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Rocking Horse

EFFICIENCY
All Show and No Go

The 1850s were a turbulent period in American history. The nation faced controversy over slavery, the aftereffects of the Mexican-American War, and the pressure to admit new states and territories into the Union. As if those problems weren't enough, President Zachary Taylor unexpectedly died of acute gastroenteritis. On July 9 of that year, Millard Fillmore was sworn in as the thirteenth president of the United States. President Fillmore, a Northerner, was very different from his predecessor, a Southerner, and the two had disagreed on many national policies. Fillmore's Whig party supporters sensed the political shift and assumed that all their problems were solved now that a new man was in office. President Fillmore understood their feelings, but he realized a greater truth when he stated, "It is not strange . . . to mistake change for progress."

People still make that mistake today when they try to substitute anything for genuine progress. They feel that motion

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and efficiency are synonymous. As long as they are doing something, they assume they're productive.

The rocking horse perfectly illustrates the faulty belief that actions equal progress. You can look and feel good while riding a rocking horse and yet get nowhere. Sadly, many leaders ride rocking horses every day, and in their minds they think they are making progress.

While all of the other toys in this book are lessons in the positive, the rocking horse is a lesson in the negative. It is a perfect example of how *not* to be efficient. When you were growing up, your mom or dad told you to not act like certain people, and they shared reasons why. We will do the same with the rocking horse and share with you why you don't want to be inefficient like him: all show and no go.

Michael has a humorous personal story that will help you never forget this truth:

My first job as a minister was in a rural area in the panhandle of Florida. At Christmas, I was given a bonus that included five live chickens. With no previous poultry-related experience, I put them in the coop behind the church and was in the egg business overnight. A few months passed, and I had way too many chickens, so I decided to be a real farmer and fry one up. My wife wanted nothing to do with this, stating that she didn't want to eat any animal she had known personally, so she went to town. After she left, I walked into the chicken

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coop, caught the slowest bird, and “wrung its neck” just as I had seen my grandmother do. Right before he died, this rooster (with a broken neck) went absolutely berserk. He jumped up, flew around wildly, and bounced off all four walls of that little cage. The other chickens just froze and watched him go. My point is this: the most active chicken in the pen at that moment was the one closest to death. Don't judge your efficiency solely by your activity.

The truth is that activity does not necessarily equate to progress. Movement does not automatically mean growth. Hard work does not guarantee success. Business leaders will tell you to work smarter, not harder, but how many explain what working smarter looks like? So, if you are in the saddle of the rocking horse, hang on, because you are in for a ride as we peel back one layer at a time the causes of inefficiency.

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Active imaginations have fueled some great rocking-horse rides. They have been discovered in the pyramids of the pharaohs and excavated from the ruins of the Roman Empire. And like the historical rocking horse, your job can entertain, excite, enthuse, and exhaust you without ever moving you forward. How many times have you reached the end of the day only to look back and sigh that you have not accomplished anything? The lesson here is that efficiency is ultimately graded on

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progress, not motion. Type-A drivers are the worst in believing that movement equals progress. Have you ever seen one who goes around the block to avoid a red light just so he can keep moving?

George Bernard Shaw was right when he said, “There are only two qualities in the world: efficiency and inefficiency; and only two sorts of people: the efficient and the inefficient.”

Widespread inefficiency has slowly compromised what is acceptable in the workplace. This has caused many leaders to lower their expectations of progress. The only thing worse than an inefficient person is a

The only thing worse than an inefficient person is a group of inefficient people.

group of inefficient people. Watch as companies replace one person with two without changing their job responsibilities. Inefficiency often abounds when you avoid the needed analysis of the hiring process.

Efficiency is being able to achieve a desired result without wasted time, energy, or resources. It is not concerned so much with the *act* of work as it is with the *results* of work. Do not jump to the conclusion that the outcome determines the measure of efficiency. Shortcuts and efficiency are not synonymous. Likewise, some streamlining may actually reduce the quality that defines your organization or product. A great example of this is Nordstrom’s checkout procedure. When you purchase an item, the employee bags it, and instead of

simply handing it over the counter to you, he or she carries the bag around the counter to you, providing not just a sale but a personal touch unlike any other. This proves that what may seem inefficient to some defines quality to others.

The first step to being efficient is defining it in your context. The definition of efficiency for your organization will point to the areas that need attention and warrant greater time investments. What consumes your time, energy, and resources? Analyze your return on these three, and you will understand how efficient you really are.

To better understand where you are right now, see if you are riding one of the following four inefficient horses.

Four Types of Inefficient “Rocking Horses”

The Dead Horse

Dead horses can describe people, departments, and programs—anything that has outgrown its usefulness or is not contributing to the overall forward momentum. Organizations often perpetuate ineffective programs without questioning if there’s a better way to reach greater results. Perpetual programs often exist because they met a need twenty years ago.

The March of Dimes was established to find a cure for polio, but when the cure came, they had to ask if they were still needed. They took their skills and applied them to other diseases, becoming effective in many areas, especially relating