



THE AGE OF SPEED MANIFESTO

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“KEEP PEDALING!”

The two-word advice every parent gives when teaching a child to ride a bike. But what’s in the mind of the little rider?

“Listen, Pops. Speed is scary. I need to move slowly or I’ll lose my balance.”

We all live in a world that’s moving faster and faster every day. Our choice is to either ignore the speed around us or learn to both embrace and harness the power of it.

Let me introduce you to Alex, our second-born daughter. She was born happy. She’s always smiling, always willing to try new things. But learning to ride a bicycle replaced the smile on her face with scrapes on her knees. She tried and tried, but Alex kept losing her balance.

Every time she’d start losing control, I’d scream, “Keep pedaling,” but fallible instinct persisted: speed does not help balance.

Eventually, my persistent logic triumphed over her counter-productive instincts, and Alex had an epiphany. With increased speed came control. Chaos went away. Balance was her partner in motion. Her smile came back. “Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, I got it! I’m riding my bike,” she squealed as she looked over beaming—WHACK.

She ran into the back of my Tahoe. You see, although Alex finally embraced speed (a vital first step), she did not know how to harness the power of it.

In the following manifesto, we will explore our present relationship with speed and examine four behavior profiles that can help you determine if you (A) embrace speed and (B) harness the power of it. By the end, you just might discover that our 24/7, CrackBerry, more-faster-now world is not threatening to eat you alive, but rather, to set you free.

THE SPEED REVOLUTION

In a 2007, North American survey:

- ▶ 92% of employees feel rushed several times per week if not every day.
- ▶ 90% feel they have to get more done in less time.
- ▶ While 56% feel that in order to succeed they need to slow things down,
- ▶ 77% feel the pace of work will only increase in the next five years

There is a disconnect that must not be ignored here. We know that life will only continue to get faster, but we think slowing down is necessary to succeed. Are we, therefore, destined to fail?

Where will the solution come from?

There are four behavioral profiles in the Age of Speed: Zeppelins, Balloons, Bottle Rockets and Jets. Identifying the one that describes you or your organization best, and then making changes if you are not satisfied with the result is the first step toward thriving in our new time. Together, the profiles fit into a two-by-two grid:

	<i>RESIST SPEED</i>	<i>EMBRACE SPEED</i>
SUCCEED	Balloons	Jets
FAIL	Zeppelins	Bottle Rockets

For many of us, we defy speed much like we resisted change in the 1990s. We struggled with new ways of communicating, new metrics for success, new technology at every turn. We didn't know how to cope. But thought leaders like John Kotter and books about moving cheese finally rang the logic bell and said that it wasn't about *coping* with change. You don't get ahead by coping. You thrive by leading change and harnessing the power of it. Change by design became an organizational and individual catharsis. Companies would reorganize as an action item, not a reactionary reflex, and people didn't want to be blindsided by outdated competence.

The same thing will happen again—only this time the revolution is speed. The organizational and individual experiences are undergoing another major shift that can be just as positive as the change revolution. If we can accept the positive potential that speed offers, we can do more, be more, live more. Rather than resisting speed, or managing it, we should find ways to create more of it. If this is a concept that you refuse to accept, check out the first profile prevalent in the Age of Speed.

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THE ZEPPELIN

The Zeppelin is the person or organization that rejects speed outright. Zeppelins are the people sitting at the meeting, stubbornly resist the urgency surrounding new ideas or initiatives. Zeppelins are companies either too comfortable or overconfident to accept a world that is accelerating past them. Entire industries can be resistant to speed where efficiency and convenience are ignored as an oncoming force.

Kodak would be an example of a company climbing out of a Zeppelin mentality. In the 90's, in an environment that demanded speed, Kodak had a ten-year plan to gradually shift to digital technology. In 1994 they invented the digital camera. Yet it could not rely on its successes from the twentieth century. It wasn't until 2000 that Kodak threw its weight behind the digital revolution.

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Like other Zeppelins, Kodak actively resisted speed even though its environment demanded it. So in 2000, its late entry in to the fight for market share was reactive and reactionary. Kodak could have had first mover advantage, but instead, they found themselves scrapping for market share. With Kodak's CEO Antonio Perez at the helm since 2003, however, a wholesale adoption of digital solutions in the image world has brought it back into the black. On its current trajectory, Kodak may emerge from its Zeppelin past as a faster company able to thrive in the Age of Speed. What trajectory are you on?

BALLOONS

It is possible to resist speed and succeed but this is confined to people willing to check out of the Age of Speed. Like Zeppelins, Balloons are individuals and organizations that resist speed—but in the case of the Balloon, bucking speed doesn't necessarily lead to failure. In general, Balloons choose to live outside the Age of Speed, and because they place themselves in environments that do not demand speed, they can resist it and still succeed. They interact with our fast paced culture only from a distance, and although their success often comes with a ceiling, they float along content to reach their destination at their own pace.

Let's look at Lennard Zinn as an example of a Balloon. Zinn is known best for his extraordinary, custom made bicycles for hard core cyclists. In the mid-90's, Zinn Cycles began expanding rapidly. The company took on more and more employees, worked with sales representatives and sold standard models to bike shops. For success in the mass-market retail world, speed was vital, and Zinn Cycles was on a roll. But founder Lennard Zinn was not happy. The stress of producing more and more and expanding faster and faster proved to be the wrong track for this Balloon. Ultimately, Zinn did not want to be in the Age of Speed, so even if it meant putting a cap on his success, he was determined to slow down. He wanted to ride his bike to work, make some bicycles and float along at his own pace, so that is what he did.

Balloons are rare, and that's because most environments today demand speed. If you're in an environment that demands speed, you cannot succeed as a Balloon. Instead, you'll face the fate of the Zeppelin: inevitable obsolescence or explosion. So it would seem that if you embrace speed, you'll be sure to find success, right? Unfortunately, it's not quite that simple.

BOTTLE ROCKETS

It's one thing to embrace speed. It's quite another to harness the power of it. A Bottle Rocket embraces speed but is ultimately on a destructive course. Speed at all costs can leave a wake of post-it notes, short-term solutions and confusion. You can easily identify a Bottle Rocket: The friend who speeds through traffic and rushes from appointment to appointment, but takes on so many responsibilities that she never manages to get ahead. The endlessly energetic coworker who powers through the day at top speed, throwing out ideas at random while checking email and talking on the phone—always moving fast, but never managing to achieve anything of substance. The company that embraces speed at every turn, but either loses sight of its goals and fails to reach its once-glorious potential or stays stubbornly focused on the wrong path. All of them are going as fast as they can, propelled through life at a breakneck pace, but speed is not translating into success.

They may be going fast, but they aren't doing it in a smart way. They can't respond to changes in their environment. Sometimes their path becomes wildly unpredictable, their speed gets out of control, and they end up diving straight into the ground. If your company is on the path to becoming a Bottle Rocket, it may look like Dell Inc.

Dell didn't start out as a Bottle Rocket. Its unique model of selling computers directly to the consumer and a near flawless supply chain management system propelled Dell to number one status. Now Dell is playing catch up to HP. What happened?

Clues are revealed in a memo by former CEO, Kevin Rollins. Dell is not an organization “where people think they're a hero if they invent a new thing.” It was the Dell way or the highway. Dell didn't change with the times and evolving consumer tastes, so although they embraced and actively pursued speed, their ability to harness the power of it for sustainable success fizzled. If it is to survive in the Age of Speed, it must become a Jet.

JETS

Jets embrace speed like Bottle Rockets but they have a much better record of reaching their destinations. They stay on course, aligned with a significant purpose, yet are agile enough to navigate quickly around problems and efficient enough to minimize drag. Jets see speed as an ally, a power that propels them further toward their desires faster. They let the speed of their environment work for them.

Google is undeniably agile in the Age of Speed. Even if it puts remarkable amounts of energy and resources into an initiative, the company doesn't hesitate to switch directions if its best efforts fall short. For instance, despite the fact that Google had every intention of dominating the market with its own speed and innovation when it launched Google Video, the company changed its strategy as soon as it saw an opportunity in renegade upstart YouTube. YouTube was faster—it won over Google Video in large part because users could see their videos online right away, without the two- to four-day delay Google Video imposed. Without skipping a beat, Google bought YouTube. Google was agile, open to change, and in constant pursuit of the fastest solution for its customers. It not only embraced speed, but also used agility to harness the power of it and dominate the online video market.

Google has further proven its ability to harness the power of speed by reducing anything that causes drag. Despite the company's reputation as an excellent place to work, its labyrinthine interviewing and selection process was at one time so grueling and glacial that candidates who had interviewed gave up on Google entirely and took other jobs. But with a keen appreciation for the value of reducing drag, Google recognized that its hiring process was a problem and began to streamline. The company has streamlined enough to reach a two-interview target in some cases.

Google is one of many examples of organizational Jets, but in the Age of Speed, we must strive to be Jets on an individual level too. We need to embrace speed because it's a powerful ally—it is the only way to live more, to get more life out of every moment. Embracing speed is not enough, though. Just like organizations, individuals must harness the power of speed in order to thrive in our modern world of more-faster-now.

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Here's a place to start: two of the most common challenges people face in their quest to harness the power of speed are (1) managing continual interruptions and (2) constantly multitasking. It seems inevitable that your focus would be shifted more often and you would have to do multiple things at once in order to thrive in the Age of Speed, but the opposite is true.

Interruptions are literally taking us down. In a recent study, frequent email interruptions (stopping a task to check email) translated into a drop in IQ equivalent to 10 points. This is two and a half times the drop in IQ that results from smoking marijuana. Interruptions take us off our game—and they slow us down. The average American is interrupted within 11 minutes of starting a task, and it takes an average of 30 minutes to get back on task—if at all.

Another study revealed that the average person gets interrupted every eight minutes, or have about 50 interruptions per day. The average interruption takes five minutes, which equates to four hours per day. With 80% of those interruptions rated as “little to no value,” this puts a price tag of three wasted hours per day.

Multitasking is another productivity black hole that can suck the life out of any aspirations of harnessing the power of speed. Sure, multitasking during routine activities is acceptable and even efficient, but when we attempt to complete more than one significant task at the same time, we are damaging our results.

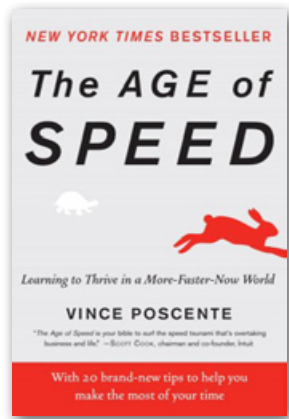
Have you ever caught yourself on an important phone call and that irresistible email pops up on your screen? As you are reading the email you hear the fateful words, “So what do you think?” No amount of backtracking or fancy footwork is getting us out of that one. In the click of a mouse, we have slowed progress and even damaged trust in those we communicate with.

Harnessing the power of speed and thriving in our more-faster-now world requires education about which behaviors help you and your organization go faster and which ones slow you down—and it demands a strategy. This is not something we can stumble into expecting accidental success. The good news is, of course, that there is a solution.

Allow me to state clearly that *The Age of Speed* is not about going faster for the sake of speed. Speed in our world today is way of life and we have the choice to look for ways to embrace and harness it to our own advantage. Or we can ignore it and hope for the best. 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 businesses forward, and it helps people spend less time doing meaningless things to make room for more significant living.

When we harness the power of speed, we not only get more and get it faster, but our lives and work become less stressful, less busy, and more balanced. So no matter what your instinct thinks of speed. It all boils down to two-word advice.

Keep pedaling! 🚲



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vince Poscente knows about speed. During the 1992 Olympic Winter Games in France, he raced to a Canadian national record of 135 miles per hour on skis. He is now a popular keynote speaker, whose clients include Oracle, Deloitte Consulting, and MasterCard.

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