



DO BUSINESS FASTER™

Jim's Profit Accelerator 235

The Problem of Pace

You're driving a Wells Fargo stagecoach, urging your six-horse wagon to deliver its valuable cargo (gold, financial documents) on time to a distant station. To do so, you're balancing a trio of challenges:

1. The latest acceptable arrival at the destination station
2. The stamina of your horses
3. Your drive to be on time, if not early, like a good leader

The stagecoach driver's unspoken dilemma is this: How fast can you go to provide a cushion against a surprise problem—a broken wheel, an attack by bandits, a torn harness? The problem is that there is no speedometer, no mileage marker, and nothing but your skill and experience to maintain a winning balance. Inevitably you don't always succeed. The ultimate catastrophe, of course, is a dead horse, so that's a limiting condition (a nod to the math folks).

SPEED BUMP: The pace of your team is always uncertain.

How do you lead critical initiatives in your business? The pace of your team is how long it takes to complete essential steps. It's not how hard they work. However, like a dead horse, an exhausted team member is a double liability: His work is now unfinished, and another team member has the work of two.

SPEED BUMP: The speed of your team isn't always linked to how hard they work.

The leader's trio is a mix of these three:

1. Team capacity
2. Team speed
3. The leader's drive to succeed quickly

The leader's balancing act would seem obvious: Go just at the speed that your team can maintain. The problem is that that speed changes from day to day and depends on where they are on the task.

SPEED BUMP: The first 10 percent of a project is often as slow as the last 10 percent.

This seems simple, but the problem comes in managing along the way to provide a buffer for the final 10 percent, allowing the project to stay on time. This is a classic problem in digital project work, as summarized by Sacha Arnoud, technologist at Waymo, Google's driverless car program: "When you're 90 percent done you still have 90 percent to go."*

It's the red zone problem in football: It's much easier to move the ball in the middle of the field than to get it over the goal line. The problem is that progress and planning appear linear until you're on your way. Then the last 10 percent seems to take forever, regardless of how you plan.

SPEED BUMP: Winning leaders adjust team speed to the team's capacity.

This can be hard, because a leader typically envisions the end point and wants to be there quickly. Her team may not be able to move that fast, and pushing them unwisely produces dead horses.

What to do:

1. Listen to your people often.
2. Encourage them to do today's work well.
3. Help them set their pace to their capability instead of your vision.

SPEED BUMP: The speed of your team is theirs, not yours.

ACCELERANT: What project needs adjustment this week?

For more information on how you can accelerate revenues and profits in your business, please call or email me.

A note on **SPEED BUMPS:** Use them to click quickly with an idea that can immediately be implemented in your life as a business leader. Think: "How can I use this today?" or "Who can use this?"

* John D. Stoll, *Wall Street Journal*, May 25, 2019, pB2.

For more information, visit www.grewco.com.

Jim Grew, the Business Defogger and Accelerator, helps leaders discover hidden opportunities within their businesses and exploit them for dramatic results. Jim has led 9 businesses, worked in 31 companies at C-level, and is an expert in strategy and executive leadership. He presents regularly to industry groups, mentors business leaders, and shares insights in his Executive Letter (above). Jim holds BA and MBA degrees from Stanford University. In his new book, *The Other Side of Succession*, he shares how to plan for the future by growing your business now.

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