

# Hurry up and slow down

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Leslie Whitaker / CTW Features

As secretary of Yale University in the 1990s, Sheila Wellington often negotiated with city officials in New Haven, Conn., home to the prestigious school.

One item they tangled over was the fate of a couple of campus streets. Yale wanted to close the streets to traffic; the city did not. Every time Wellington raised the issue, the response was No.

But that all changed quickly. During a contentious session over fees the city wanted to charge the university, Wellington indicated that Yale would be willing to pay handsomely to block the streets. That's when she detected a brief sliver of silence before the expected No.

"I just watched and listened," she says. "And they didn't say No quickly enough. You could hear a pin drop."

Wellington realized the issue was in play and soon raised it again. Ultimately, that pause opened the door for a new fee agreement that included closed-off streets.

Rapid-fire decision-making is widely considered to be a hallmark of great managers and a virtue in the workplace. However, it is useful to remember the value of delay.

If it's someone else's time out, however short, it may signal serious hesitation.

If it's your own pause, you may need more time to ponder or tune in to your gut before moving ahead.

Don't be afraid to take time before responding to something someone says, does, or writes, advises **Nance Guilmartin**, a fellow at Florida International University's Center for Leadership and author of "The Power of Pause," (Jossey-Bass, 2009).

"In tough situations, when your intuition can be short-circuited by the demand for instant answers, you can, and to be truly effective, you must," pause and think twice, she says.

If you take your foot off the accelerator before taking action, especially in high pressure or high conflict situations, you may give yourself (and the other side) the necessary time to check assumptions, gather more information and even calm down.

It can also save a job hunt.

If you pause to proofread a cover letter before hitting the send button and catch an error, for example, that may be the difference between being invited to an interview or receiving a lightening speed rejection.