Do you want it done fast, or right? This concept is all around us and embedded in many of our idioms and expressions—Slow and steady wins the race, More haste, less speed, Look before you leap— all of these run in a similar vein and something we know from experience—thinking and consideration lead to better results. Yet, this learning can often be absent from the way we operate daily within the work (and personal space).

This has come to the forefront of my mind due to my present work scenario, moving from a
role that is heavily output driven, to a role that requires me to tangibly produce less, but think and consider in a more meaningful way. We all know that meaningful thinking (not over thinking!) will benefit us within our professional and personal lives, but whilst we know (and often chase this), it’s incredibly difficult to do.

From personal experience, decision making is often confused with thinking. The ability to make good, quick decisions is coveted within the business world – the archetypal business leader can go into any given situation and quickly (and assertively) make effective decisions, often on the spot. Whilst this is true of some, for most of us, we are achieving this through making decisions based on past experience, rather than a huge amount of considered thought. Whilst this isn’t a bad thing, if this is the only type of thinking we’re doing, it can lead to stagnation – doing the things the way they have always been done – with businesses often needing an injection of “new blood” and new thinking to compensate.

There are lots of reasons why this speed centric approach to working has become more prevalent, arguably the changes in communication (wading through 100s of emails everyday) being top of the list. In his book ‘The Shallows’ Nicholas Carr highlights that the internet is changing the way in which our brain works, we have become “better” at making decisions quickly, but this impacts our ability to think deeply about topics.

This way of working also creates challenges for more junior people within our organisations – they are expected to work at speed, without the benefit of experience to fall back on. When Junior people in the agency are given the space, structure, and support to think creatively about briefs, the results and creativity have been outstanding. I’ve seen the evidence of this within the MediaCom Edinburgh Local Media Awards entries for the past two years.

Whilst there are numerous interventions to organisational structure, culture and process that can, and should, be made to create thinking space, I’ve found that very small changes can have a real impact. For example, I’ve been taking a few minutes when receiving a meeting invite to identify my objective and role within the meeting and the preparation needed; not only has this improved what I add to and receive from meetings, at times it meant there was no need for a meeting at all! Whilst these small changes won’t revolutionise the way we work, they can start to embed thinking time into our daily work lives.