

Jim's Profit Accelerator 21: Are You Speeding Action with First Step Leadership?

NBA point guard Damian Lillard is building his legend with the Portland Trailblazers. Twice in the past six months he has drained a three-pointer right at the buzzer, winning a game that seemed out of reach. In both situations it was not only the pressure it was the impossible complexity of finding success in the noise.

Here's his description of how he did it: **"I looked for a spot that I could get to quickly, and then went there and took the shot."***

Let's deconstruct this brilliant advice. It shines a bright light on how to ignite winning action throughout your organization.

SPEED BUMP: "I looked for a spot..."

It wasn't a process or a play or a stack of complex interactions. Amazing, when you visualize the churn of powerful men on the court. He didn't look at his teammates, size up which competitor he had to beat, analyze the route, or pay attention to any of the thousand other things that might have cluttered his mind.

This nugget can transform you as a leader. Stop directing like this: "Here's how I want you to do it." Instead, ask for the spot: "What is the first step that you can take? Where will you land?" Most of us don't play in the NBA and therefore don't have to worry about beating the buzzer. We have the opportunity exploit our advantage: we can take a step and adjust, and adjust again. Nothing happens without the steps, and adjustment is usually much simpler than taking the first step. *"It's easy to steer a moving boat; it's impossible if it's sitting still."*

If you or your person is still stuck, use the *lily-pad theory*: Before the frog jumps to a lily-pad, he already knows where he'll go next, in case the target spot doesn't work.

Ask, "What's the easiest thing to do if this step doesn't work?" Then jump when the horn blasts.

SPEED BUMP: "...that I could get to..."

This was only about Damian and what he would do. He wasn't thinking about winning the game. He focused instead on doing something that he knew he could do: go to that spot.

As leaders, let's ask our people what they can do now, instead of asking for a full solution to the problem. Imagine walking into a dense forest on a narrow, winding road, hoping to find a treasure. Looking ahead you can see maybe fifty yards to the next turn. You can't see what's around the corner any other way except by going to the corner to look. Around that corner you may find your treasure,

but it's invisible until you get to the corner. Often, it's only after taking a step that we see the better next step, and we'd have missed the treasure if we'd spent more time planning.

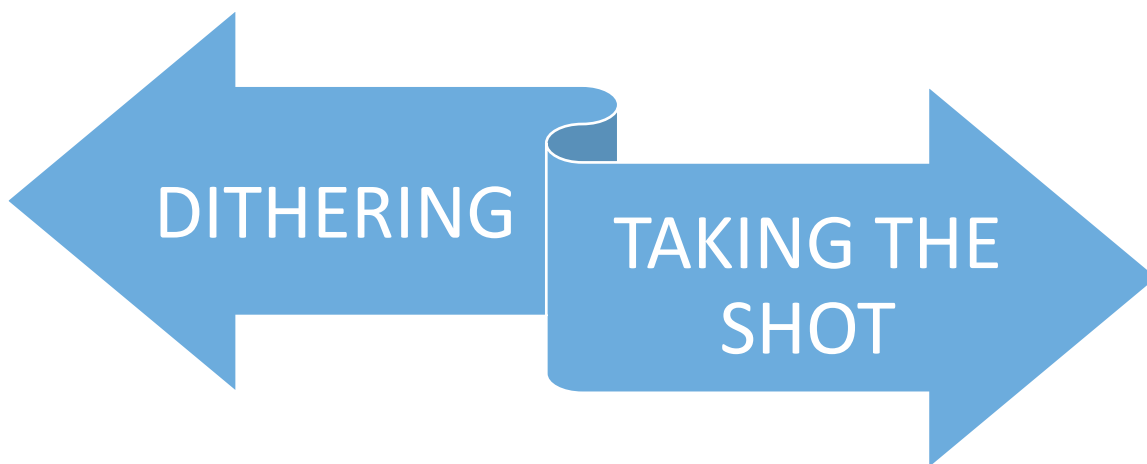
SPEED BUMP: "...quickly..."

It's obvious that speed matters in basketball. But do your people think that you value speed in your company? Watch what they do; it will tell you. Apply the 50 Percent Rule to your leaders: If they spend more than half their time acting and adjusting, things are moving forward. If they are spending more than half the time planning, they are knee-deep in wasted opportunity!

Ironically, Ferrari has decided to do business faster. For many years, eager buyers waited for almost a year to receive their Ferrari. Some speculate that the wait is part of the mystique. Last week, Ferrari Chairman Servio Marchionne hinted that yearly production could rise from 7,000 to 10,000 cars to shorten that wait time. "If exclusivity becomes unreachable, it is no longer exclusivity," Mr. Marchionne told the *Wall Street Journal* in an interview published December 27, 2014. If Ferrari can do business faster, why can't you?

SPEED BUMP: "...and went there and took the shot."

Are your leaders going there and taking the shot, or are they going there and going there and going there without ever doing what needs to be done? This is the toughest of all, of course, because once the shot is taken, there is either success or not. In business, this is what "fail fast" looks like. But in most organizations, most of the time, "fail fast" is more talk than walk. Attorney Bill Campbell, a guru in the emerging markets space, created the "failure theory" to explain the shortage of Portland-area business start-ups. After studying firms in Portland and Silicon Valley, Campbell found that Portland entrepreneurs hung on too long, trying for success; Silicon Valley entrepreneurs wanted to fail fast, convinced that was the path to success.



The second-most important item in the toolkit of successful people is that they take action. Seems simple, but look around: chances are good that you're surrounded by dithering, dressed as preparation.

ACCELERANT: Whose dithering can you convert to action this week?

Call me.

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Jim Grew is an expert in CEO-level strategy and executive leadership whose clients refer to him as the Business Defogger and Accelerator. Jim helps leaders swiftly discover the hidden opportunities within their businesses and exploit them for dramatic results. Nearly three decades of success as a COO and CEO coupled with his experience running nine thriving businesses provide the foundation for his consulting work as president of the Grew Company. He presents regularly to industry groups, mentors business leaders, and shares insights on his blog, BizBursts.com: <http://bizbursts.com/>. He holds BA and MBA degrees from Stanford University.

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