

Don't Just Do Something, Sit There!

By Tom Massey, Ph.d.

“When I slow down,
I go faster.”
- Old Japanese proverb

Perhaps you are old enough to remember those old Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy comedy classics. One recurring scene depicted an exasperated Oliver turning to his reticent little pal Stanley screaming, "Don't just sit there. Do something!" That statement largely reflects the attitude of movers and shakers in the Western world: If you are not taking action and taking it fast, you are not hitting the target - Ready, Fire, Aim!

Let's examine that philosophy for a moment. If you recall, each time Stanley reacted to Oliver's urgent demands, he ran around in a frenzy accomplishing very little except to provide the audience with laughter from a comedy of errors. Consider also the fabled race between the tortoise and the hare. The hare was speedier than his opponent, but much less focused on the goal. The tortoise steadily plodded along, and while the hare became sidetracked, he ambled past to win the race, proving that accuracy and persistence, in the long run, are more valuable than speed.

Engaging in moments of stillness will enable your subconscious mind to function at deeper levels than usual, moving beyond the limits of self imposed boundaries of logic, space, and time. You will experience moments of intuition, wisdom, creativity, and a heightened state of mental clarity. Everything you do is affected by your state of mind. If you speak and act with an unclear mind, chaos will follow you, as a shadow clings to its form. If you speak and act with mental clarity, peace and prosperity will be your faithful companions.

Through clearing the mind, you will find the safe sanctuary of your inner world. In bullfighting, that safe place is called the *querencia*. This is a place in the bullring where the bull feels completely safe. In the *querencia*, he can stop running and gather his strength. He is no longer afraid. This is also the place where the bull becomes most dangerous to his opponent. It is the job of the bull's opponent, the matador, to be aware of the bull's *querencia* and keep the bull from occupying this place of wholeness. For humans, the *querencia* is a space in the inner world of the mind. It may be a place we retreat to in crisis or simply a place of deep inner silence. A change takes place in people who find their *querencia*. They become calm, peaceful, and strong.

Here is a simple exercise for relaxing and clearing your mind:

Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Open your mouth slightly and let your tongue rest gently against the soft palate between the roof of your mouth and the back of your upper teeth. Slowly inhale, expanding the diaphragm and abdominal area fully. Pause for a short moment. Exhale slowly, contracting the diaphragm and abdomen. Your exhale should take twice as long as your inhale. Pause between each breath. Close your

eyes and let your breath flow back and forth from both your nose and mouth. Do not try to resist any thoughts that arise. Simply allow them to flow in and out of your mind, bringing your attention back to your breath. After performing this pattern for a brief time, you will notice your mind and body entering a more relaxed and centered state.

Unstring Your Bow....

The Greek historian Herodotus recorded a brief, yet telling story about King Amasis, who ruled in the 26th dynasty of Egypt from 570 to 526 B.C. Amasis held a daily routine of working diligently from dawn until noon, at which time he would abruptly quit whatever meetings or court proceedings were going on, and retire for an afternoon of leisure. He and his companions told stories, played games, traded witticisms, and indulged in the “free flowing barley ale.” According to Herodotus, royal decorum wasn’t a high priority in the afternoon activities of Amasis and his friends.

One day the advisors to the king reported to him that some people looked unfavorably at his afternoon routine. These folks, his advisors intimated, thought a king should act more dignified, in a “kingly” manner so to speak - one befitting someone of royal stature. The king listened attentively as the advisors pleaded their case, and then responded, “When an archer goes into battle, he strings his bow until it is taut. When the shooting is over he unstrings it again. If he didn’t unstring it, the bow would lose its snap, and would be no good to him when he needed it in battle.”

Herodotus said very little else about the king, except that Amasis was the most prosperous leader in the history of Egypt. Rest and relaxation are key ingredients for health and wealth. Too much work, with too little recovery time, can be overwhelming. As the tempo, complexity, and demands of work escalate, downtime should be increased to offset the overload of stress.

Are you unstringing your bow on a regular basis? If you were arrested for being good to yourself would there be enough evidence to convict you? Create time in your schedule to relax. Go to a movie. Read a novel. Take a walk. Slip away for a round of golf or a weekend of play with your mate, family, or friends. The key is balance. As you blend leisure and relaxation with work, you will notice a livelier spring in your step and more snap in your bow.