality

is vitalizing and worthy of individual and collective dedication. Employees are excited to step up and contribute their own “spark” to impacting the lives of people, inside and outside the firm. They now have a purpose bigger than product or performance, a purpose that will likely drive performance to new levels.

## Transformative Pause Five:

### Focus on Coaching and Authenticity.

**M**anagers seek to be “right,” but leaders need to be “real.” The evolution from critic to coach and from accuracy to authenticity is fundamental to transformative leadership. Last year, a new CEO came to me for help in activating his vision. He is brilliant, strategic and creative—not a bad profile for the rigors of corporate leadership today. However, his precise, critical, discerning intellect and his need to be “right” in nearly every situation was squeezing the life and collaborative potential out of his team. After some very important and tough work together, he began to see himself and his impact more clearly. Commenting on his insights, he reflected, “I was always trained to be right. Little did I know that one of the most important aspects of senior leadership is to be real. Letting go of my need to control the outcomes, I now see that the collaborative, innovative results are actually better. The more I coach, facilitate and support my people, the more they rise up to the tough demands we face with greater energy and impact. I thought the team was not stepping up to activate the vision, but I discovered that I was the one who needed to re-envision my own leadership for them to step up. I step back, I support, and then they step up. It is counterintuitive and amazing to experience. Don’t get me wrong; I can always step in, if necessary. But it is no longer my first and only response.”



## Transformative Pause Six:

### Use Questions to Innovate.

**Q**uestions are the language of innovation and transformation. The right question at the right moment can stop us in our tracks, force deeper insight and allow us to examine new perspectives. From our research, we know that innovative leaders ask questions at four times the rate of asserting their expertise. This constant inquiry, even when innovators think they know the subject matter well enough, engages deeper, broader, fresher and more integrative outcomes. A colleague at Korn Ferry, Andrew Pek, an author and thought leader in innovation, postulates that a new type of acumen is required nowadays; he calls it “integrative intelligence,” and it is precisely the “connecting the dots, as well as creating new dots” skill required in today’s marketplace. Becoming adept at the language of integrative intelligence—compelling questions—is

one of the most underdeveloped competencies in leaders today.

The next time you are in a meeting with a complex and important topic and you think you have it figured out, take a pause and ask yourself, “What question would take this discussion to a deeper, broader or more significant level?” Keep the collaborative inquiry going a bit longer and see where your questions lead you. You may be amazed to see yourself, and the group, generating more innovative potential.

■ Pausing to energize transformative leadership is a complex, multidimensional journey. Consider purpose, stories, questions, coaching and authenticity as initial practices to begin building the energy required to face the complexity and demands in our lives. And, if these principles turn out to be less than helpful to you, then you just might want to take a different kind of pause and go buy that scuba shop in the Caribbean! //

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**Kevin Cashman** is a senior partner at Korn Ferry. He focuses on CEO and executive development and is the best-selling author of “Leadership From the Inside Out” and “The Pause Principle.”