

MANAGING BOOKS: IDEAS: NEED FOR SPEED

Why the hare shudda won

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THE AGE OF SPEED

By Vince Poscente

Bard Press, 225 pages, \$27

We live in a world where everything seems to be zooming by too fast, so many people crave a slower pace in their work and home lives. But consultant Vince Poscente, an apostle for speed, says we should want things to move even faster.

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"While this may seem terrifying to some, I believe speed has a unique power to enrich our lives on an individual, organizational, and even societal level. It is the lifeblood of the information age, it pushes business forward, and it helps people spend less time doing meaningless things to make room for more significant living," he writes in *The Age of Speed*.

Mr. Poscente is not oblivious to the pressures we all feel, and adds some intriguing anecdotes about the need for speed. In the United States, 45,000 people have paid an annual fee of about \$100 (U.S.), and given fingerprints and an iris scan, so that they can speed through airplane security in a few minutes, rather than endure lengthy waiting. One American bank used its ability to cut average transaction times at ATMs to 24 seconds from 42 seconds as a positioning strategy to appeal to the many speed seekers in its potential customer pool.

More options clamour for our time than ever before. And we want it all. Indeed, a survey last year found that 26 per cent of individuals claiming to be time-starved would choose having fewer things to do over having more time to do all the things they currently do.

At the same time, we resist speed, or pressures to move faster when management or customers ask for another quick turnaround on something, Mr. Poscente says.

"But if we continue to reject speed out of hand, we'll never be able to get ahead of it. We'll be in constant conflict with the world around us - a world pulsing with speed. So we need to identify the roots of our resistance and work to change our view, to see speed for the positive force it can be and end our opposition. It's the first step toward thriving in the Age of Speed," he writes.

(You may be thinking at this point about the tortoise and the hare. The tortoise won - slow but steady wins the race. But Mr. Poscente, as you might imagine, roots for the hare, which he says lost the race because it was irresponsible and arrogant. Choose speed, stay focused, and don't underestimate your competition in the Age of the Hare if you want to be successful. Give up the fantasy of the tortoise.)

Mr. Poscente divides us into four behavioural groups, depending on whether we resist or embrace speed - and whether we are successful or fail in our approach:

Zeppelins: These are lumbering, dangerous and potentially explosive - and, like the notorious Hindenburg, which exploded and crashed to the ground in 1937, likely to fail. These individuals and companies resist speed, feeling threatened and angry, but the world continues to rush by them. They demand many levels of approval for the simplest initiative. Eastman Kodak was a zeppelin, inventing the digital camera but wanting to take 10 years to shift fully to digital technology, while its competitors rushed by.

Balloons: These are the happy individuals and successful organizations that don't seek speed and don't need to, gracefully floating along. Not just gurus

on mountaintops, but perfume testers and the makers of handcrafted collectors' items. They usually exist in niche markets.

Bottle rockets: They embrace speed but never make it work for them, such as the energetic worker who powers through the day full blast but never accomplishes anything. Or the company that embraces speed at every turn but loses sight of its goals or stays stubbornly focused on the wrong path. Mr. Poscente argues that computer maker Dell Inc. fits in this category: Although once the epitome of speed and success, it now retains the speed but is mired in a flawed business approach.

Jets: They are agile and aerodynamic, free from the drag that slows down others, but remain aligned on a sensible path and, as a result, are successful. They let the speed of their environment work for them. Watch Google, a company that moves fast, but in a smart way.

Ah, to be a balloon - floating gracefully through life. But (sigh) few of us can be balloons. So, how do we become a jet and avoid being a zeppelin?

Mr. Poscente spends the last part of his book explaining how to follow the jet's pattern for success, by sensing opportunities, keeping flexible, finding a way to be aerodynamic by ridding yourself of clutter, and aligning yourself, as an individual or organization, with an authentic purpose.

It's all presented briskly - 37 chapters in just more than 200 pages - and at times it's as light as a balloon, with its breezy call to turn speed into an advantage. And he helps us address the world more realistically, providing a glimmer of (depending on the metaphor) how to beat the tortoise or soar like a jet.

Just In: *Implementing the Four Levels* (Berrett-Koehler, 153 pages, \$34.95) by training experts Donald Kirkpatrick and James Kirkpatrick is a practical guide for effective evaluation of training programs.

Succession Planning Toolkit for Business Owners (Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants, 198 pages plus CD, \$29.95), developed in collaboration with specialists from PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, Fasken Martineau duMoulin LLP and Bank of Nova Scotia, is aimed at owners of small or medium-sized businesses planning their succession.

The second edition of *The Budget-Building Book for Non-Profits* (Jossey-Bass, 200 pages plus a CD, \$53.99) offers a step-by-step guide for managers and boards to various aspects of budgeting.

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