

Timeout

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Sometimes a timeout is appropriate and deserved.

If you have [kids](#) or if you play(ed) sports, you can probably relate to [calling a timeout](#). In either case, calling a timeout halts the immediate “play” and allows time to regroup. But not only in child-rearing or on the sports field is calling a timeout an appropriate thing to do, in business settings or meetings, sometimes timeouts are also appropriate, well-deserved, and are a smart thing to do.

As business leaders, many of us believe that we have to be the strong ones who keep **relentlessly pushing on** without taking breaks in the action for any reason.

But is this always the right thing to do? Are there times when we should take a break in the action and call a timeout?

Well, from my personal experience, I have learned that it is better to work smarter than to work harder. Pushing on and making bad decisions due to a variety of factors (fatigue, lack of information, etc) can actually lead an organization (and those you are leading) down the wrong path or even worse. Generally speaking, the consequences for not calling appropriate timeouts fall into the category defined by the [law of diminishing return](#).

Smart Fella'

I once had a peer who admitted to the group that he would always want to have 24 hours to “think” before any **major decision were made**. When he said this, I immediately assumed that he was admitting to being mentally slow and that he was making excuses for his inability to make snap decisions. I wasn't immediately impressed with his “timeout” concept.

But after a few months of observing his well-placed moderation, I came to realize that he was using this 24-hour period as a way to analyze potential outcomes; he was giving the new situation the time it needed so that he could discuss the issues with his key advisers. After observing behaviors that I first thought were retarding **his leadership performance**, I realized that his approach was brilliant as he made better informed decisions and that he was even involving his staff when possible. Not only did he always seem to get better-than-expected results from this tactic, he also increased the loyalty within his organization.



Timeouts are also a good tactic to use when a discussion gets too heated or too emotionally disruptive. Timeouts gives people time to reflect on the real issues and talk with those they trust.

Well-placed timeouts can tend to let emotions get back from the boiling point and allow for clearer heads to prevail.

Though not a cure-all, timeouts can certainly help. Keep in mind that some issues are so emotional for some people that even a timeout won't do much, and people will let their emotions rise right back to where they were once the discussion starts again.

But overall, they are good things to do.

As a leader, one must realize when it is appropriate to call a timeout.



Calling a timeout can be done either for yourself or if you think a situation is becoming non-productive and a break might do everyone well. When you call a timeout, I encourage you to do something to **get into a different setting**. Sometimes I walk around the building or go to the cafeteria and have a coffee to clear my head. Also, make sure that you have a general agreement with the other people involved as to how long of a timeout you are taking. Sometimes, you may need to simply take a timeout from a topic and set it aside for later while the rest of the agenda can continue forward.

My experience tells me to **work smart** and use **timeouts** when needed for yourself or others in the meeting so that you make smart decisions and have productive work interactions.

Do you have formalized procedures for calling a timeout at your organization? Are you implementing appropriate breaks when extra time is needed to let clearer heads prevail? Are you taking enough time and deliberation on important issues to make sure that rush decisions are not being made? Please let me know if you do timeouts. I would love to hear!

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