

Thomas A. Gilson
204 Hudgins Farm Dr
Yorktown, VA 23692
(757) 890-9951

1040 words
Daily Press: One Time Serial Publishing Rights

Never Slow Down?

It's a new year, a fact that has escaped none of us. America is among the most time-conscious places on the planet. We hate to waste time.

A cellular phone company in Florida captured this in their advertising slogan a few years ago: "*Never Slow Down.*" It would be hard to pick a phrase that better conveys the greatness and the sickness of our times. It's our greatness: the fire of our mighty economy is the long, intense hours we work. It's our sickness as well: the fire is burning us up. When I first saw that slogan, it struck me, "What's wrong with us, that we could think 'Never Slow Down' is attractive?"

But in many ways, we do. We're addicted to activity. We've practically lost our ability to calm down. One researcher says Americans get 35% less sleep than our mid-19th century predecessors. Another recent study found that 66% of affluent Americans feel stressed several times a week—mostly because they're too busy.

Never-slow-down is a disease afflicting many of us. Here's a quick test to see if you have it:

1. Have you ever waited for a fax machine to feed your document, and thought, "This thing is so slow!"
2. Have you ever complained about how slow your computer is?
3. Has it ever occurred to you that both those machines work faster by far than anything we dreamed of 25 years ago?

If you answered, "yes" to the first two questions and "no" to the third, you have a definite case of never-slow-down.

The rush seems to be unavoidable. We have more machines doing our work for us than ever, but we're working harder and harder. How can this be?

To a great extent, the problem is the flip side of something that most of us have considered unqualifiedly good: the move toward increasing quality and excellence in our economy. It comes at a price: we who expect this quality and service are the ones who must provide it for each other. We who are choosy consumers must face the fact that our customers are choosy just like us. In the big picture, we are our own very demanding customers.

So now we have the new term, *hypercompetition*. The battle for survival in the marketplace —both corporate and individual— is far more intense than our grandparents faced. Now that we can comparison-shop for books on the Internet, what place is there for friendly neighborhood booksellers, with less-than-perfect prices? They've mostly been swallowed up—as all of us can be, if our own production is less than ideal.

The economy is far from our only source of stress, of course. All the age-old stressors of health and family problems, personal guilt, accidents and tragedies, unloving people, and so on, continue as ever. We have learned the reality of terrorism on our soil, so we feel less safe than before. And with our cell phones (“Never Slow Down”), Palm Pilots, pagers, and e-mail, we seem more connected with each other, yet it's more superficial and busy-making than it is deep and refreshing.

The sum of it all is that at a time when it seems the world should be an easier place to live, it is becoming more stressful instead.

The spiritual fallout has been very damaging. The Psalms speak of “waiting on God.” John C. Ortberg, speaking to Christian leaders (among the most pressed of people) says we must “ruthlessly eliminate hurry” from our lives. He adds, “For most of us, the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it. We will just skim our lives instead of actually living them” (*Leadership*, Fall 1998).

We cannot develop our inward life in a rush. We cannot quickly go deep with God. It takes time to hear God speaking to us, in Scripture and in prayer. It takes time together for us to love one another. Even to experience the beauty of God's creation cannot be done in a hurry. Most of us recognize this, but we're inexorably carried along by the pace of the world. What can we do about it?

First, we can rebel against the need to be productive every moment. We can begin to value unproductivity.

I hesitated to write that last sentence. What if readers think I'm lazy? Then I need to make my point more clear. Hard work is good, but it's not the only good. Time should always be spent with purpose, but not always for production. Time spent meaningfully with God, with family or neighbors, in the garden, or hiking on a mountain path just might be more important than “getting something done.”

There is no place so frenzied or noisy that God is not there. Still, there is something about the quiet, slow places that gives opportunity for ordering our souls, which we so deeply need.

Each of us will have a different style for slowing down. For my part, I've discovered the joy of getting up before the rest of the family, and sitting on the porch with cup of coffee and a Bible and a journal, reading, praying, and listening to birds sing. In the winter, of

course, I have to do this indoors. Either way, it has become a favorite part of my day, a moment of peace, a place where I can connect with Jesus Christ, and be refreshed.

We each approach God in different ways as well. Some of us prefer simply to use the Bible to guide our time; others find it helpful to read a devotional guide. *My Utmost for His Highest*, by Oswald Chambers, is a classic and a great choice. A popular contemporary guide is Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life*.

Second, we can give each other a break.

We all appreciate excellence, but we could afford to be less demanding of each other. The rest of the world may be endlessly bent on rushing ever faster, but in our small ways, we can rebel against this. We can give each other a break. In 2004, we can seek to slow down, and go deeper than we have before.

Copyright ©2003 by Thomas A. Gilson All Rights Reserved