

STOP! TO ACCELERATE

By Charlie Lang, Executive Coach & Managing Partner @ Progress-U Ltd.



Stop! to Accelerate

No, this is not another article that bores the busy executive with the appeal to slow down, take a vacation, and recharge the batteries.

No, it's neither an article that appeals to find more work-life-balance by reducing one's pace.

As you might know, a core part of my work is to coach senior executives. Having been in this line of work since 2002, I sometimes wonder why the majority of my clients truly cherish the time with me.

Over the years, I learned to admit that I (and my charm) might only be a secondary reason.

The people I'm spending time with in my coaching sessions are typically first or second level executives – Managing Directors, Sales Directors, General Managers and the like. And they all have at least one thing in common: they are super-busy! They are often the ones who are the first to arrive at the office in the morning and are frequently among the last to leave. Their schedules are insanely packed with meetings and before, in between and after they need to go through their emails, often numbering 100 – 200 per day. Have I mentioned that most of them travel a lot, too?

When every minute of the day is precious, why would they want to add another 3-4 hours per month to their schedules to see me?

Interestingly, while many of my coaching assignments started out with some very specific objective to be achieved, they often turn into a continuous assignment and the specific objective seems to disappear.

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That seems strange, doesn't it? Very busy executives cut significant time out of their schedule for something unspecific? And even cherish that time?

Let me explain what I observed.

Did I say that they waste time with me? By no means! They cherish the time with me because they figure that it makes a significant difference. And as I said, I might be only a secondary reason for that – and secondary means that I still have a role to play...

What I noticed is that the executives I'm coaching realize through our sessions - which may have started for a very specific reason - that a 'time-out' with their coach makes a bigger difference to how they run their business than they would have thought at the outset.

They realize that during these 90 – 120 minutes, something almost like magic happens. They stop, yes, really stop – and think. This is part of my job: to really make them stop by establishing certain boundaries to ensure that there will be no disturbances. Take for example, the case of one of my coachees, the only person who is allowed to interrupt our sessions is his wife. My job is not only to stop them, but to challenge their current way of thinking as well, as to trigger new insights.

That's not where it ends. New insights in most cases require a change in action. Part of the process is 'to nail the action', to ensure the coachees actually make specific changes in the way they think and do things that will lead to improved outcomes. The last part of the process is to keep them accountable through follow-

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up and follow-through in the subsequent sessions.

Tom, Managing Director of the Global Sourcing office of a European retailer once shared with me the following after I asked him why he still kept seeing me once or twice a month even after 1.5 years since we started his coaching sessions:

“Charlie, you know by now how crazy our business is. You are aware of the daily madness and the pressure we get from both headquarters and our customers. Taking these 90 minutes off to meet you every few weeks is a great way of recharging myself for the daily battle.”

“You could go to the spa instead. I’m sure that would recharge you, too, and might be even more pleasurable.” I responded.

“Perhaps, but I wouldn’t get the same level of inspiration and I’d probably make more stupid decisions which would lead to even more pressure. So it’s not just the 90 minutes that make the difference, but the impact of these 90 minutes on my daily work. That’s something I can’t get in the spa.”

One of my friends at Toastmasters and NLP expert Talis Wong insists: “Practice doesn't make perfect – unless you get useful feedback. Otherwise, practice may make you perfectly wrong.”

Let me twist that a bit: “Just taking time off doesn’t guarantee gaining great insights. Most of the time, to make a real difference, it takes qualified feedback, as well as effective challenging of current thinking.”

But why pay a coach for that when you could do the same with spouse, friends or

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colleagues. There are two main reasons why using a professional coach tends to be more effective:

- Spouse, friends, and colleagues are all 'party' in your life, so they'll tend to be biased to some extent. Even if they consciously try to be totally objective, it would be difficult for them to avoid being biased.
- Professional coaches are trained in the art of reflection and use various tools to get their coachees think on a much deeper level thus triggering more profound insights

Stop – Think – Accelerate!

What do you do to move faster?

Feel free to share on Charlie's blog: <http://progressu.blogspot.com>

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Charlie Lang is an Executive Progress Expert (Executive Coach, Facilitator and Trainer) who founded Progress-U Limited in 2002. His mission is to assist his clients in developing a corporate coaching culture for the benefit of all stakeholders. He is a passionate and professional Executive Coach, Mentor Coach, Trainer, Public Speaker and Author of over 100 articles related to leadership, change management and innovative sales.

In 2005, he published the book "The Groupness Factor" (see <http://www.progressu.com.hk/Groupness-book.htm>). Currently, he's authoring his second book, a business fiction on corporate coaching culture. Charlie's articles got printed in publications like Human Resources, FZ Magazine, Banking Today, SCMP, Effective Executive, A PLUS and CareerTimes. Currently he authors the book "A New Map for a New Age" and co-authors the book "Business Coaching in Asia".

Charlie is a founding member and was President (2007/08 and 08/09) of the Hong Kong International Coaching Community.

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