

# GOING TOO SLOW?

BY ROBERT M. GIGNAC

“You’re going too slow!” “You’re going too slow!” “You’re going too slow!”

No, my CD compilation of Snoop Rappy Diddy isn’t skipping, but I have had this refrain ringing in my ears for a few days now. Why? I thought you might ask.

I recently had the opportunity to watch an interesting dynamic unfold between a “trainer” and a “trainee”, in which it seemed to be the trainer’s intent to get the trainee to act in a different manner than they were currently engaged. In short, to act in a manner more in keeping with what the trainer expected of the trainee, rather than what the trainee seemed capable of doing at that point in time.

How was the trainer intending to change the behaviour of the trainee? By standing approximately 15 to 20 feet behind the trainee, bellowing in a loud forceful voice: “You’re going too slow!” Not once. Not twice. I lost track somewhere around the tenth bellow.

As a trainer myself, I found this rather intriguing. So, I decided to watch a bit longer. When it was apparent that the speed of the trainee was not increasing—in fact seemed to be decreasing—I was happy to see the trainer try something different. The trainer changed position from behind, to approximately 15 to 20 feet in front of the trainee. This was a good sign, as the trainee could now see the trainer, and I felt that perhaps the trainer might model the expected behaviour, thus encouraging the trainee to change theirs and make some progress.

Sadly, I was mistaken. After taking the new position in front of the trainee, the trainer again began to bellow: “You’re going too slow!”—once again, I lost track of the number of times. As you can imagine, there was no change in the behaviour of the trainee and, in fact, what little movement had been exhibited while the yelling was coming from behind had completely stopped as the trainer moved to the front.

The questions, which beg asking here, are these: First, who was this incompetent trainer? Second, when would the trainee up and quit?

The saddest part of this entire interaction, which occurred while my wife and I were skiing in Germany last week, was that the trainer was a gentleman (and I use the term loosely...), probably mid-30’s, and the trainee was his pre-teen daughter.

I was watching with interest from the side of the ski run, as it was only four years ago, when we moved to Switzerland,

that I learned to ski. I know that had my ski instructor taken the same approach with me it would have ended badly for him. Fortunately, my instructor was one who believed in modelling behaviour and encouraging while skiing beside, behind and in front—offering both critical evaluation and praise for what I was doing right.

The trainee had now started to make some movement in the direction of going downhill, but did not seem very confident about it. I took this opportunity to make a long sweeping turn behind her, close enough so she could hear me, but not close enough to scare her. I simply said, “You’re doing great! You can do this!” as I passed by. Her approach into making her turns was pretty good—she just needed some confidence. I then continued into a second turn passing in front of her, keeping a safe distance, and as she looked at me with a mix of both surprise and a bit of fear, I told her again, “You’re doing great! Make nice wide turns!” and she had a smile on her face that I will remember for some time.

I passed by the “trainer” as I made another sweeping turn and he was looking at me with some curiosity, especially since his daughter was now showing definite progress as she made her way toward him—still smiling. Most importantly, he had not yelled anything in almost a minute.

It also forced me to think that every time I am asked to help someone do something that they are not familiar with, that the speed at which I am capable of performing the act has nothing to do with their ability to learn. Yelling in a repetitive manner that “you’re going to slow!”, will do absolutely nothing to make them move any faster and, in fact, will lead them to either give up entirely, or despise you for your attitude. Neither are desired results—from an employee, co-worker, or especially your child.

If you want to encourage someone to change their behaviour, especially when they are learning something new, do not yell—model. Encourage with your actions, motivate with your words, and teach with a hands-on approach. It worked wonders for a young girl on a ski hill in Germany; it will do the same the next time you have to teach someone to do something they might never had tried before. **E**

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