

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Shiny objects

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Remember the last time you felt the sting of buyer's remorse? Maybe it was that new truck with all the bells

and whistles. Maybe it was a software system that failed to deliver on its promise to be user-friendly and life-changing. Shiny objects come in all kinds of forms — new technologies, the latest app, instant news, popularity, best practices, tweets and retweets, gadgets, and the list goes on. Shiny objects seem attractive in the moment, but they fail to deliver lasting value.

They capture our time and attention, but ultimately prove to be only a distraction that siphons our focus away from that which is most

important. Shiny-object syndrome is a thief that steals time, resources and energy. Avoiding its allure is an intentional and strategic choice that defines people, enterprises and organizations with long-term records of success.

Case in point

Consider that the average American spends seven hours per day immersed in virtual connection through some sort of screen. About half of that time is spent on a mobile device (phone, tablet, etc.), and fully two of those hours connected to social media. This is the land of shiny objects. They are sources of addiction that are every bit as problematic as the chemical addictions that confront our society.

Table 1: Questions to slow thinking

Internal-facing questions	External-facing questions
What dragon has to be slain?	Who's it for?
What new skills do you need?	What's it for?
Would it be easier if you had help?	Does it matter?
Would you have a bigger effect if you were willing to give up credit or control?	How will you know if you are winning?
Which of your assumptions are most likely to be wrong?	What are the most critical problems faced by your customers?
Who is being prepared to take the helm?	What will generate revenue in the future?
Is the journey worth it?	Will anyone notice if you quit?

To be fair, web-based marketing and sales tactics are economically critical. However, as our grandmothers remind us, you can have too much of a good thing!

Time and attention should be allocated to productive and useful activity, and anything deemed urgent must also be important before gaining our focus. Unfortunately, we have become ensnared by urgency, immediacy, speed and popularity — the stuff of click rates, likes and reposts.

Eye on the ball

Athletic performance coach Ryan Anderson works with baseball players to improve their performance. The basis of his approach is “You can have the most beautiful swing, but if you don't see the ball, it doesn't matter.”

To see the ball, a player has to learn to slow down the game. So it is with business. If you want to go fast, you must first slow down. By slowing down we take the time to define metrics of success; winnow the chaff out of our sight line; and expend our resources of time, talent and treasure on the critical few activities, relationships and initiatives that will drive performance.

The most effective way to slow

our thinking is to ask direct and powerful questions. These questions can be categorized into two buckets — those that are internal-facing and those that are external-facing (see Table 1).

These questions, while straightforward, are not easily answered. Addressing them requires allocation of time that is free from distraction. But where will you find that time? If you happen to be one of those folks spending a couple hours a day on social media, you might consider grabbing an hour per day of that time. With disciplined effort, a person who drops their social media usage by an hour per day, Monday through Friday, can buy back five hours of focus time a week or 250 hours a year. That's the equivalent of nearly a month's worth of banker's hours.

In the midst of uncertainty and its accompanying opportunity, will you spend time on a shiny object or invest it in your future? |

Editor's note: In “Outside the Box,” a regular, separate column in both the *Angus Journal*® and the *Angus Beef Bulletin*, author Tom Field shares his experience as a cattleman and his insightful perspective on the business aspects of ranching. Field is director of the Engler Agribusiness Entrepreneurship Program at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, where he holds the Paul Engler Chair of Agribusiness Entrepreneurship.