

FOREWORD BY

New York Times Bestselling Author

JOHN C. MAXWELL

BE THE UNICORN



12

Data-Driven Habits that
Separate the Best Leaders
From the Rest

WILLIAM
VANDERBLOEMEN

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FOREWORD

Studying successful people doesn't always mean becoming successful. I can study the golf swing of Jack Nicklaus or Tiger Woods, and it won't turn me into them. Studying Michael Jordan's ability to slam dunk won't teach me how to slam dunk. Because some keys to success just cannot be learned.

But in this book, my friend William Vanderbloemen has not only studied successful people, he has unlocked the teachable habits they practice that make them successful. That means for you, this isn't just a book of case studies. You're holding a manual for becoming unusually successful—as unusual as a mythical unicorn. It's a manual based on hard data that unlocks the way you can become mythically valuable. Successful. Irreplaceable. He will teach you, as he puts it, how to become a Unicorn.

William's work lines up with and builds upon so much of what I've been teaching my entire career. And what's really compelling is that he's got the data to back it up. That's the remarkable thing about this book: more than thirty thousand top-caliber candidates and fifteen years of asking questions is what it took to get us here.

It's not surprising to me that curiosity is what led William to the conclusions found in this book. And it's not surprising that curiosity itself is one of the twelve traits that make a Unicorn. I am convinced that being curious and asking questions will take you on the most exciting journeys, so I encourage you to get curious. Ask yourself

how you're going to develop yourself. Ask yourself in what ways you can grow yourself in these twelve areas.

Becoming a Unicorn won't happen overnight. And, like any other measure of success, becoming a Unicorn isn't a destination, it's a journey. It's going to take diligence and living in the present. It takes conscious and concerted effort every day. I've said it before, but every day we're either preparing or repairing. I encourage you to focus on what you can do each day to develop these twelve traits as you prepare to become a Unicorn.

I've said that everything good in life begins with a challenge, so this is my challenge to you: read this book, learn from this book, and live this book. Something magical happens when you commit yourself to personal transformation. And soon enough, you'll be a Unicorn.

—John C. Maxwell

INTRODUCTION: THE RIGHT PERSON FOR THE JOB

unicorn: something that is highly desirable
but that is difficult to find or obtain

You can stand out in a crowd.

You can be the star.

You can be sought after and chosen, again and again.

You can be a Unicorn.

I know it sounds like a crazy promise. The world is filled with more humans than ever. For the first time in history, the workforce has five generations crowded in at the same time. In the age of hyperconnectivity and social media, everyone has a megaphone, everyone has a platform, and it's noisy out there. And with the dawn of a new era of artificial intelligence, I don't blame you for wondering when (not if) you will be replaced.

What I'm here to tell you is that you can stand out from your peers, and you can become irreplaceable. I've found a way to achieve this. It's based on data I've collected and studied over the course of my career. And I'm going to share it with you.

WITNESSING THE X-FACTOR

Have you ever met someone, and within one or two minutes, you know that they're special? That they stand out from the crowd?

They are the energy in a room. They have a spark that lights up their environment. They don't seem to have trouble succeeding. And they seem to be the exception to the rules the rest of us are bound to. To me, they are like the unicorns that captured the imaginations of medieval Europeans. Unicorns were said to be magical. Simply being in the presence of one meant good fortune for all. Everyone wanted to be part of the unicorn experience.

If you're like me, when you've met these people you've wondered if you could ever become that kind of person.

I've actually spent a lifetime trying to figure out what makes these modern-day Unicorns so special. I have discovered just what it takes, and what's more, I can teach it to you.

Why me?

My name is William Vanderbloemen. I started and still run an executive search firm. I get paid to spot the best of the best. For the last fifteen years, very high-caliber organizations have tasked me and my team with finding their top talent. We aren't asked to "fill staff positions." We are asked to find the next superstar for our clients. The unusually talented. The effortless leaders. The irresistibly winsome. The Unicorns.

Today, with thousands of repetitions under my belt, I am pretty good at spotting Unicorns. I have seen them. Interviewed them. And I know more about them than ever before. In fact, I've not only learned how to spot them, but I've learned what qualities and habits they have in common. And I can teach them to you.

This isn't a book filled with my musings on what I think makes people likable or how I imagine you can stand out from the crowd. It's actually a how-to book for becoming one of those winning people, based on proven data. You see, I've spent the last several years studying the Unicorns I have met and learning what makes them tick.

What makes a Unicorn?

During the lockdowns of the pandemic, not many of our clients were hiring. In fact, nearly all of our clients were indefinitely closed (which I learned is not great for a small business . . . but that's another book). This slow period gave me time, and in that time I dropped back and began to seriously ask: "What makes a Unicorn a Unicorn?" "What causes these remarkable people to stand out?"

In a previous career as a pastor, I was always intrigued with the Unicorns. I would look for them in volunteers, in leaders, and in people I could learn from. The churches I served were filled with these kinds of people. What was most intriguing was how the Unicorns I came across came from every walk of life. I kept looking for common denominators, but I couldn't find them. Despite the inordinate value culture places on wealth and good looks, these weren't it. Neither was family status or level of education.

For each executive talent search we perform at Vanderbloemen, we put together a database of hundreds of candidates. That list of hundreds gets narrowed to dozens of exceptionally qualified people. That gets further narrowed to a handful of standout, unicorn-level talents. Once we have identified that handful, we do a long-format interview with them. We have now done more than thirty thousand of those long-format interviews. My question led me and our team to ask, "Who are the best of these thirty thousand interviews?" "How did they become the best, and who went on to truly succeed in their jobs?" Most importantly, we wanted to know if these Unicorns had anything in common.

We launched a massive study, not knowing if we would find any commonalities. The results of our study were at the same time stunningly congruent and shockingly teachable. Turns out, Unicorns don't share physical attributes. They weren't all good looking or

tall or inherently athletic. What they had in common were traits and habits that were actually teachable.

A question I've asked throughout my life became a study. The results of a study became a guide for you, for anyone who wants to stand out from the crowd.

LET'S INVADE FRANCE

People who stand out in work and life possess the power to get what they want and inspire others while doing so. I will give you plenty of examples in the coming pages, but a quick one to get us started is fictional, from the Apple TV show *Ted Lasso*. Team owner Rebecca Welton (played by Hannah Waddingham) is demonstrating to friend and mentee Keeley Jones (played by Juno Temple) how she makes herself feel powerful when she needs a boost of self-confidence. Keeley's reaction to her demonstration is a breathless, "You're amazing. Let's invade France." My mission in this book is to empower you with the skills to become an exceptional person whom others watch with awe and inspiration in the same way that Keeley is awed and inspired by Rebecca.

After doing more than thirty thousand face-to-face interviews, I've started to see what those skills are. It turns out there are very clear ingredients for a successful person—twelve of them to be exact.

Yes, this book is the answer to the question I've been asking throughout my career. But this book is more than a book about talent and job searching. It's a book about distinguishing yourself from a crowded field and standing out as a Unicorn.

DISCOVERING THE UNICORNS

If you want an insightful business book, get a preacher. (Said no one ever!) And yes, I come by my expertise via a long road that began with divinity school. Hardly the credentials one would expect, I admit. But hear me out. I maintain that what I've learned about people, particularly successful people, during my time as a pastor and throughout my life has taught me more than an MBA ever could. Don't get me wrong: There are brilliant business minds out there that I will never hold a candle to. But you don't need to have aced accounting to unite a roomful of people who can't agree on where to spend the endowment fund proceeds this year. You don't need to be Six Sigma trained to talk a grieving family through what they can expect at their loved one's funeral service. And determining who would be the best fit for the youth pastor position has so much more to do with your ability to read people than to read a spreadsheet. It's human skills that make the difference, not the formulas and algorithms that can be programmed. We've got machines for that, so why not let us humans do what we do best? My point is, when it comes to excelling, particularly in the workplace, it might be time to start looking for solutions in different places.

The hard truth about soft skills

There is no profession that requires more excellence in soft skills and people skills than in my area of expertise, ministry and nonprofit work. Think about the last time you donated money to a nonprofit. Was it entirely because you believed in the cause? I'm willing to bet you had a charismatic standout from the organization aid in your decision. And how about the last wedding or funeral you attended?

On these days of great joy and of great pain, the pastor, rabbi, or other spiritual leader can make or break the experience for everyone. But the qualities we have identified in our own search efforts aren't limited to people who work in faith-based organizations. Soft skills are essential to success in any field or business and leaders of all types will benefit from the lessons that follow.

Come with me if you want to live

Not to reveal my age, but *The Terminator* was a formative movie for me growing up, science fiction that now seems frighteningly close to reality. Machines may not take over the world, hunt down humans, and coin one of the most iconic catchphrases of all time, but they *are* taking jobs. And it appears that—with or without a cool motorcycle—they're only gaining speed.

Okay, maybe “come with me if you want to live” is a bit drastic. Let's say “come with me if you want to *thrive*.” The truth is, experts predict that whole industries will be almost completely automated in as little as ten years. Health care, agriculture, and industrial sectors can all expect to be hit by an AI takeover. Of course, it's not all doom and gloom for us humans: the jobs we lose in these industries will be found in tech and robotics.

For better or worse, robots helped us out during the pandemic. When employers were scrambling to find labor that didn't get sick or spread infection, AI was there. As a result, economists estimate that 42 percent of jobs lost in the pandemic are not coming back.

Historically, we have feared innovation and tech advancements—but we've almost always been wrong to fear these things. I'm sure you've read some facts about humans' reaction to technology in times past that have made you chuckle. When we fret over technology “taking” our jobs or “replacing” us, we're being

as foolish as the critics of the steam locomotive who were certain women's bodies could never safely travel at speeds as high as thirty mile per hour. The Luddites were wrong and so are we. AI isn't the apocalypse. It's an opportunity to evolve.

Bloomberg surmises that 120 million jobs are converting to AI, so for those 120 million displaced people, well, it's time to go back to school! And if not school, it's time to learn what machines can't. (Or can't *yet*.) While some jobs will go the way of the travel agent, it also means that there is tremendous job growth ahead and a chance for humans to redefine their value in the marketplace around the things AI cannot do. Most of that value? Soft skills.

After each of our thirty thousand interviews, I'd sit down with my team and highlight the best features from each candidate. Eventually, I began to see a pattern among the best of the best. What did the best interviews have in common? What did those people exhibit that made them stand out from the crowd? That's right: soft skills.

It's getting crowded in here

Not only is tech taking jobs, but there are more workers than ever in the workplace. As I'm sitting down to write this book, we're coming out of the Great Resignation. Not to brag, but Vanderbloemen actually forecast this Great Resignation before anybody else. We saw it coming and now we're seeing what happens next. Soon most of those who left work are going to want to find work. Maybe even return to their previous work. And when that day comes, people have to stand out from the crowd like never before.

So what would it look like to up your soft skills.? What would it look like to be one of those people who stood out in the crowd? The interesting thing that we discovered about soft skills is that every one of these skills can be developed or improved upon.

Olympic sprinters are fast. And most of us can never train to become as fast as they are. As much as I'd like to win the NBA slam dunk contest, I'm fairly certain a five-foot-nine person with average jumping ability is just not going to win that contest. Not all of us can become exceptional in certain skills. But we can get better and reach our own highest potential.

The Unicorns hold a skill set that can be learned. What we've discovered in our research is that these people have skills that can be developed by anyone.

That's why I'm so excited about this book. The day is coming when interviewing is going to be less about competence and more about soft skills and cultural fit.

SOFT SKILLS WIN

I'm always amazed at how, when we do a search, and we get down to two finalists, the person who wins the job is simply, as one of my senior consultants says, the person who plays best with others.

I hope you'll take time to read this book slowly. I've tried to build in descriptors of each of the soft skills that we've noticed among the Unicorns. But I've also left room for questions at the end. This book isn't just a narrative, and it isn't just a science study. Hopefully it's a manual. Hopefully it's a guidebook you can follow to become one of those people who stands out in the crowd.

It's a brave new world out there, and standing out is more important than ever. The good news is that doing so is within your reach. Let's take a journey together and learn from the Unicorns. It may just change your life for good.

**BE THE
UNICORN**

ONE

THE FAST

CASE STUDY: THE FAST UNICORN

Blake Mycoskie doesn't miss a beat. Throughout his life, Mycoskie has let speed guide him, propelling him from one opportunity to the next. When an injury ended his college tennis career, Mycoskie left school and started a successful laundry business. Then he moved to Nashville and started a media company. Mycoskie Media succeeded even faster than EZ Laundry. Having bounded from one success to the next, Mycoskie and his sister teamed up on the second season of *The Amazing Race*, which, it seems to me, is pretty on brand for the hustling entrepreneur. Everything Mycoskie does, he does with speed. More opportunities and successes followed, and in 2006, Mycoskie started what we now know as Toms shoes, which is one of the earliest and most successful examples of social entrepreneurship. Not content to slow down, present-day Mycoskie is still investigating new enterprises, still racing to find the next big thing for himself, sure, but with a sharp focus on what his next endeavor can do for the world.

We've all been told to play it cool at some point in our lives. Don't accept the first offer; wait a few days before returning the call/text/whatever of a potential suitor; cast and then let the

fish have a little time with the lure before reeling back in. Looking overeager weakens your position, right? Wrong.

Speed wins.

Unicorns know this. For as many aphorisms there are warning you not to move too fast, there are still more urging you to fling wide the door the moment opportunity knocks. We live in a time of on-demand everything. If we ourselves are not on demand in some capacity as well, we lose. We lose opportunities to achieve more and be more. Response time matters.

WHAT WE KNOW

Okay, so “be responsive.” Is that it? That’s it. While this seems like an easy one to hack—and indeed is the easiest of the twelve traits—it’s harder than it sounds. Acting fast isn’t always in our nature, especially when we’re afraid.

Being fast is scary

“He was a bold man who ate the first oyster,” wrote Jonathan Swift. Being fast is often associated with being first, and being first comes with a lot of risks. It’s much more comfortable for us to wait and see what happens to the first guy before we act on an opportunity of which we’re unsure. Uncertainty is hard on our brains. After all, they evolved with the express purpose of keeping us alive and well. Our brains are vigilant, always trying to guess what’s going to happen next so our bodies can be ready to react in a way that keeps us safe. When we don’t know what’s coming next, we can’t plan. When we can’t plan, we could die. (Admittedly, this was much truer for our ancestors venturing out of the cave in the dark of night, but some habits aren’t easily shaken. It’s hard to prove a negative; we

can't always convince our brain that we're *not* going to get eaten by a saber-toothed tiger.) In our early days as a species, it made a lot of sense to wait for another person to leave the cave first. And to this day, our brains are doing the work to keep us from harm. When the boss asks the group for “honest opinions,” your brain tells you to let Jim from HR go first so you can plan your answer accordingly.

Our brains are also predisposed to procrastination, but for slightly fewer noble reasons than “keeping this person alive.” That’s because our limbic system (the brain’s pleasure center—woo, party!) is much stronger than our prefrontal cortex (the planning part of our brain) and tends to win. The task can wait till tomorrow.

Fast fact: The word *procrastinate* comes from the Latin *crastina*, which literally means “tomorrow.”

Being fast doesn't mean saying yes

There's a lot of evolution and neuroscience to learn and unlearn on the path to becoming the Fast. But it's important to remember that being fast doesn't mean saying yes to everything always. Rather, it means discerning (quickly!) what needs an immediate response and what does not.

In the start-up world, there's a cautionary phrase: beware of distractions disguised as opportunities. It can take a lot of discipline, plus some trial and error, to teach yourself the difference between distraction and opportunity, but the more you practice the better you get. I'll give you some tips for telling what's what at the end of this chapter.

The risks are worth it (usually)

I run. More accurately, I jog. I do this for all the usual reasons: it clears my head, it boosts my energy levels, and I've never met a piece of fitness tech I haven't wanted to take out for a spin. Over the years, I have found the best predictor of me actually going for a run on any given day is if I do so at the first chance I get. When I tell myself I'll do it later, later rarely comes. I sit down, start scrolling through social media, and that's the ball game: another check in the "win" column for the limbic system.

Being able to quiet the limbic system—with its lies about taking a run after work and entreaties to see if there are any donuts in the break room—and doing now what you probably won't do later is the best choice and the preferred practice of Unicorns.

We have an impulse to act fast when we are excited about an opportunity that we think will benefit us. No need to wait for HR Jim to go first in this case! How many times has this happened to you? You fell in love with some product in some store. Maybe it's the pair of shoes you knew you were born to have. Maybe it was the watch you've been searching for your whole life. Or maybe it's the latest high-draw driver with the Fujikura shaft that will 100 percent for sure put you on track to join the senior tour when you retire from corporate life. It doesn't matter what the product is. You love it, you want it, you'll buy it today. You hand over your credit card and tell the sales associate to box it up. And then they break your heart: The product you're looking at is for display only. And they're out of stock. You'll have to wait two to three days for another one to come in. Should they process your card now and give you a call when it comes in?

No. The spell has been broken long enough for the prefrontal cortex to kick in with all the reasons the purchase is a bad idea. The

item has lost its luster, and suddenly it's just another Saturday at the mall. Your limbic system suggests going to Cinnabon.

There is no time like the present

Salespeople know better than anyone how important response time is. If you aren't there for your client *now*, you may as well not bother.

The data is here to back this up. A 2021 study looked at over 5.7 million inbound leads and determined which were most likely to convert. The answer: the ones a rep responded to in *less than five minutes*. If those leads weren't attended to in the first five minutes, the chances of them converting plummeted by a factor of eight.



Five minutes is all it takes to miss out on a lot of potential revenue. It makes you wince, doesn't it? The good news is, we know how to prevent this kind of revenue exodus. The mind boggling news is, so few people actually take action to do so. But not you. Not anymore. You're becoming the Fast.

WHY HIRING MANAGERS LOVE THE FAST

The Fast are a hiring manager's *dream*. The Fast respond quickly so they can proceed with next steps. There's no dithering; any hardball that's being played will be played quickly and efficiently. The Fast will get their paperwork in on time. The Fast will be the ones to get the interview and then the offer.

Tips to cultivate Fast practices at work:

- Make it clear that quick response time is a company value.
- Offer incentives for faster responses.
- Set quick, achievable deadlines; no one needs a month to make their benefits elections.
- Try the Vanderbloemen Fast Test with your next hire.

WHO IS FAST? LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA

The *Hamilton* creator and star is the best example I know of the Fast. I am constantly astounded when he is on Jimmy Fallon and does the "Wheel of Freestyle"—a bit where he gets three random words and then immediately produces a freestyle rap containing all three words. It's obvious he's a genius and that genius is at least partially to do with his gift of

speed. Lin-Manuel Miranda not only thinks fast, he acts fast as well. For years, including while he was onstage in *Hamilton* up to eight times a week, he tweeted thoughtful, not ponderous, thoughts of love and encouragement morning and night. Immediately after Hurricane Maria, he sprang into action to help the people of Puerto Rico. Lin-Manuel Miranda doesn't appear to overthink things. Rather, he trusts himself to do what's right or what will work and then he does it.

WHAT WE'VE SEEN

In business and relationships, being quick to respond almost always pays off.

When I was a young senior pastor, we were looking for a new place to hold worship while we were waiting for our new space to be built. One of the elders in the church took me driving around to look for a location. Right across the street from the property we had purchased to build on was a YMCA that was not being used on Sunday mornings.

The board member said to me, "I think I know the chair of the board of the YMCA. Here's his phone number. You could call him and see if we could use the facility on Sunday mornings."

I thanked him and began to talk about another subject. When we were back in the office, he listened to me talk to some colleagues for a minute or two and stopped me. He looked me in the eyes and asked, "When are you going to call the chair of the board of the YMCA?"

“I’ll get around to it pretty soon,” I said. To be honest, I was a little annoyed. I’d taken the number and said I was going to make the call. He didn’t need to micromanage me. This “opportunity” felt way more like a distraction.

His response? “Why don’t you call him right now?” He went on to say, “I’ve learned that if I have time to take care of something right away, it usually is the best time to get things done.”

He was right, of course. And since then, I’ve seen time and again how candidates who are fast and responsive are candidates who act quickly and get things done.

Fast is a great indicator of success

In our experience at Vanderbloemen, the candidates we reach out to are very slow to respond. Normal response time for these types of leads is over two days. Normal response time from candidates who are (a) already on our radar and in our network, (b) have expressed an interest in finding a new job, and (c) have actively entered a search is still slow, usually around a business day.

When we reach out to a candidate via text, email, phone, or LinkedIn, if we receive a response within a minute, it still turns heads in the office.

Fewer than 1 percent of candidates respond within a minute.

Those candidates who respond within a minute get fast-tracked. Not coincidentally, our experience is that the 1 percent who respond immediately to a text have stayed the longest at their placements—indicating job satisfaction—and have been rated as “highly valuable” by their colleagues.

*Being on the receiving end of Fast: the Vanderbloemen
Text Test*

With speed, the medium is the message. The overwhelming evidence shows that texting is the fastest way to a prospect's heart—or, at least, consciousness. Most text messages are opened within three minutes. And with the ease of use that accompanies them, most are responded to quickly as well.

At Vanderbloemen, we use this data as another way to discover if a candidate is right for us. Some may call it “borderline entrapment,” but we like to refer to it as “putting our values into real-life situations and seeing what happens.” Here's our not-so-secret “text test.”

When we're vetting a new candidate, there's a significant chance they'll get a text message from someone on our team—and not necessarily the person who interviewed them—but someone they talked to here at some point. They'll likely get the text at a late-night hour, maybe around 10:30 p.m. The message will probably be some kind of weird question such as, “Okay, the Astros have won over fifty games before the All-Star break. How many teams that do that also win the World Series? Do you know?”

If they don't answer, it doesn't mean they'll lose the job. But if they answer within the first minute, saying, “Ha ha, I love the Astros too,” then they'll get a big-time bonus point (for loving the Astros) and another point for answering within one minute, which aligns with the idea of ridiculous responsiveness. If they answer with something like, “Well, I looked it up and only three teams have done that. The Rangers did it twice and the Astros once. The Astros blew the World Series, and the Rangers won it both times,” then I know (a) they're ridiculously responsive, (b) they've made me go “Wow!,” (c) they've shown solution-side living, and (d) they've

shown contagious fun because they're snarky about the Astros, which is fine by us!

It sounds simple, responding to a late-night text, but it's very telling for our recruiters. I have, however, ruined this part of the test now because I've told the story . . .

We don't tell people these little tests are part of the interview. If they pass the test, we tell them, "Look, we have communication guidelines during off-hours. It's not a free-for-all text 24-7, but if you get an email, answer us the next time you're on your computer, within twenty-four hours. If you get a text after hours, answer it right away. If you get a call, pick it up. If that's going to make you crazy, then we want to test for that right away."

The text test is one of the best and easiest tools we have to predict a candidate's success.

Report from the Unicorns

When we sent our survey to our database of Unicorns, only 2.6 percent identified "fast" as their best quality. Still, I uncovered a lot from this 2.6 percent that informs what goes on inside the minds of the Fast.

It shouldn't surprise anyone that a lot of the Fast attribute their speed to a military background where being fast is often a matter of life and death. They've brought that urgency home with them, to use in their personal lives as well as the workplace.

Timothy C. tells us: "I'm fast thanks to my military and Army aviation background. Both require a rapid assessment of the situation and quick decision-making skills. In combat or flying, this is a required skill for successful outcomes."

"Make a decision!" says Patrice M. "Quickly gather the information necessary to make a decision, knowing that we will never

have all; we'll never know everything. Be decisive. Commit and move forward. The unwillingness to commit, combined with a fear of failure, paralyzes many in positions of leadership. No, not every decision will be a good one, but fail fast and learn."

"By serving in the US Navy for eleven years and rising to the rank of chief petty officer, I learned to be accurate but also fast enough to pump out lots of work in short amounts of time while utilizing all the men serving under me," says Jack J. "I worked by making lists at the end of each day that had to be done the next day, week, month, etc., and cross-checked it with manual requirements to generate lists for each of the men, myself included. I would go back over the checklists to make sure all work was completed accurately and efficiently. I still do this in my career today."

WHAT WE DO

Some of the Fast come naturally to the habit of rapid response. The rest of us have to hone this skill our whole lives.

When you're born with it, you know. And even before *you* know, your parents know. My wife and I are both very quick to respond and quick to act. We've had one child together. Everyone wondered what would happen when William and Adrienne's genes are mixed. What happened was our daughter, Macy.

Macy was just beginning to talk. But instead of having a first word, she had a first sentence. One morning, she was bouncing in one of those bouncy seats the toddlers play in and looked across the room at a toy she wanted. She looked back at me and said: "Do it!"

I laughed and got her her toy. I guess Nike's "Just do it" slogan was too long for Macy? She was a girl on a mission and keeping the "just" clearly took too much time. Ever since then, she's shown an uncanny quickness to respond.

If you don't have nature and nurture working for you like Macy has, don't worry. We can help you get so good at being the Fast that EMS services will want to take master classes from you.

Here's how

In golf, speed is all the rage right now. There's a lot to be said for mass, but speed is having its day. If you want your ball to go far out of the tee box, maximize the force you're putting on that ball. To achieve this, designers and physicists are coming up with new and creative ways to optimize your clubhead speed.

Fun fact with serious implications: For every one mile per hour of speed you add to your golf swing, you will gain more than three yards of distance.

In our own bodies, athletic trainers remind us that we have to work on speed, or it will naturally decrease with age. Speed is a “use it or lose it” part of our lives. If you don't practice moving fast, you can kiss it goodbye. The same is true for response time in your day-to-day life.

Speed barriers . . . and how to break them

Two things can keep you from living up to your potential as a member of the Fast:

1. Access to the opportunity
2. Fear

Access: You can't respond quickly if you never receive the message. Maybe your phone is charging in the other room, maybe you never check your email, or perhaps your only digital presence is a Myspace account you set up in 2004. Now, we're not saying you need to be everything everywhere, all access all the time, but you do need to allow for messages and opportunities to find you in the first place. While they're not necessarily my thing, happy mediums do exist. If you don't think you can respond quickly to a call, text, or email, set up an autoresponder. You can have your "you" time without it costing an opportunity.

Sometimes the opportunity is right there. It has found you. Maybe you heard the text come through or maybe you're sitting in an audience of a magic show and the magician is pointing straight at you. That's when fear comes in.

Like I said before, being the Fast is not a matter of saying yes to everything (the magician will just have to get someone else to cut in half, thanks very much). It's a matter of determining what your answer should be quickly. Fear can paralyze your decision-making.

Questions to consider for the fastest possible response time:

Is this a distraction or an opportunity? I told you I'd be back with some tips for determining which is which! Check out this chart the next time you're not sure:

DISTRACTION	OPPORTUNITY
Doesn't get you closer to your goals	Gets you closer to your goals
Your limbic system gives it a "heck yes."	Your whole brain agrees on it.
Takes more time/money/resources than it is worth	Yields results that are worth the sacrifices you have to make for it

Are you overthinking it? Fear *loves* to make you overthink. Overthinking makes you safer, right? You're more likely to get the right answer or work out all the possible scenarios if you overthink. "Thinking" is valuable. Overthinking is not. Some of my favorite people are overthinkers. The work they do is studied and flawless. They put so much care into how their audience will interpret their response. Unfortunately, the beautifully crafted email they send three days later is of no use when you needed a yes or no within the hour on the first day.

Are you overthinking? Some questions to ask yourself:

- Am I responding to a head of state? Will my response need to be unimpeachable? Most of us take things at face value. Frankly, most of us aren't big enough deals to warrant the Perfect Response. Good grammar and spelling are important, but if you're waiting to get a three-sentence text message vetted by the copy chief of the *New York Times*, stop and send it as is. You're fine.
- Is the time I'm spending on this response even remotely proportional to the level of importance this has?
- Am I overthinking this? If you have to ask, yes, yes you are.
- Is this an irreversible action that can have ramifications for my family generations into the future? Or is it just your lunch order?
- Am I being wise or am I afraid? There is a time and a place for responding slowly. (William Congreve's "Marry in haste, repent at leisure" comes to mind.) But those times and places are few and far between. Respond now and move on to the next opportunity.

Speed comes from confidence

Michelle L. tells us that confidence is key to a fast reaction time. “I was raised by a single mom. She gave us chores to do and a deadline on when to get them done. No micromanagement. We made decisions along the way. This gave us confidence with getting things done. As a leader, I get adequate information about a problem and make the decision without second-guessing myself. No need for perfection. Sometimes you fail but you learn and keep moving. There is not much that you can’t recover from.”

FAST TAKEAWAYS

- Our brains don’t always want us to be fast.
- We need to learn when to act fast.
- Quick response time in business and relationships is almost always beneficial.
- A new driver won’t necessarily fix your golf game. But it could.
- Practice speed.