

Ep #195: The Art of Strategic Slowing Down to Speed Up



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With Your Host

Maisie Hill

The Maisie Hill Experience with Maisie Hill

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This is episode 195, The Art of Strategic Slowing Down to Speed Up.

If you want to do things differently but need some help making it happen then tune in for your weekly dose of coaching from me, Maisie Hill, Master Life Coach and author of *Period Power*. Welcome to *The Maisie Hill Experience*.

Alright, folks, welcome back to the podcast. I'm a bit sore today. I'm a bit bruised and banged up because I went flying through a wooden fence yesterday. Now, it sounds worse than it is. I'm okay. My shoulder and neck are a bit sore. My pinky finger is the worst actually, it's swollen and it's blue and the thumb on my other hand is also bruised. So I'm okay, I'm up and walking around, there's no issues. I'm having lots of hot baths and things, but it's really just my pinky and then my other thumb is limiting my ability to do things. So of course this is related to a horse riding incident.

I had a horse riding lesson. My instructor and I will sometimes leave something near the environment that I'm riding in. We call it the school that we ride in. So that way, there's just something novel in the environment, and therefore my horse, Buttons, has to get used to those different objects being there. And so rather than spooking at them and being afraid of them, because horses are often very afraid of inanimate objects as I've found out on numerous occasions.

So the idea is then that he just becomes used to them and becomes desensitised to them rather than the riding school needing to always look the same and there be nothing that kind of interrupts things visually. So sometimes I'll leave a rug out that's kind of flapping around on a stable door or I'll leave a door open so it's different. And it's just an opportunity for him to learn to adjust to different scenarios.

So my instructor had left her waterproof coat on the fence, and it's a riding coat. And this particular brand of riding coat, it's a lot like a dry robe, except that it's got these straps that you can secure around your thighs. So you can wear it when you're out riding. And Buttons was really wary of it initially.

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And then he got used to it, but he still wasn't going very close to it. And then as we were walking past, he went really close to it and my foot caught in one of the straps.

So as we kept walking, the coat was pulled off the fence, at which point Buttons just took off because now there's a flappy monster coming after us. And as he canters away, it's not going anywhere because it's still on my foot. So he just starts bucking. And there was this tiny moment where I was like, "Yes, I've managed to stay on with all his bucks." And then he just sped up and there was no steering, no brakes involved. And he just charged right up to the fence where he stopped but I did not and so I went through it.

Thankfully it wasn't that bad. It could have been so much worse. So, talking of speed, today we're exploring a concept that will sound possibly completely counterintuitive to you initially, but it's going to change the way you think about progress and timelines. And hopefully help with issues around urgency and rushing. So this is about slowing down in order to speed up. Sounds like a paradox, it just doesn't make any sense.

So hang tight and I'm going to break it down for you because this is really about the power of slowing down, possibly even pausing or seemingly pausing. And how doing so actually gets you there wherever there is, faster. So think about archery. I want you to imagine an archer pulling back their bow string. There's this moment of apparent stillness right before the arrow launches towards its target. And the arrow has to actually move backwards first so it's not even stopping. It's going backwards but moving backwards isn't a setback.

It's actually this critical gathering of energy that is necessary for propelling forward with greater power and also with precision. Both of those are important, power, speed, precision. So it's necessary for the trajectory of that arrow, and it's the same in our lives and the same in our businesses. Sometimes stepping back is what's necessary to propel us forward with more focus and with more impact. But this is challenging to do because we

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live in a world that is typically obsessed with fast results and constant growth.

So taking a moment to pause can sometimes feel like it's the worst idea ever, because it's actually so radical but it's often the best idea ever. So let's start there and that's the fear of slowing down. There's been several occasions in the last five years where I have told people that I wanted to have a non-growth year in terms of numbers. So what that means is, instead of focusing on increasing revenue, I've chosen to focus on other things. And there's some people that I interact with, colleagues, mentors, coaches who totally get that and they're on board with it, they see the value in it.

But there's occasionally someone who is mortified at the idea of that because in business, growth and scalability are the words that everyone loves. And it's always about more and more and more and how to get there quicker. And the idea of slowing down or even pausing is just abhorrent to a lot of business folks, often men actually. And it's a hard thing to wrap your head around if you are attached to numbers and specifically revenue and profit.

So if you use numbers in order to feel secure about yourself and your business and you have no other ways of creating that security for yourself regardless of what the numbers are doing, which is what I'm a fan of being able to do. This is what I teach my clients as well is not needing to rely on external things in order to feel secure and safe. That doesn't mean the numbers aren't important. The numbers are always important in business. There's no getting away from that.

But if you are relying on numbers in order to feel secure, then you won't want to focus on other things because then that's going to feel very scary to you. That will feel like the worst idea ever. But this is how businesses get very messy. So you can be selling, you can be having money coming in the business, it can be profitable, but your clients might not be having a great experience of your business. Or the back end of your business is such a

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mess that it's hard for your team to work with and things take longer and there are headaches.

And everything is packed together instead of being a smooth sequence of events that happens behind the scenes, and it all runs smoothly without you needing to do much. There's always things to do, guaranteed. Again, you can't get away from that either. But when your business is a mess on the back end of things, then things don't work, they're always breaking and it's stressful and unpleasant for you, your team and your customers. And there's always things that need to get fixed.

So what we're talking about here is slowing down in order to fix those things. And this can be the case for you, whether you're talking about your work, your business, if you have one, or something in your personal life as well. I'm going to give you some examples of this. I'm a huge fan of slowing down. Even to the point of seemingly pausing, I say seemingly because it's not actually a pause, a lot is happening. Just as there is when the arrow is being pulled back.

And there might not be growth in terms of numbers, but often there is. When you focus on other things, sometimes the numbers take care of themselves. It's really interesting. But aside from all the numbers, there's a lot of other growth that's happening. The kind of growth that can only happen when you slow things down and address them so that you can then move forward with clarity and velocity. There's this unhelpful belief that if you're not moving forward, you're falling behind, but constant motion does not equate to progress.

And what goes unacknowledged is the power of discernment and reflection that comes with slowing down. And this isn't about stalling or stopping your momentum, it's about an opportunity to course correct, to address things that need to be sorted in order for you to continue in a sustainable way. So this is about quality. This is about longevity. And you can think this about your relationships. You can think about projects that you're working on or your own business if you happen to have one.

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But pausing is so uncomfortable for people because of the false comfort that we get from doing things in the moment. The dopamine hits from numbers and revenue and being busy, even, especially if your approach, whether it's conscious or subconscious is that more and faster is always better. But is that frenzy because it often is a frenzy of constant activity, is that genuinely pushing you forward, or is it just keeping you busy? And you can tell yourself that there's progress that's being made. In reality, that hustle is often masking that there's something essential that needs to be taken care of.

And when you're busy just rushing around all the time and doing all these things and telling yourself that they're the important things, you're not going to be able to do the deep sustainable growth. The other types of growth, the things that matter, the things that can only be done when you actually pull back, reflect on things, recalibrate, tend to the things that need tending to.

So slowing down is a strategic choice for long term success because when we slow down then we create the mental space to review things and to ask, "Well, is this working? Is there a better way? Why are we still doing it this way? Does it need to be changed or are we going to stick with things as they are?" And you might decide to stick with them as they are, but you're doing so in a very intentional way. It's different to just going along with things because that's how they've always been done. And it's these kinds of questions that are the seeds of innovation and help with efficiency.

And it's that taking the time to think deeply about these questions that ensures that our actions are not just swift, but also effective and aligned with our values and our greater goals, rather than just going and going and going until the wheels come off. Because if you don't take the time to slow down, something will make you slow down. Something will happen circumstantially, that means you have to slow down or stop. And nature doesn't go on and on without pausing.

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It's not a relentless push through all of the seasons, there's a time for rapid growth, a time to bloom, a time to shed and a time to hibernate. And all of the seasons are of equal importance, and each pause within a cycle is essential, and it's full of purpose. So why should our businesses or our personal growth be any different to that?

Same goes for the menstrual cycle. Think about the difference between when you keep going at the same momentum during the phase of your cycle, where you have less energy, which for many of you will be menstruation, your inner winter when you have your period. What's the difference between when you keep going versus when you get to pull back and do what feels good to you? Whether that's having a duvet day, going for a rejuvenating walk, a yoga class, whatever it is that you feel drawn to doing at that time, or you need to do during that time.

When you are able to do that, how does that impact the rest of your cycle? The same principle applies when you slow down, when you're in your inner winter, it creates energy for the rest of your cycle, allowing you to speed up. If you go flying out of the gate too soon, you end up knackered and depleted during the parts of your cycle where you usually have the most energy and enthusiasm.

The same goes for when you're ill, when you keep going, we often end up dragging out the illness and not doing the best quality work if we keep working. Actually letting yourself be ill in my personal and professional experience, speeds up the healing process and it also stops you from making costly mistakes that only slow you down further. So often we're lying to ourselves when we think that slowing down is costly, actually, keeping going can be costly.

So I found this great quote that Abraham Lincoln once said, which is, "Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe." Isn't that great? I think that quote just beautifully illustrates the effectiveness of preparation and not just jumping into action. Don't get me wrong, there's a time when that is the most useful as well. So we're talking

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here about knowing what to do and when. Time spent in preparation isn't time wasted, it enhances what we do, it speeds up the efficiency of that action phase.

So I've been doing this with my horse, Buttons in teaching him how to stand at the mounting block so that I can get on him. Because he would do this thing where he'd stand alongside the block beautifully. And then when I'd get onto the block, he'd take a step backwards and swing his hind end away from me so that I couldn't get on, or maybe I could have if I'd have rushed. But I want to teach my horse to be able to stand there for me to get on. I don't want to have to be racing and doing a flying leap to get on him.

So with my instructor's help, we've helped him to learn how to stand there and we just broke it down into these tiny blocks of things for him to learn. And then when we put all that together it allowed him to create that behaviour of standing and waiting for me to get on. And we slowed it right down because she and I shared the belief that taking it slowly would be the quickest way to succeed.

And for a while, that actually meant me standing at the block with him for a good five to ten minutes before I even attempted to get on, me not doing anything, not asking anything of him. Just teaching him that the mounting block is a place where he can come and relax. I'd give him some scratches, I'd just hang out next to him with a very relaxed posture. And then I go to get on, so let's say that it would take me 15 minutes, 'just to get on him'.

Getting on him was actually a big deal, but that was quicker than what I'd previously done a few times, which took around half an hour for me to get on him. Required someone else to help me in the end and didn't teach him any skills in the process. So trying to just get on him, that's the quick way. It was the slowest way. Slowing down allowed us to speed that process up. And now the skills that we've taught him have been embedded and I can get on straightaway. And he's learnt how to manage himself in those scenarios.

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So let's talk strategy. Lincoln's approach wasn't about wasting time. It was about making the time you spend doing the work as effective as possible. And sometimes that will actually be about rest and rejuvenation for some of you. I want you to see that as still doing something, we can tell ourselves we're not doing anything and yes, that is true, but you're also doing something. And this is particularly true for those of you who have or are currently experiencing burnout of some kind.

That's a really good example of the importance of slowing down in order to speed up or to speed up in a different way, not the way that landed you in burnout in the first place because there's a difference. But this requires you to be able to hold the tension of pausing or slowing down in the same way that the archer needs to hold the tension when they pull back the arrow. And it might require a lot of you.

And it might feel uncomfortable, but if you can manage your mind and you can be in that discomfort, then it pays off. So to integrate this concept into your life, just start by recognising signs that you might need to slow down a bit and address some things. So are there things that need to be sorted out that are harder to do when you're caught up in the day-to-day? Maybe there are indicators that you or other people could do with some time to recalibrate, to rethink things.

It might be that you or they are feeling overwhelmed, making more mistakes or just feeling less enthusiastic about work or personal life stuff. So these can all be indicators that it's time to take a step back and to rethink things and then step back into it. You can also implement regular times to review things into your schedule. I like to do this on a seasonal basis, so you can think about that as quarterly if you're in the world of business. It could also be a weekly review of tasks, quarterly assessment of goals.

This is why I encourage all the stuff inside the membership when we have a specific framework to review and assess things. And you can do that for a situation over the course of a week, a month or at the end of each season.

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But these built-in pauses really help to maintain your focus and ensure you are on the right track without burning out.

So one of my clients recently did this because in the membership we have an end of season review worksheet that you can fill in. And they went through it, and they shared in the community afterwards. They were really astonished because they had been looking back over the last few months and thinking, well, didn't make much progress, didn't get this done. This was my goal blah, blah, blah. And what they actually found was that there was significant growth, but they would have completely missed that had they not taken the time to step back to reflect on things.

And now they're moving into the autumn with a completely different perspective of themselves and of what matters to them. So time to review things, to assess stuff, really helps. And you can also just actually step away from your usual environment to do this. So I spoke about this in episode 123, Levelling Up, where I shared how I take time away from my home, from my work in order to assess things and to make decisions about what's next.

So I really recommend listening to that episode. It's been really fun hearing how you've all gone away and done the process that I shared in some way in your own life, because these aren't just breaks. They're strategic intervals to refine and possibly redefine your pathway. It might mean tweaking a method, completely overhauling things, ending something that just isn't working. It could be doubling down on the things that are working. You might get sudden unexpected insights, but those insights only come when we step back. And that doesn't mean you're doing nothing.

It is an active process even in the stillness that might be there. Now, what this inevitably brings up is how, how do I do this? Or I don't have the time to do this. We can't slow down, it'll be too costly. And I think I actually address some of these in the levelling up episode, so listen to that. But I'm going to give you some quick things here because I just want to tackle them head on.

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So the biggest thing to focus on is what you can do. And your brain might be telling you it's not possible at all. If you are a member, then make sure you get coached on this because if you have this thought, I guarantee it's showing up in other areas of your life as well. But so often we get hung up on what we can't do rather than seeing what is possible. And this requires us to be able to see all the grey rather than the black and white. So that all or nothing thinking, which is a cognitive distortion, i.e. an unhelpful thought pattern where we just go to the extremes.

So this approach of focusing on what is possible also means not being a perfectionist and thinking that if you can't do the fullest expression of something, then there's no point doing it at all. How often do we do that? And it's not actually true, but what we want to get to the bottom of is, why you're going to those places of how it's not possible. And my guess is that it's a way of not doing anything because if you tell yourself, well, there's no point unless I can do it in this particular way, then you don't have to bother. It's an excuse.

And it means in the context of the conversation today that you can just keep going even when there are negative consequences to doing that. But you get to stay in what's familiar rather than the discomfort of what's unknown and perhaps needing to manage your mind on all the thoughts that come tumbling in once you do slow down and you don't have the security of numbers, for example. Or it might not even be numbers, it might also be the approval of others.

There can be all sorts of external things that you're used to relying on, and take that away and things get real. So is it also true that you can't afford to slow down? Just for fun, play a game with yourself and see if there are places where that might not be true and what are the costs of not slowing down in the short term and in the long term? Let's say you continue as you have been, and you don't tend to the stuff that needs to be tended to. What are the potential costs of that?

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And there really is no right or wrong here because again, that's just a black and white way of thinking. This is all about your ability to discern what matters. Is this a time to speed up? Is it a time to slow down? Is it a time to be in that middle and all the other options as well? You discern what is the best thing to do, to make a decision and to trust yourself and to make that decision the right decision because there is no right decision, only the decision that you make right.

So think about where in your life, your personal life, your work life, where might you benefit from some strategic slowing down, and what would that look like for you? How might it feel to give yourself that space to pull back the bow string, to take a breath, to aim with intention, to be precise, to let that power gather and then let go and fly.

Alright, my loves, what a fun episode. I will be back next week. Can't wait to catch you then.

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