



136: Decision-Making for Slow Processors

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 136.

This is a podcast about making decisions, but also about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or if you just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful, but also distracting hum of entertainment, you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer and a simple next right step.

Today's episode is inspired by a few comments I received after I did an Instagram story in the Chick-fil-A line. Y'all, we have to always be paying attention for inspiration, and it hit me in the Chick-fil-A line. But in that Instagram story, I talked about an episode of my friend, Laura Tremaine's podcast, 10 Things To Tell You, and how she hosted a wonderfully engaging conversation around the question. Has the internet ever changed your mind?

Well, I loved that episode so much that I had to hop on stories and tell the people to go listen to it. And in passing, it wasn't even the point of my story. But in passing, I mentioned that I wished Laura would slow her episode posting down to just one time per month instead of once per week. So that would give me time to process all of her thoughtful episodes. She always has such wonderful questions to consider, and I need more time to consider them.

Well, after I posted that story, I heard from several of you who raised your hand in the comments, and you said that you are slow processors too, and it's so good. You said to hear from someone like me, who continues to put out content weekly and seems to be a functioning human adult person, but that I too am someone who thinks slowly or processes slowly.

So that's what I want to talk about in today's episode, is there room for slow processing in this fast moving world? How can we make thoughtful decisions when everything moves so quickly?

As a slow processor, it helps to have tools to rely on to help you get out of your own way so that you can do your next right thing with some sense of ease. That's why I'm excited this episode is sponsored by Skillshare. Skillshare offers membership with meaning with thousands of classes to choose from, real projects you can create, and the support from fellow creatives along the way. Skillshare empowers you to accomplish real growth in topics you care about. There are classes designed to help you make progress by simply doing the next right thing you are interested in. I've shared a little bit about my work rhythms on the show this year. And I just dove into Lindsay C Holmes' class Productivity with Evernote, which

is a tool I've started to use as a writer and a creative that's saving my life. And author Greg McKeown teaches a class using his book *Essentialism* called *Simple Productivity: How to Accomplish More With Less*. There's a lesson on mastering the slow "yes" and how to uncommit when you've already said yes to something. So helpful and practical.

These are just two of the thousands of classes available. Maybe your next right thing is learning something new with Skillshare, explore your creativity or productivity and get two free months of premium membership as [skillshare.com/next right thing](https://www.skillshare.com/next-right-thing). That's two free months of unlimited access to thousands of classes at [skillshare.com/next rate thing](https://www.skillshare.com/next-rate-thing). I can't wait to see what you'll create. Now onto today's episode. Listen in.

Several years ago, I was invited to be part of a committee to plan an event that would happen in six months' time. I went to the first meeting, listened to the conversations engaged as I could, and I went home to consider the next steps I thought would be best. But before I had a chance to process some of the conversations that took place during our initial meeting, I received an email that made it quite clear that the organizers were already five steps ahead of me. Even though they had asked for input, it seemed like they already kind of knew the direction they wanted to take things.

Once they heard from a few quick responders, they were off and running. Reflecting on that experience, I felt as though my opinion didn't much matter. And in the truth in that circumstance, it kind of didn't at least not enough for them to wait for. But instead of considering that, perhaps, they were moving too fast or even considering a more neutral acknowledgement that they had their way and I had my way. Instead, I internalized that situation and decided there must be something wrong with me. If only I were a faster processor, then my contribution will be valuable and my voice could be heard.

Well, I've learned a lot since that particular circumstance years ago, I've learned a lot about the world within me and the world around me. Both are valid, both have faults. For now, I want to share one observation that could help if you're a slow thinking decision maker like me.

But before I do, I realized there is an actual diagnosable term, I think called slow processing speed or having to do with slow processing speed. And I am 0% qualified to talk about that here. I'm just using that term in a more conversational way, the way that I've heard many people talk about being a slow processor, just in everyday conversation, there isn't one right way to process. And in fact, even saying I'm a slow processor, implies that there's a baseline of regular normal processing that everybody agrees on and there's really not. But I found in conversation, this is a word that comes up a lot or a phrase that comes up a lot, but there isn't just one right way to process. In fact, there are three right ways. It just so happens that many people value some over the others. Some of us feel fast, others of us think fast.

And then there are those who act fast without diving too deep into the Enneagram or any other model of understanding humans and our personality. I will simply mention there are many, many resources for study and understanding of the centers of intelligence and there's beauty and downfall in all of them. But it is generally agreed upon that there are three: thinking, feeling, doing.

While we all have one primary center of intelligence that we rely on, we also tend to have one that we

avoid and we might not even realize it. For me, my most natural way is to first filter the world through my feelings. And then I take time to think through them after that. And I'll go ahead and tell you, my last resort is to act or to make a move. This doesn't mean I'm incapable of making a move. It's just not what comes first for me, how this plays out in my own life, for example, is when it comes to making decisions or, as I mentioned before, giving feedback on someone else's decision.

I tend to feel my way through and or think my way through. And I won't act until I've gone through the other processes first, but we don't actually call that what it is. We call that slow processing and conversation. When in fact it's more like being slow to act or to come to a conclusion. We aren't necessarily slow to think; we're just slower to act on what we think.

There are, of course, potentials and burdens to this way of seeing the world. I admit just as there are potentials and burdens of being a fast actor, but the trouble comes when we think our way is wrong and someone else's way is right or vice versa. The more I grow, the more I see how nuanced being a human truly is.

So back to that particular example about the organizers and the event and my slow processing. Well, I had initial feelings right away about what the event organizers were doing. And then I took a little time to sort them out. But when I was finally ready to share my opinions or when I was ready to act, they had already moved forward.

Well, in that case, it seemed like the act first was valued over the think or feel first. And maybe, in fact it was, but that doesn't mean that I was wrong to take longer to process. And it also doesn't necessarily mean they were wrong to move ahead still. What do those of us who see ourselves as slower thinkers or slower processors or slower to actors, what do we do when we have a decision to make? When the committee is waiting on us to move? When our family does need to know what action to take?

Well, in the spirit of giving you three things to consider, here's the first: Recognize the gift of your own way.

If you feel your way through things or think your way through things, this is both a gift and a burden in the same acting fast or doing your way through things would be. Deciding quickly has gifts and burdens as well. One is not better than the other; one is not more of a leadership quality than the other. Despite what Forbes magazine might say, the world may not recognize your gift, but that doesn't mean you don't have one.

I tend to think my limitations are only burdens, but they are not just one thing. Because once I finally grab hold, I will take the conversation, the idea, and the influence all the way in. I will allow it to move and shape my thoughts and actions. These slow-cooked thoughts will influence how I love, how I think, how I write, how I create. They will fill up holes of misunderstanding, smooth some of the rounded question marks into straight-up exclamation points.

Slow processors, we have to work against the bad rap that we've given to that title. We have to change the narrative to one of giftedness, and it's probably going to start in our own heads.

Having said all that, a second thing to keep in mind is this: Be open to growing in a new way.

Just because something comes natural, and there's a gift to be had in that doesn't mean we have to turn our back on someone else's way or label it wrong or inferior. I've learned so much from my fast-acting, fast-thinking brothers and sisters. I've learned to challenge myself to choose and move before I feel ready. I've recorded several episodes about that. In fact, like for example, episode 60 of this podcast, Start Before You're Ready.

I launched this podcast before I had fully thought it through. I said yes to opportunities before I knew what I was up against. It's a practice, and it takes work and it doesn't feel as natural, but that doesn't make it impossible. Yes, I am a slow processor by nature, but by watching how fast actors move through the world and the gift that that can sometimes be, I'm learning how to bypass my natural tendency when necessary and act when the situation calls for it.

But finally, my very best advice for the slow processors who have a decision to make: Just do the next right thing.

I know it's true, if you're a slow thinker or a slow processor, a slow actor. As I now like to say a slow doer, it can help to focus on just one next right thing to take action on. Even if you don't know the whole thing, processing speed is relative. This is an encouragement simply because it could take away the stigma of the label. Oh, I'm a slow processor. I'm a slow thinker. Well, in truth, some people would look at me and my life and my processing and come to the conclusion that I'm a fast processor. Others might see me in my ways and think, "Wow, make a move already lady." Because processing speed is relative in so many ways, that means there isn't a baseline for this, which means there is not a standard we should be living up to or striving for.

But still I know the struggle when you feel like you're the slowest among your people or the slowest processor on the team. If you are the slowest and in whatever group you're in and you want your people to know that you're not being lazy or inactive, but you're just not ready to make a full decision yet. It's okay to make a partial decision, but just let them know what it is, do one next right thing. So your people know that you're moving. So there's some momentum, even little momentum. Resist the temptation to put words or expectations in other people's mouths, their minds. You might think they expect a completed task or a full decision, but really maybe they just want to signal that you're on it that you see and you hear and, you know, action needs to be taken, but you're just not quite ready to take it yet.

That can go a really long way, especially when you're working with people who lead with doing before thinking or feeling doing. One next right thing can be a gift for everyone, including you.

So here's to you, my fellow slow processors, or as we've now considered here, my fellow slow to take action offers that we can't post a bulletin to the fast-moving world and announced the celestial timeout. We can still honor the way we're made while respecting at the same time, the way others are made.

Here's to the quick thinkers and fast responders. Here's to the deep feelers and thoughtful considers. Let's take the long way home when we can, Let's embrace the silence to consider. Let's give ourselves permission to think, to listen, to be sure.

So here's to waiting before we move, pausing before we speak, and trusting that our natural hesitations may be our greatest gift rather than our liabilities.

Here's to believing we have something to offer. That doesn't mean we have to offer it in all the ways the world tells us we must. Here's to listening to our questions, sitting in the darkness and letting our experience do its deep work within us. Here's to a long, deep breath here's to learning new things, here's to doing our next right thing and love.

Thanks for listening to episode 136 of *The Next Right Thing*. I hope this simple practice of both accepting our own way while learning from the ways of others can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow. Because while it's true, this is a podcast about making decisions. The bigger truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives.

As always, you can find me on Instagram @emilypfreeman and online at emilypfreeman.com, where we always provide a transcript for every episode, are there for you if you prefer reading to listening and our deaf and hard of hearing friends who would otherwise not have access to an audio offering.

In closing, here's a quote from the author. I mentioned earlier at the top of the episode, Greg McKeown, from his book, *Essentialism*, he writes:

“The faster and busier things get, the more we need to build thinking time into our schedule. And the noisier things get, the more we need to build quiet reflection spaces in which we can truly focus. No matter how busy you think you are, you can carve out time and space to think out of your workday. Whether you can invest two hours a day, two weeks, a year, or even just five minutes every morning, it's important to make space to escape your busy life.”

Thanks for listening. And I'll see you next time.