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Slowing Down, Speeding Up, and Your “Runaway Brain” . . . What Are We Talking About?

There is no such thing as overtraining . . . just underresting.

—Allen Lim, PhD founder, Skratch Labs

Slowing Down . . . What’s That Mean?

From Robb:

Having spent almost a decade in the cycling industry, I had so many opportunities to learn about slowing down in order to speed up. But my thoughts were usually going so fast I probably missed most of them. That is, until my friend Allen Lim dropped

this nugget on me one day. Dr. Lim is one of the world's leading authorities on exercise physiology, specifically in bicycling. Anyone outside of cycling may not know his name, but if we were to rattle off a list of athletes who have hired him to help them win races, medals, competitions, or contracts, that would be a heck of a list.

I first heard him say this right after he had finished consulting for a Tour de France team years ago. He was sharing his months-long experience with us and throughout the course of his stories, his quote made more and more sense.

For those who are unaware, and regardless of your opinion of cycling, the Tour de France is arguably one of the hardest, most grueling events in all of sports. And it requires quite an investment of suffering in order to complete the event. Competitors typically ride a minimum of 100 miles every day for three weeks straight. There are only two days off. The stages typically include climbing, sprinting, hours-long turns riding at the front to block the wind, and countless trips back and forth to the team car to gather food, water, and supplies. Got a bee sting? Road rash? Sunburn? Saddle sore? (Yes, that's a real thing and at least as painful as you can imagine it to be.) Too bad. You must deal with it and fight through the pain, because many of the medicines used to heal these problems are banned in and out of competition.

So Al was sharing with us that his job is to help the riders figure out ways to stay healthy and strong up to and through the last week of the race. A lot of riders believe that they need to grind it out no matter what, all day and every day. They have been told "it will only make me stronger for tomorrow, so harden the "F" up!" This is a mindset that many professionals carry into their sales, customer service, clinical, insurance, real estate, and trade careers. Spoiler alert: There's always a story about failure or burnout that follows the admission.

Al's job was to help the athletes learn, understand, and apply different techniques for doing just the right amount of work exactly when they needed to while racing, so that their bodies could fully recover between stages. Climbers should ride their

hardest only in the climbs. Sprinters can sit in until the last possible moment. Domestiques (the guys who do all the grunt work and protect the team leader[s]) can take turns, never going a minute longer than they need to at the front of the pack.

The lesson for these cyclists is this: You think you are tired from working too hard. That’s only part of it. You are actually tired from not taking the proper amount of time to recover. You waste energy doing things you don’t need to do to achieve the goal. And then you don’t value your “down time” enough to let yourself rest and recover properly. You are already thinking about tomorrow when you haven’t even finished today. You’re not fully present where you are *right now*, and instead you are creating turbulence, and *that’s* what’s exhausting you.

Cure for the Common “GO!”

Here’s the deal: most of you reading this book aren’t cyclists. But the lesson is still relevant for you, personally and professionally. Replace the word “cyclist” with “realtor” or “financial advisor” or “artist” or whatever your profession or your goal is.

Imagine a financial advisor studying for her Series 65. She spends a *ton* of time studying, typically after a full workday. She tries reading when she is tired. Her mind is elsewhere. She forgets what she read. And this happens over and over and over again. She starts thinking about what will happen if she doesn’t get her studying done. It stresses her out. She stays up late and doesn’t get a good night sleep. Every single appointment the next day is unproductive. Are you starting to see how the idea of “powering through” isn’t serving you? Are you starting to notice that taking a little more “down time” will help you operate more effectively during your “up time”?

Stop trying to “fight through” to get what you want. Stop ignoring reality. Start rethinking how you approach things. Start putting the appropriate amount of time, effort, and mental bandwidth into not only working smarter but also thinking smarter. *Thinking smarter* means less small thinking and more *big* thinking, less overthinking, and more relaxing.

Real-Life Examples

When it comes to slowing down in order gain progress, there are examples we can find everywhere to understand the importance of this tactic.

An airline pilot's job is to safely travel from origin to the destination. If he can make it there on time, that's a bonus! But the ultimate goal is to get the plane safely to the destination.

How many times have you been on the plane, in your seat, slightly overheated, wondering when this plane is going to take off. All of a sudden the sweet, soothing sound of "Boi-n-n-ng" comes over the loudspeaker, followed by "Ladies and gentleman, this is your Captain speaking. We are currently number 12 for takeoff, but don't worry, we'll make it up in the air. So for now, just go ahead and sit back and relax, we'll be off the ground in just a bit."

You might think the pilot needs to speed up in order to achieve his goal. He needs to fly faster than he had planned in order to get to the destination on time. But there's more at stake here.

The pilot needs to get to the airspace where the destination air-traffic controller can get the plane in the queue to land. Once there, the pilot receives instructions on where to be and when (and at what speed) in order to keep the air traffic flowing smoothly.

Here's the best and potentially most overlooked part. In order for the pilot to achieve the goal (landing safely at the destination), the most important thing he needs to do is slow the plane down. If the pilot does not decrease the speed of the plane, it literally can't land, and he'll never achieve the goal.

How many projects, conversations, activities, meetings, and so on never got finished simply because you never took a second to "lay off the gas" in order to let things fall into place, instead of having the emergency brake pulled, bringing everything to a screeching halt?

Here's another example from football (the American type, not soccer). In order to snap the ball and start the play, everyone on the offense needs to be standing still. If someone on the offense rushes to start the play, they are penalized and subsequently get moved further from their goal. Even taking two to three seconds

to stop and think can mean the difference between one step forward instead of two steps back.

Ever driven in the snow? If you have, you know that the worst thing you can do when sliding on a slippery surface is to steer the car back in the lane as hard as you can. If you haven’t driven in the snow, I’ll describe what happens. Your car is on its own course. All 100–200 pounds of you is *not* going to be able to get the two to three tons of automobile back on the road. No matter how hard you try or how fast you steer, you simply have to slow the car down. Only then can the tires grab and allow you to regain control. The car is downright out of control until you slow it down and take control of it.

Your mind operates the same way, and if allowed to careen along it can become a Runaway Brain. This is what we’ll be talking about in the next few pages.

What’s a “Runaway Brain” and Why Should You Care?

Take this yes/no quiz:

- Have you ever met someone for the first time, shook their hand, repeated their name, and then literally five seconds later you couldn’t remember their name?
- Have you ever been reading something, reached the end of a page, and realized that your mind had been . . . elsewhere, and as a result you had zero idea what you’d just “read”?
- Have you ever had a day at work when you worked to the point of exhaustion, and then realized that you had just run in circles all day and therefore didn’t actually accomplish anything?
- Have you ever woken up in the middle of the night and then not been able to get back to sleep because your mind was racing about something work related?

It’s likely you answered yes to all four of these, but even if you said yes to only one question, you’ve experienced Runaway Brain.

How Your Brain “Runs Away”

Your brain “runs away” in two ways: Sometimes it runs away like a dog runs away – you open the door, the dog squeezes out between your legs, and it just bolts. And then it keeps on going over the horizon, leaving you wondering whether you’ll ever see it again. It just . . . leaves.

When your brain runs away in this sense, it shows up as

- Forgetfulness
- Being at a loss for words
- Not knowing an answer to a test question
- Wondering “Where did the day go?”
- Feeling like you’re losing it, or like something might be seriously wrong

More often, your brain “runs away” with you in tow, and this is a serious problem. Lots of psychologists and authors have described how your mind can “hijack” you: It doesn’t leave you – it’s much more like a carjacking while you’re still in the car. In this case, your thoughts are literally in the driver’s seat. You may not like where you’re going or the route you’re taking to get there, but you’re just along for the ride with no control.

If your brain is running away in this manner, you’ll experience:

- Insomnia caused by a racing mind
- A lot of stress
- You’ll be frustrated, irritable, and angry
- Exhaustion and burnout
- A sense of powerlessness
- Anxiety
- Distraction
- Poor self-discipline and bad time management
- Other issues that make you feel like you’re driving yourself crazy and can’t stop

Either way, it’s not pleasant. What you may already understand is that *the Runaway Brain is not only unpleasant, it’s extremely expensive*. If you are who we believe you are, things like anxiety,

distraction, low energy, and forgetfulness will *cost you*. Your Runaway Brain will cost you in terms of

- Wasted time
- Destruction of personal and professional relationships
- Shrinking sales numbers
- Higher attrition or turnover
- Lowered income
- Fading self-confidence

And, clearly, nobody wants that, right?

The bad news is that we’re actually *wired* to have Runaway Brains. You’ll learn about your brain’s unhelpful default settings in Chapter 4, for now just understand we all have strong tendencies ingrained in us which cause us to just . . . keep . . . making . . . these mistakes over and over again, until we fix the underlying cause. The good news is that you definitely *can* fix the underlying cause, which is what the rest of *Master Your Mind* is about!

A Brief Word of Caution

Actually, for refocusing and re-energizing your Runaway Brain, it’s important to know how to deal with the resistance you may experience. There will be people along the way who think you’re nuts, so let’s take some time here and understand why all this is “counterintuitive” in the first place . . .

Know That You Can Rewire Your Brain

For most people (a.k.a. “The Majority”), a *ton* of what they think they know about life is just flat-out wrong.

You’ll get way more out of this book – in fact, you’ll get way more out of your life – if you are open to the idea that a *huge* percentage of the things we’ve been taught, been sold, or had drilled into our heads as “facts” . . . are simply not true. They often are easy to believe because they sound logical, but these inaccuracies can have negative and even devastating effects on our lives.

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Some examples from different areas:

- Most of us were taught by our parents that we shouldn't go swimming for 30 minutes after we eat, because we will suffer from stomach cramps and drown. This is easy to believe because eating food makes you heavier, and heavy things sink more easily than lighter things, right? True, but this is just BS. Swimming after you eat has proven to be no problem at all, and believing this "fact" just kept us rule-followers from having fun swimming for a lot of half-hours. We are sure that our moms had good intentions, but this is an exaggeration that was passed down for generations and taught to us as truth. And really, this one's fairly inconsequential . . . the next one, however, has gigantic implications.
- For decades, the entire medical and health system (some call it the medical-industrial complex) has promoted the idea that a high carbohydrate/low-fat diet is the best way to fuel your body, be healthy, avoid heart disease, and even lose weight. We were taught to avoid fat like the plague, because "fat clogs your arteries" and "eating fat makes you fat." Again, easy to believe, right? It just sounds like it should make sense: "Eating fat makes you fat" sounds so logical that it *must* be true. Unfortunately, it's patently false for the majority of human beings. More and more research (and our own personal experience) proves that the best diet for weight loss, being healthy and alleviating everything from heart disease to diabetes to any number of chronic health issues, is a diet that includes almost no carbohydrates but relies on large amounts of high-quality fat. The reality is that eating fat actually makes you thin and healthy . . . but eating *sugar* makes you fat and chronically ill. This incorrect premise, which has been systematically sold to the public, has had gigantic implications for millions of people. Ever since the American "food pyramid" was popularized, rates of heart disease, obesity, diabetes, cancer and all manner of chronic illness have skyrocketed and become a global pandemic. Thankfully, this one is actually the subject of numerous books and a growing body of research, so I'll leave it alone for now, but the next one directly relates to your brain and your success.
- If you're like us, you were taught in school that once you reach adulthood, your brain becomes "set." We were taught that you stop making new brain cells, that your brain's structures

become fixed, and you’ve got what you’ve got. The logical extension is that learning new things becomes impossible and that your path in life is pretty much established by your early to mid 20s. Once again, this makes sense . . . and is total BS. It might be true that teaching old dogs new tricks is difficult, but you are not a dog. You’re a human being, and one fantastic thing about human beings is called *neuroplasticity*. Read on . . .

Neuroplasticity was discovered in the 1980s, and it’s revolutionized how we think about success, personal development, and aging. Neuroplasticity is the truth that the human brain can and does both generate new brain cells and rewire itself *throughout a person’s entire lifespan*. Neural pathways can be established, re-established, and modified at will, no matter how old or young we are, no matter our race or gender, and no matter our educational background.

Do some brains require more work to “rewire” than others? Of course. But if you’re able to read this book (clearly we’re talking to *you*), you unquestionably have the ability to rewire your brain, and therefore you will see results, no matter where you’re starting from. So please don’t let other people’s uninformed (or worse, *misinformed*) opinions of “what works and what doesn’t” deter you in your quest for greatness. And definitely don’t let “The Majority” dictate your actions . . . “they” may not be in doubt, but they’re often wrong.

Why did we create such a lengthy sidebar? Because you have to understand that when you take action on new things that will transform and elevate you, you will encounter resistance. Because everyone has been exposed to myths and exaggerations and believed them, and when you start to break away from the established norms, you become a rebel. You become “not normal.” Those who are *not* deviating from the norm (a.k.a. “The Majority”) often subconsciously feel threatened by your new path. If this happens, they may sometimes attack you. How will you know if this is happening?

As you start refocusing and re-energizing your Runaway Brain, you will notice that:

- You have more energy.
- You sleep better at night.

- You're much more productive – you accomplish more in less time.
- You're happier.
- You have much greater control over your life, more enthusiasm, and more peace of mind.
- You're literally more magnetic and attractive to high-caliber people.

On the flip side, you may simultaneously notice that:

- You hear people make some jokes about “Mr./Ms. Positive.”
- Some people in your circle of friends start seeming tiresome and draining to you.
- Those around you get sucked into drama that you used to be interested in, but no longer are.
- Some long-standing relationships change or maybe even disappear.

If/when you experience these flip sides, do not let them stop you – please just notice that they're happening, realize that they're happening *because you're growing*, and *stay the course*. You may need to enlist the help of a coach or mentor to keep on track, but please stay the course. These reactions in your environment will be temporary storms that subside, and when they do you'll be in such a much better place.

So let's get cracking, shall we? We'll begin this journey by helping you to understand more deeply what's actually going on in your brain, specifically the parts of your brain that actually get results. Some of it might seem backward, odd, or counterintuitive, but you're about to learn quite a bit about *you*. Here we go!

Chapter Review

- There's no such thing as going too hard, but there's definitely such a thing as not going slow enough.
- Land the plane.
- Get set before the ball is hiked.
- It's going to be difficult at first. Observe the friction instead of fighting it.