Pause and Effect

By Dave Wendland

In our frenetic, rapid-fire world, the pressure of providing an instant response is always upon us. With smartphones, iPhones, Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr literally at our fingertips, it’s easier than ever to reflexively reply. But what effect does this high-speed response mentality have on us? What risks does it pose to successful communication?

The inner voice

Carly Fiorina, former CEO of Hewlett-Packard, recently spoke at the HDMA Business and Leadership Conference. She addressed the importance of “brain power”, and the wisdom that can be gained by making a conscious decision to stop and evaluate all angles of a problem, before committing to a solution.

Paraphrasing her sage advice, Ms. Fiorina suggested, “Wherever you go in life, however fast you’re going, remember this: whenever you are in doubt, pause. Take a moment. Look at all of your options.”

Pause. Think about Ms. Fiorina’s suggestion for a moment. That single word feels like a breath of fresh air, doesn’t it? My mother used to refer to that pause as the “inner voice.” It means halting to listen to your sub-conscious and evaluate a situation from all vantage points before you respond in a reactionary, short-sighted manner. Too often, however, we place pressure on ourselves to respond instantly, without taking the time to consider if we are responding wisely.

Courage to pause

As a frequent public speaker, I often need to remind myself that presenting to a group, be it large or small, should be a dialogue. If I take a moment to catch my breath, it’s not just for dramatic effect. In that space, I’m letting my audience reflect on and internalize what I’ve said, and formulate their own questions if necessary. Embracing this moment of silence gives us all time to gather our thoughts and continue with purpose.

In everyday conversation, whether in-person or digitally, those thoughtful moments are vital to effective dialogue.

24-hour sleep test

Our company’s founder, Dave Hamacher, employed a philosophy I much admired. Dave believed in a 24-hour respite prior to making any important business decision. This allowed everyone involved in the process an opportunity to examine the pros and cons without the pressure of a snap judgment. Often a good night’s sleep revealed new insight and revised opinions.

That said, today’s pace of business does not always afford us the luxury of a 24-hour “sleep test.” The need-it-now mindset and pressure to move fast and furious have compressed the 24-hour deliberation period to a snap 24-second turnaround. Fear of losing an opportunity drives business leaders to jump into the water first and then figure out how to swim. Look no further than the Affordable Care Act, which political leaders assured was too lengthy to read but would be examined after passage. We might have been saved a lot of headaches if they’d simply stopped to read the document before setting it to practice.

We all need to listen to our inner voice, take a moment to breathe, and allow ourselves time to reflect on decisions in a thoughtful manner if we hope to make positive decisions that will benefit us long term.

Think about it this way…

Don’t simply pause for effect; pause so that you can reflect.