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You were fired up at the start — you pushed yourself and the team hard to get over the 50-yard line... you kept the momentum going over the 30 yard line...and as you finally approached the 20-yard line, you felt for the first time the end zone was clearly in sight. Great time to pause? Take a rest? Turn your energies towards a new exciting idea you have?

So often, we get into the [red zone](#) on a task, project, or initiative — and something stalls out. We lose momentum. We move onto something else. Something else distracts our attention.

Until our attention gets snapped back when unfinished business reappears — that’s right, it’s review time and you realize that despite all your efforts, your results fell short of expectations. The C-Suite comes down hard on you for not driving the final win. And, on a daily basis, you experienced the anxiety of facing a stack of unfinished to-dos.

Getting into the end zone is getting things done. So on large change initiatives or even the smallest of tasks, why do we get stalled on the 20-yard line? What can we do to get ourselves across the goal line?

1. Change mindsets. Take Joe, an executive client in a financial services firm who asked us for help with the “20-yard stall” after getting 360-degree feedback about this tendency.

Joe's mindset at the 20-yard line was, "the real work is mostly done." He felt the value-added activities lay in the exciting up-front vision setting and strategic planning for an initiative, but not at the end. "The last 20 yards is just detail, all the big thinking and big plays have been taken care of," he said.

Joe needed to adopt the mind-set of a change agent driving an initiative from beginning to end. He needed to recognize when there was more to do. And, when there was, amp up his sense of urgency, sense of impatience, and persistent demand to go for the win. In the classic article "[Leading Change](#)," John Kotter talks about the critical step of creating a sense of urgency at the start of a change initiative. Joe needed to tap back into the original urgency and bring it to the finish.

2. Deal with underlying fears. As Joe got into the weekly habit of reviewing his overall priorities, he took an extra hard look at those on the 20-yard line.

To Joe's surprise, he uncovered items which sat on his list longer than they should due to underlying fears — some items required a tough decision first. Others required a difficult or politically loaded conversation. With this clarity, Joe resolved some root causes of inaction so that the overall action could go on.

3. Take a real break — with a time limit. In some cases, perhaps you've been pushing so hard on a project that you really do need a break. If this is the case, take it. But, taking a break means **not** thinking or stressing about what needs to get done, or talking about how much you have to get done without any physical action or results. That's just another form of procrastination. Step away completely and set a hard deadline for when you will come back to take action. Sometimes a clear head, rest, and a recharge gives you the ability to carry forward.

Look at where things sit on the playing field for you. Are there things stacking up at the 20-yard line? What do you do to keep the action going?

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