



The Leader's Toolbox

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The Slower It Gets, The Faster You Go

Ted Williams, the greatest hitter in the history of the game of baseball, said he could see the stitches on a 90+ mph fastball as it screamed toward him in the batter's box. Marshall Faulk, pro-football Hall of Fame member, speaks of game action occurring in "slow motion" before his eyes as he accelerates past would-be tacklers on his way to the end zone. Dozens of other world class athletes describe the games they play as "slowing down" as they progressively increase their dominance on the field of competition.

Actually, the games these athletes play have not slowed down at all. Quite conversely, the games played by professional athletes today are quicker and faster than they have ever been. What these elite athletes are describing is a mental skill they have developed that surpasses any physical abilities they may possess. They have the acquired ability to eliminate any distractions that may be irrelevant while remaining keenly aware of the physical world around them. Faulk speaks of not hearing the roar of a crowd of 70,000 raging fans yet hearing his quarterback call signals before the play begins. He speaks of seeing the play before it actually begins—anticipating the precise points on the field where he will run as well as those he will avoid.

The skill that athletes like Faulk have is acquired: They were not born with it. Over time they have developed it, honed it, and refined it to a sharpness that serves them superbly—even more than their physical strength and speed.

Can we learn anything from watching these athletes? How can you slow it down and as a result, go faster?

Slowing it down is really another way of describing mental focus, or clarity. If you want to *slow it down*, practice these techniques:

- **Choose an event.** Choose something that you have had trouble with in the past. It may be an anticipated meeting or a complex series of tasks. The more complex the event the greater the need for preparation.
- **Eliminate unnecessary stimuli.** Anything that can distract you (telephones, people, noise) *will* distract you. Remove them from your conscious thought—at least for the moment.
- **Visualize movement and action.** See yourself in the event. Note what you believe are key actions that must occur. This isn't a plan. It's a mental picture of possibilities. Realize that no two events are identical, though they may be similar.
- **Select what must occur.** As you visualize your movements and actions, note what matters the most—what must happen if you are to be satisfied after the event is completed.
- **Take snapshots, not full-length movies.** Remember, even the best athletes practice this for short periods of time. Faulk, in the instant before the play begins, sees it in his mind's eye.

Even Ted Williams wasn't able to slow the game down every time. He did strike out. At his best he was able to safely hit only 40 percent of the time (an achievement which has never been equaled in the history of professional baseball). And, Faulk did get tackled. Yet think how remarkable their accomplishments were. It shouldn't take long before slowing it down becomes a method for going faster!!