Why You Should Stop Rushing (Your Brain is Tricking You)

By Patrick Buggy

WHY YOU SHOULD STOP RUSHING
(YOUR BRAIN IS TRICKING YOU)

The adrenaline hit me like a slap in the face. I had slept through my alarm…again.

I developed the unfortunate habit of sleeping through my alarm while studying in Copenhagen, Denmark.

It led me to miss half of a mid-term exam. And I nearly missed a bus departure for a weeklong class trip!

Everyone has their own version of this story, feeling behind during an important situation. Trying to "catch up" is a stressful experience!

Whenever I slept through an alarm, I would leap out of bed and start rushing around like a madman.

In the moment, rushing feels like the only way to remedy the situation.

"I'm running behind, so I need to rush to catch up!"

<u>But in reality, rushing to "catch up" is rarely worth it!</u>

The amount you "catch up" pales in comparison to the added stress you create by rushing.

The Myth of "Catching Up" (And why the Odds are Stacked Against You)

Rushing is a simple exchange, with inputs and outputs.

You put something in (extra physical and mental energy) to achieve a result ("catching up").

But the positive results from rushing are marginal at best. You never truly catch up!

And the cost for acquiring those marginal benefits significantly outweighs their benefit.

Let's say you're running late to a meeting and decide to speed on your way there. Instead of going the 60mph speed limit, you push it to 72mph. What used to take you 15 minutes now only took about 12.

But saving those precious three minutes costs you significantly. You're putting yourself at greater risk for physical harm (crash), mental harm (stress), and financial harm (speeding ticket).
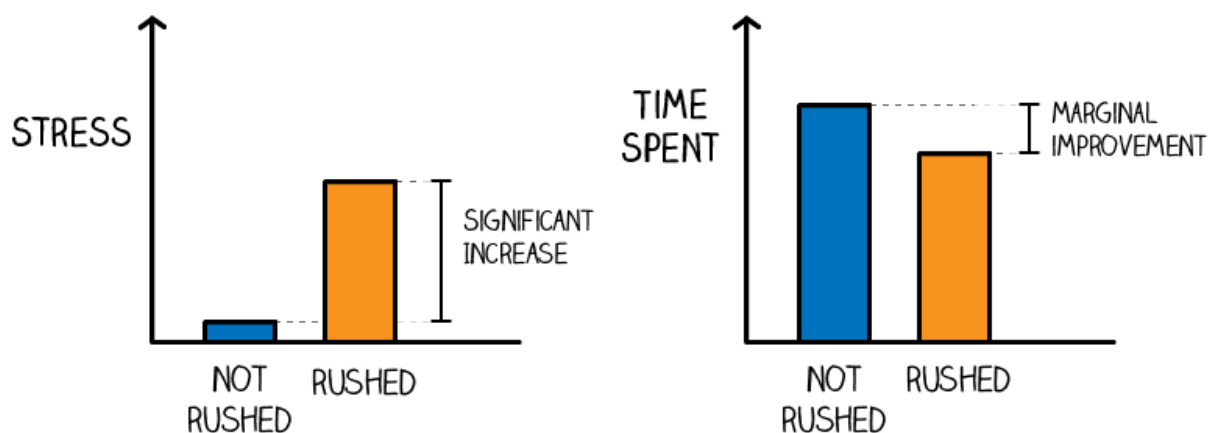
Rushing adds stress and anxiety to your life. Over time, this can make a big difference in your default mental state.

Even if it doesn't feel significant in the moment, the difference between a peaceful mind and a somewhat stressed mind is significant. It impacts everyone around you as well.

The stress of needing to act quickly can be worth it when your wellbeing is threatened…But in modern times, those situations are few and far between.

With that in mind, why don't you bat an eye when you see coworkers frantically rushing around the office? Why is rushing so commonplace?

YOUR BRAIN

CURRENTLY SABOTAGING YOU

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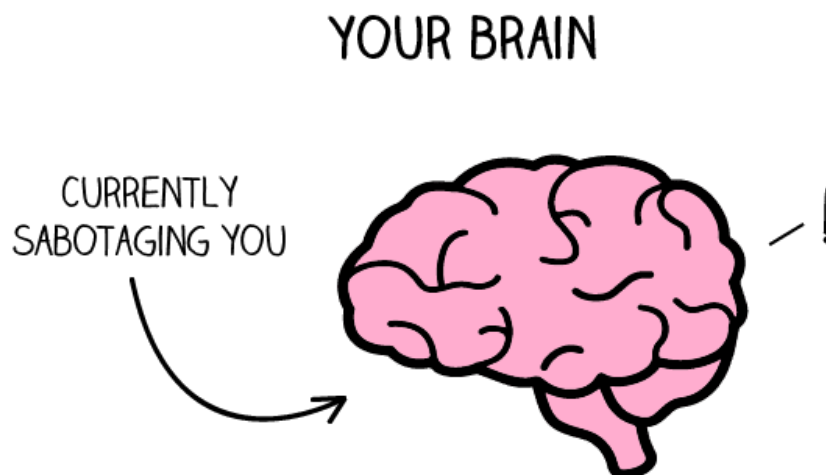
The Brain that Cried Wolf

The modern brain is poorly calibrated to understand threats.

This has nothing to do with your intelligence. It's a natural byproduct of human evolution.

Fear's role is to motivate you to act swiftly to prevent a threat to your wellbeing. But in today's society, most people don't experience situations with legitimately harsh consequences.

Our distant ancestors faced frequent threats from wild animals, unforgiving elements, and warring enemies. Modern man's most common "threats" involve nothing more than short-term emotional or physical *discomfort*.

Your brain has new inputs in today's world, but the operating system is the same as our "caveman" ancestors.

This is why rushing around is so commonplace in modern society. Situations with minor consequences feel significant in the absence of anything more dangerous.

CONSEQUENCES OF "FALLING BEHIND"

REAL   PERCEIVED
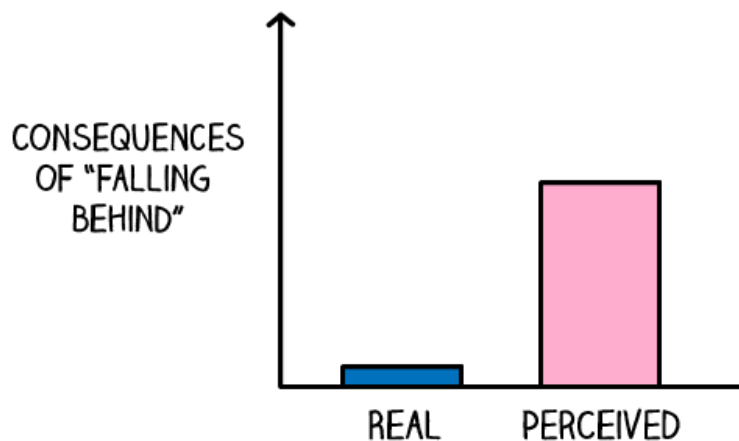
The result: unnecessarily elevated levels of stress and anxiety.

You fear the consequences of "falling behind" at work, so you work frantically to try and make up for it.

You fear what will happen if you arrive a few minutes late to something, and drive aggressively to get their faster.

Both of these scenarios exemplify the stacked equation of rushing. The marginal gains in either case aren't worth the added stress.

This isn't to say that working quickly is never worth it. Sometimes it's necessary. But it should come from a place of genuine inspiration and internal motivation, not fear.

Letting fear take over on a regular basis is unnecessary and harmful to you and those around you.

Fortunately, there are a host of ways to take control in these situations! You can learn to understand when it's worthwhile to rush.

3 Situations to Cultivate Awareness and Reduce Stress

Awareness is your antidote to unnecessary stress.

When you pause to identify the real consequences of everyday fears (rejection, "falling behind", running late, etc.) you give yourself the opportunity to act intentionally.

Instead of letting fear take over, you understand when the consequences of rushing won't be worth the added stress.

Here are three different situations where you can cultivate awareness to minimize rushing and reduce stress:

In the moment
Cultivate awareness and notice when you start to rush. Take a minute to pause and evaluate your scenario.

Think through the benefits and consequences of rushing by asking yourself two questions:

1. What's the worst that could happen if I act normally, and don't rush?
   This tends to be surprisingly insignificant. (e.g. "My friend will be by themselves for 10 minutes." or "I get a little embarrassed for 30 seconds.")
2. What are the best and worst-case scenarios if I choose to rush? The best will likely be a marginal improvement from acting normally, while the worst may be significant. (e.g. Best: You arrive at my destination 5 minutes earlier. Worst: You get a speeding ticket or get in a crash.)

In preparation

It's easy to feel behind when you've lost control of your schedule. This lack of control is often a matter of priority. It's a sign that you've let too many commitments into your life that don't align with what matters to you.

Give yourself more control with these three strategies:

1. <u>Start saying "no"</u>
   Take control of your schedule by saying "no" to more things. Spend your time on things that you value. (Use the 20 Minute Life Check to get started here.)
2. <u>Organize to-do's by urgency and priority</u>
   This framework was popularized by Stephen Covey (author of 7 Habits of Highly Effective People) and used by President Dwight Eisenhower. It will help you focus on the right tasks by identifying what's actually important.
3. <u>Cultivate space</u>
   Create space in your day by scheduling short breaks to reflect or give your mind a break. Active reflection time and subconscious processing time are critical to doing your best work.

After the fact

Reflect on the times when you do choose to rush.

Ask yourself: Was it worthwhile? Why or why not?

Hindsight is 20/20, so use it to calibrate your sense of urgency for future scenarios.

Vanquish Insignificant Fears to Live With Intention

Modern society has it's legitimate dangers. But most common fears have insignificant consequences.

Conquer your fear of falling behind by staying present to the true consequences of your actions.

Some of the best advice I've ever received came from a friend in a three word text when I was running late.

"Sweet, **no rush**."

Next time you're running late or feel behind at work, take a minute to breath and find your center. Then, evaluate your scenario, and act accordingly.

The world will be a better place when you do!