

## **SLOW DOWN**

### **Why a Code 2 Response Saves Lives**

By Kevin J Jablonski, PhD, MPH, Chief Police Psychologist, Los Angeles Police Department,  
and Michel Moore, Chief, Los Angeles Police Department

The demands of your job relentlessly tell you to work harder, work longer, do more, know more, and work faster. It's easy to believe that if only there *were* more hours in a day, you would be more productive. Since there aren't, the key to accomplishing more may be to just. slow. down.

Fast-paced lifestyles with lengthy work schedules, competing demands, and substantial responsibilities, challenge even the brightest and most energetic of chief executives. Left unaddressed, such demands can lead to poorer decision-making; decision-making driven by emotion and subjectivity rather than systematic, evidence-based processes more likely to yield positive results.

Learning how to slow down has extraordinary health benefits. Science has shown that individuals who practice relaxation techniques, get enough rest and sleep, and enjoy meaningful time away from work demands live longer, healthier lives. These healthy behaviors contribute to higher energy levels, better decision-making, greater psychological resiliency, improved social intelligence, and less risk of obesity, dementia and even hair loss.

Here's a bit of unconventional advice that you may, at first, dismiss as silly. However, numerous empirical studies suggest that given time, these rather simple behaviors can and will improve your health.

#### **Breathe**

The science suggests that the old saying "stop and breathe" has tangible health benefits. Breathing is a natural process that typically requires little to no conscious attention. And yet, people are often surprised to learn that their breathing is dysregulated. Extensive research shows the connection between 'proper' breathing and relaxed physical and mental states, less reactive responses to perceived challenges and conflict, increased oxygenation and enhanced mental acuity. Here's one approach you can try:

Sit comfortably in a chair and let your head, neck and shoulders relax; breathe slowly and deeply through your nose; let your belly rise while your chest remains stationary; inhale slowly (3-5 seconds), hold your breath for a second or so, then slowly exhale through your nose. Your exhale should take longer to complete than your inhale/ breath holding (6-8 seconds). Start by practicing this process for one minute, working your way up to five or more minutes over time. Do this exercise three or more times throughout the day and whenever you feel tense.

#### **Rest**

This may seem like a foreign concept for chief executives, but rest is as critical as exercise to being healthy. Rest is the intentional slowing down or halting of physical activity. Rest gives the human body (and mind) an opportunity to repair tissue, reduce inflammation, and improve

immune function. Without periods of rest, you are at increased risk of weight gain, heart disease, muscle injury and depression. Try this:

Start by making time each day for a little downtime. If necessary, put a 5-10 minute 'self-care' block of time in your schedule where you don't have a meeting, call to make, or project to accomplish. During this time, read for pleasure (not for work), plan something enjoyable to do with your spouse/kids, listen to music or an audio book. If you meditate or pray, do so during this time. You might even close your eyes and simply sit silently, letting the world exist for a brief time without your conscious involvement. This can be a great time to incorporate your breathing exercise into your day.

### **Stop**

This may be the most challenging recommendation of all. Make time in your life to temporarily put aside work responsibilities and focus on your outside responsibilities. All too often, law enforcement officers of every rank, tenure and assignment arrive at retirement with regret for not having balanced their work-home responsibilities well. Furthermore, a lack of work-home balance is correlated with lower morale, higher rates of burnout and work dissatisfaction, poorer decision-making, substance abuse and depression. Do this:

Schedule time (literally calendar it) each week to engage in a personally satisfying, non-work-related activity. Take time to eat lunch away from your office, to work out in the morning or early evening, to run errands or grocery shop with your spouse. Take the steps necessary to ensure that you are getting sufficient, *uninterrupted* sleep regularly. As antithetical as this suggestion may sound, delegate someone within your command to attend one meeting or one event on behalf of you and your agency. Finally, take time off from work. Time off, like a family vacation or weekend getaway, means that, barring the most significant of tragedies, you're out-of-pocket. Don't monitor your phone or the news - you have a competent command to handle matters should they arise.

### **In the end...**

These suggestions may sound challenging. Most aspects of your job are challenging, but that does not prevent you from tackling them head on. Do the same for your health and for the good of your family, knowing that, in the end, **slowing down** can be the key to being a better chief executive.