



The Great Tragedy of Speed, by David Whyte

Speed in work has compensations. Speed gets noticed. Speed is praised by others. Speed is self-important. Speed absolves us. Speed means we don't really belong to any particular thing or person we are visiting and thus appears to elevate us above the ground of our labors.

When it becomes all-consuming, speed is the ultimate defense, the antidote to stopping and really looking. If we really saw what we were doing and who we had become, we feel we might not survive the stopping and the accompanying self-appraisal. So we don't stop, and the faster we go, the harder it becomes to stop. We keep moving on whenever any form of true commitment seems to surface.

Speed is also warning, a throbbing, insistent indicator that some cliff edge or other is very near, a sure diagnostic sign that we are living someone else's life and doing someone else's work. But speed saves us the pain of all that stopping; speed can be such a balm, a saving grace, a way we tell ourselves, in unconscious ways, that we are really not participating.

"The great tragedy of speed as an answer to the complexities and responsibilities of existence is that very soon we cannot recognize anything or anyone who is not traveling at the same velocity as we are. We see only those moving in the same whirling orbit and only those moving with the same urgency. Soon we begin to suffer a form of amnesia, caused by the blurred vision of velocity itself, where those germane to our humanity are dropped from our minds one by one. We start to lose sight of any colleagues who are moving at a slower pace, and we start to lose sight of the bigger, slower cycles that underlie our work. We especially lose sight of the big, unfolding wave form passing through our lives that is indicative of our central character.

On the personal side, as slaves to speed, we start to lose sight of family members, especially children, or those who are ill or infirm, who are not flying through the world as quickly and determinedly as we are. Just as seriously, we begin to leave behind the parts of our own selves that limp a little, the vulnerabilities that actually give us color and character. We forget that our sanity is dependent on a relationship with longer, more patient cycles extending beyond the urgencies and madness of the office."

--David Whyte

