

# Common Sense Leadership

JOHN KEYSER, BUSINESS LEADERSHIP COACH

## “SLOW DOWN, WE’RE TOO BUSY”

“Slow down, you move too fast,” is the opening line of the 59th Bridge Street Song, a wonderful Simon & Garfunkel song from 1966 often recognized as “Feelin’ Groovy”.

If I were a composer rather than a leadership coach, I’d try to write a new song, “Slow down, we’re too busy”. Today, “slow down” is a key message that most of us in business need to consider.

The fact is, we are all too busy. Way too busy. And it is hurting us, individually, in our leadership – and in our businesses.

CEOs and senior executives spend endless amounts of time in meetings, on conference calls and in front of computers, hours and hours just about every day.

Yet, most of their companies’ essential daily work is done by the people who work for them. Senior managers should be out of their offices, off the executive floors, side by side with their people, having conversations with them. Senior leaders need to ask for ideas and feedback:

- How can we improve?
- What help do you need?
- What advice do you have for top management?

We need to let our people know that their work is important and valued, and that they are appreciated.

What’s getting in the way? The Internet was supposed to make us more productive; arguably it’s made us less productive. Business results are not good, our workforces are not happy, and morale is low in a great many companies - in fact, I’ve read studies that it is in the 75% range.

The endless flow of emails is a huge problem. There is no easy answer, no magic solution, no off the shelf product guaranteed to work. I have taken the Getting Things Done workshop by David Allen and gained lots of good ideas, but was forewarned that it can take two years to truly implement the system. There are other good productivity programs available, lots of them.

Yet, I only know two people who actually get their emails down to zero on a regular basis. The rest of us struggle, and that weighs on our mind. We are not in control, and that is a major source of stress.

David Allen’s premise is that our productivity is directly proportional to our ability to be relaxed.

So one message I offer is to please try to find an approach that works for you to gain control of your time. Start with emails and meetings. Set a time limit for these.

No one wants to go to every meeting. Sure, information has to be shared. No question. Why not ask the people of our companies how to have fewer meetings? They may well have ideas, and will certainly appreciate being asked. Remember, bottom-up ideas are often the best ideas, and top-down directives are not as effective as bottom-up initiatives.

And how's this? Have stand up meetings! Seriously. The information will be shared, ideas will be discussed and their brevity will demonstrate respect for everyone's time. Sure, there may be crucial meetings where this may not work, but try it when you can.

We want to conserve our time, to invest it wisely! To do this, we must identify our priorities.

As a senior executive, or an up and comer, our leadership has to be a very top priority. The most effective leaders are servant leaders who work with our team members. The operative word is with. This means:

- Connecting with our team members.
- Supporting them.
- Asking for their ideas.
- Listening to understand and learn.
- Helping them learn, grow and succeed.
- Inspiring them.
- Caring about them.

I wish I had the solution. However, I do know that low morale is prevalent. Our responsibility as leaders is to take positive steps to help change that. And we can only work towards improving morale and the spirit of our people if we slow down, come around from our computers and out of our offices, and have authentic conversations with those doing the work of our businesses.

Let's slow down! Let's be more purposeful and have meaningful conversations that will inspire our people, improve our cultures – and boost the bottom line.

## About The Author



*John Keyser is the founder and principal of Common Sense Leadership, [www.commonsenseleadership.com](http://www.commonsenseleadership.com). He works with executives helping them develop organizational cultures that will produce outstanding financial results year after year, and a striving for continuous improvement, theirs and their team's. His contact information is [john@johnkeysercoach.com](mailto:john@johnkeysercoach.com) and 202-236-2800.*