

4 Seconds that Shape Everything

Most leaders invest significant attention in the substance of what they are building: the strategy, the team structure, the product. Far less attention goes to the opening conditions, the first weeks of a new team, the first moments of a new project, the first signals sent in a new role. And yet the evidence, from sport and from organisational research, is consistent: what is established earliest tends to be what proves most durable.

This is not an abstract observation. It has a precise and uncomfortable implication for anyone who has taken on a new leadership role or launched a significant initiative without treating its beginning as the most consequential phase. The norms that form in the first few weeks of a team's life tend to persist long after anyone can remember how they formed. The trust that is or is not established at the start of a project shapes what is possible within it far more than any subsequent intervention. The signals sent early, about what is valued, what is safe and what is expected, create patterns that are far harder to shift later than they would have been to set correctly at the outset.

The physics of bobsled make this principle unavoidable. In most professional environments it is merely invisible, which is precisely why it is so consistently underestimated.

The Push that Decides the Run

There is a point in bobsleigh where the cameras rarely follow what matters most. The opening push lasts only a few seconds. It is not the part of the run that draws crowds or fills highlight reels. The drama comes later: the blur of speed, the tight curves, the precarious lines through ice that offers no forgiveness. But anyone who studies the sport closely knows that by the time the sled reaches the first curve, the result is already substantially set. The push does not determine everything. It determines more than most people assume.