



## Educating Entrepreneurs

By Steve Gottlieb

### 'Speed Addiction' Kills Creativity & Innovation

In today's economy, the importance of creativity and innovation ("C&I") is universally recognized. But our awareness may not necessarily translate into results.

Why not? Awareness of a problem is just the first step toward success. Gaining C&I requires changing certain attitudes and habits. But people generally resist that kind of fundamental change, and change only comes when we personally experience how change leads to improved outcomes.

One example of a habit that may require changing is our culture's "speed addiction." Creative ideas take time to develop, and turning those ideas into valuable innovations takes even more time. But we have been trained to work fast.

Speed is definitely a virtue, and often a necessity, when pursuing most business goals, but when you seek to solve problems and meet challenges with C&I, you need to operate in a slower gear.

#### Personal Experience

My observations about the negative impact of speed addiction on C&I — and the methodology I've developed to combat it — come from an unexpected source: a photography workshop I have taught for years called "Creative Vision."

I tell my students: "Don't pick up the camera too fast. Think carefully about different, more creative, perspectives you can bring to your subject."

I've learned that, for virtually all students, this advice went in one ear and out the other. And their results showed it.

It's a paradox: People resist following the advice that will help them achieve their desired result. Having worked in the corporate world for years before becoming a photographer and photography teacher, I'm convinced that the same thing happens in the workplace.

The sources of our addiction are not hard to find.

- We admire and reward the fastest among us. Starting in elementary school, teachers called on the first student with the answer. School exams rewarded speed. In business, we're trained to equate time with money.
- Working fast makes us feel productive. ("A great day," students say, "look at how many images I shot.") Many people believe "productivity" will increase the odds of producing creative results ... but it doesn't.
- We're impatient; the faster we work, the quicker we see results.
- Many believe the myth of the "eureka moment." We wait for creative ideas to come in a flash of insight.
- Changing any work habit or approach — like slowing down — generates stress.

Is it any wonder that we choose to apply speed to every challenge?

#### Discovery Activities

A six-year study published in a recent

Harvard Business Review found that innovative entrepreneurs spent 50% more time engaging in "discovery activities" than CEOs not associated with innovation; other studies have consistent findings.

We would do well to spread the innovative entrepreneur's approach — more exploration and thought, fewer quick actions and decisions — throughout every level of an organization. But how?

Telling people to "take their time," like saying, "Don't pick up the camera too fast," won't break their addiction; it can even have the negative consequence of encouraging procrastination. What is needed are for individuals, teams and whole organizations to adopt specific techniques, attitudes and policies geared toward changing mindsets and behavior.

Some companies, to take one example, dedicate specific days and hours of the week for employees to put aside "regular work" and instead focus, at their own pace, on developing creative ideas and innovations; this has led to notable successes, such as Gmail.

#### Specific Techniques

Here are specific techniques I've used with success in my photography workshop to motivate students to "slow it down." These techniques can be adapted to any workplace.

- Whenever students pick up the camera too fast, I point it out to them.

*Self-awareness is a key to changing behavior.*

- I tell students that I work much more slowly than they do.

*Role models inspire behavioral change.*

- "Look casually at a person," I say. "What do you see? Now look again, more slowly."

*Demonstrate in a concrete way the positive consequences of slowing down.*

- "After taking a picture of a subject," I suggest, "ask yourself: 'What else?'" Look for variations." I offer specific suggestions

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such as: “Get up on a ladder. Tilt the camera. Move in closer.”

*Push people to find fresh perspectives and point them in new directions. (Beware: Too many suggestions can cause a mental overload.)*

- I advise: “Before deleting ‘bad’ pictures from your memory card — and your memory — take time to learn from your mistakes. Can an element in the bad picture point to a successful one?”

*After mistakes are made, produce a mental “post-mortem” that draws lessons from the mistake and searches for potential benefits.*

- I give students an object to photograph on

Saturday morning and ask them to produce one picture of it by Sunday afternoon. Having time to ponder frequently results in their most creative effort of the workshop.

*Don’t wait until the last minute to start thinking about, or delegating, a challenge; allow time for problems to “incubate” on the mental back burner where the conscious and subconscious can work on it.*

By applying specific techniques to combat speed addiction — as well as addressing other attitudes and habits that suppress C&I — you will enhance creativity and innovation. I’ve seen this happen over the course of a short workshop. Imagine what could be achieved over an extended period if you

adopt some version of these techniques in your workplace.

*Steve Gottlieb, VisionMining (<http://vision-mining.biz>) founder and president, uses the tool of photography to promote greater creativity and innovation for teams and organizations. A nationally recognized photographer (with six books to his credit) and founder of a photography workshop, as well as a former attorney and senior corporate manager, he can be reached at 410-885-2020. He will present the program “Creativity and Innovation: Making It Happen in the Workplace” on Feb. 16; visit [www.dcastd.org/Event\\_Calendar](http://www.dcastd.org/Event_Calendar) for details and cost.*