BOOK REVIEW

Title: **The Slow Fix: Solve Problems, Work Smarter and Live Better in a World Addicted to Speed**

Author: **Carl Honoré**

Publisher: **Toronto, ON: Alfred A. Knopf Canada**

Year of publication: **2013**

Reviewed by: **Stephanie Tukonic**

We live in a world that is addicted to the quick fix – quick and easy solutions for instant weight loss, turning your baby into Einstein, and instant abs in 5 days. We rely on money and medications to help quickly solve our problems. Yet, I find myself falling victim to these tactics of the quick fix as responsibilities increase and deadlines approach. In English, these solutions are deemed as “band-aid cures” or “duct tape solutions” (p. 12). *The Slow Fix: Solve Problems, Work Smarter and Live Better in a World Addicted to Speed*, written by Canadian Journalist Carl Honoré, promotes fixing problems at the right speed to yield better and longer-lasting outcomes, because too many times we depend on quick solutions to mend problems. These include problems from personal relationships, to other matters such as business and education. The quintessential example of this book describes an ‘andon rope,’ which translates into a ‘paper lantern rope’ in Japanese describing the juxtaposition of the rise and fall of Toyota as a cautionary tale. This rising Japanese car company tackled problems at the source, by pulling the andon rope when something went wrong on the assembly line. Yet, in a sprint to become number one car manufacturer in the world – management overreached despite warnings from the factory floor and lost control of the supply chain – in other words, they stopped pulling the andon rope and fell for the quick fix. In this book, comprised of 14 chapters, Honoré collectively uses research, personal experiences, and examples to investigate the multiple ingredients of a slow fix. It begins with admitting mistakes; thinking hard, long, and holistically; thinking in small detail; preparing for troubleshoots to collaborating with others and crowdsourcing; an individual catalyst and including everyday people in the front line; understanding and challenging emotions; solving problems with games with a problem that is evolving. Honoré motivates readers of all backgrounds to stop, reflect, learn, and become active agents of their own slow fix.

Honoré is very clear on the fast paced culture in which we live and surround ourselves with everyday, but uses multiple qualities of a slow fix as an opportunity to reduce the hurry of our environment. This does not mean living at a snails pace, however, “doing everything at the right speed – fast, slow or whatever pace delivers the best results” (p. 290). The book introduces the reader to two speeds of thinking. System 1 is described as rapid intuitive thinking, which is used in fast paced situations (e.g., deciding on which sandwich to buy, smiling back to a stranger on the bus), but this system is also responsible for human biases (e.g., Einstellung effect, denial, legacy problem). System 2 is described as slow deliberate thinking, which requires more time and effort, but yields more accurate results (e.g., calculating 34 multiplied by 12). These systems of decision making is an extension of the work of Daniel Kahneman. This book is a reminder that we must engage in the slow fix in our everyday lives so that it can be the core of our culture,

which will not be easy given human biology. There are several things one can do to short-circuit the quick-fix reflex, as readers, learners, educators, or employees, which to my understanding, are clear in experiential learning through critical reflection and participatory learning, in conjunction with maintaining a goal-orientated outlook.

There are several ingredients of the slow fix that Honoré explores – including confessing mistakes, thinking hard, holistically, and long – that subscribe to experiential learning through the use of critical reflection. There are several examples that Honoré uses to illustrate the potential of each ingredient as a part of the slow fix. One purpose of critical reflection is to inform ones self of our actions, which can lead to interpretation and creation of new knowledge (Brookfield, 1995). Interpreting our actions begins with recognizing our actions. Yet, these actions that may be labelled as a mistake are often more difficult to own up to due simply to the adverse consequences of this action. For example, in a testing scenario, an incorrect answer on a test results in a deduction of a mark. Honoré also recognizes that “deadlines have a role to play in finding solutions, but racing the clock can lead to sloppy, superficial thinking” (p. 66), which is unfortunate, since the world we live in “prizes action over reflection, and when the clock is ticking, it takes nerve to spend 55 minutes thinking” (p. 58). Locke high school in South Central Los Angeles, California, is a prime example of how the slow fix that incorporates the qualities of critical reflection in combination with these slow fix ingredients. Marco Petruzzi is a member of the non-profitable organization Green Dot and the man behind the engineering turn around of this “lousy school” (p. 73). Schools like Locke were administered quick fixes (e.g., a fresh reading program, new attendance policy) of “sweeping policies handed down by District with no thought for what they would really mean for Locke, so they never made a dent” (p. 75). Petruzzi argues that it is not the one policy that can change the environment, but “it’s host of factors, and you have to figure out what they are, how they are interconnected, and then tackle them all together” (p. 76). In essence, critical reflection is a useful tool in assessing assumptions about beliefs, and specifically, how to solve problems (Mezirow, 1990). This process of critical reflection is a way for adult learners, in particular, to interpret and create new knowledge or actions from ordinary to extraordinary experiences (Brookfield, 1995). Therefore, using critical reflection as a learning staple, it challenges prevailing social, political, and cultural, or professional ways of acting.

As a learner, goal orientation is rooted in the ability and willingness of ones self to delay gratification and the slow fix incorporates this motto that if you “put in the effort now... [you can] save time and money later” (p. 292). These behaviours are not new, as delaying gratification in childhood enhances the cognitive and social competence in both adults and adolescents (Michel, Shoda, & Rodriguez, 1989). Are Hoeidal uses the ingredients of the slow fix to reinvent the penal system in Norway with the Halden High Security Prison, which are similar to Marco Petruzzi and the Locke high school slow fix. Most penal systems outside of Norway have adopted short-term views of prisons and consider incarceration to be costly and an ineffectual approach that fails to turn criminals into law-abiding citizens. Hoeidal uses a different penal philosophy that is primarily focused on the goal of paving a way for convicts to fit back into society at the end of their sentence. But once more, Honoré reminds the reader that setting long term goals may come easy, but it is important to continue to test everything against it to help one in the slow fix. Nonetheless, individuals like Hoeidal and Petruzzi act as important catalysts in this goal-reaching process. The rationale behind this is that “ideas change, circumstances change and teams change, so people need a single person who has a clear idea of where they are going and is ultimately going to be responsible for what happens” (p. 194). Therefore, this book helps

readers to understand and recognize that the slow fix is not easy, but constant reflection and goal orientation is essential in a slow fix.

Learners can also use their own expertise to be apart of the slow fix. Participating in events can help individuals learn to build their expertise and troubleshoot errors. Experiences in the work place, relationships, and home help us to prepare for trouble shooting along the way in the slow fix. We build up a personal database of experiences that allow you to spot familiar patterns, pitfalls, and possibilities in a problem, in a process referred to as “thin slicing”. The twist is that true thin slicers have “taken the time before the problem arises to build up a database of experiences that allows you to troubleshoot from the hip when things go wrong” (p. 131) – which becomes a defining ingredient in the slow fix. Honoré highlights that the best thin slicers never stop building their expertise. This is especially true in the field of research where it is suggested that it takes approximately 10,000 hours to master a discipline, and it is something that resonates close to my position as a graduate student. This situational perspective of participatory learning evokes communities of practice to involve people to engage in the process of shared collective learning (Fenwick, 2000). Collective learning in communities also lead to collaborating with others, in essences, people from different disciplines and fields of work to come together to give a different perspective on the problem.

Essentially, this book provides insight into how to go about solving all kinds of problems in the domains of, but is not limited to, business, politics, education, and relationships. The ingredients for the slow fix can be used to take a moment to understand the available resources and tools, and the possibilities for fostering solutions to problems in a world addicted to the so-called quick fix. As an educator, these ingredients can be embedded into problem solving opportunities that are incorporated into the learning material to promote the slow fix at both micro and macro communities of learning. However, Honoré reminds us that “a partial solution is often much better than no solution at all” (p. 276) as complex problems evolve. Yet, the challenge is to recognize and foster our personal slow fix, that may be unique to us as learners, educators, partners, or employers in a culture addicted to fast results.

References

- Brookfield, S. D. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fenwick, T. J. (2000). Expanding conceptions of experiential learning: A review of the five contemporary perspectives on cognition. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 50(4), 243-272.
- Mezirow, J. (1990). *Fostering critical reflection in adulthood*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Rodriguez, M. L., Mischel, W., & Shoda, Y. (1989). Cognitive person variables in the delay of gratification of older children at risk. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(2), 358-367.