

Speed as a Default

How one sales leader changed his response to pressure

SECTOR

Medical technology

LEADER

Regional sales director responsible for nine markets

CARD USED

The Horseman

ENGAGEMENT

One-to-one executive coaching

COACHING PRIORITY

Maintain pace while improving judgement, delegation and challenge within the team

OUTCOME

The leader identified the situations that triggered acceleration and introduced a more deliberate response to escalation

01 Coaching context

The regional sales director had built his career by moving quickly. He responded to clients early, entered difficult negotiations directly and expected his team to maintain the same pace.

After a weak quarter in two markets, his speed increased. He joined more customer calls, asked for daily updates and rewrote proposals late in the process. Decisions that once sat with country managers began returning to him.

The approach created visible activity and protected several important opportunities. It also affected the team. Country managers delayed decisions until they had his view. People prepared extensively for review meetings and raised risks late, once they had a solution to present.

The coaching engagement focused on how he could retain urgency while widening the team's capacity to think and act.

02 Using The Horseman

During the third coaching conversation, the leader selected The Horseman from the deck.

The image and title matched a quality he valued. He saw himself as the person who created momentum when others became cautious. Speed had supported his success and had become part of how colleagues described him.

Two questions on the card shaped the conversation:

— Is your speed a strategy or a flight?

— What are you trampling in your haste to arrive?

He first connected the questions with workload. He was moving quickly because the region had real commercial pressure. As the conversation continued, he identified a second reason. Activity gave him relief from uncertainty. Entering the problem directly felt more useful than waiting for another leader to work through it.

03 Examining the pattern

The coach and leader reviewed three recent situations: a delayed tender, a disagreement over pricing and a country manager's request for additional headcount.

In each case, he had moved from concern to direct involvement within a few hours. He asked for information, proposed a route and set the next action. His team received clarity and lost the chance to frame the problem themselves.

The leader described one review call in which six people waited while he worked through the answer aloud. He had experienced the call as decisive. His country manager later described it as a signal that senior involvement was expected whenever the stakes rose.

He also identified what speed protected. Fast action reduced the possibility of being surprised by a client, missing an internal deadline or appearing uncertain in front of senior management. These were legitimate concerns. His response concentrated information and judgement around him, which made the regional team more dependent during the next difficult decision.

The Horseman helped him distinguish commercial speed from personal acceleration. Commercial speed shortened the path to a sound decision. Personal acceleration placed him at the centre of every urgent issue.

04 A different response

The leader developed a short practice for the first twenty-four hours of an escalation.

He would begin by asking the decision owner for three points: their reading of the situation, the decision required and the support they wanted from him. He would state whether he was advising, approving or taking ownership.

For issues that remained with a country manager, he agreed to avoid rewriting the proposed solution. His questions would focus on risk, assumptions and stakeholders. The manager would choose the final route and communicate it.

He also introduced a weekly thirty-minute meeting in which country managers brought one uncertain issue at an early stage. The purpose was to build judgement before pressure created an emergency.

05 Evidence from follow-up

At the next coaching session, the leader reviewed two escalations in which he had used the practice.

In one, the country manager changed the tender strategy after answering the three questions. In the other, the leader took ownership because the pricing decision crossed the region's agreed commercial threshold.

He noticed that clear boundaries reduced his need to monitor the work. His team brought him earlier information because the first response was a discussion about ownership rather than an immediate takeover.

The coaching evidence remained behavioural and short term. It showed a change in how the leader handled live decisions; commercial results would require a longer period of observation.

06 What the card contributed

The Horseman gave the leader a precise way to examine a strength that had become overused. The conversation respected the value of pace and made its wider effects easier to see.

The card stayed on his desk during the month. Before entering an escalation, he used one question from the session:

“Am I shortening the path to a decision, or making myself the path?”