**The Practice of Slowing Down by Phil Powers**

*Phil Powers is the executive director of the American Alpine Club and has made dozens of
mountaineering expeditions to Alaska, Asia, and South America. Powers has written two
books on mountain climbing and lives in Denver with his wife and children.*

April 3, 2006 - I believe in the importance of pace. I grew up in a frenetic household, both
parents working jobs that demanded their attention 24/7. I was little and fast and rushed
around, and I still have that person inside me, always at risk of moving too quickly, missing
the connection, making mistakes.

The forest behind our house offered a peaceful respite. My passion for the vertical world
took me from tall trees in my backyard to climbing steep cliffs and crags. As a teen, I was
moving easily over the landscapes of the American West and was drawn to higher summits.

When I was 19, I leaned something called the "rest step" from an old mountain climber
named Paul Petzoldt. He advised me to rest in the middle of each step completely, but
briefly. The rest step, which I still practice today, allows me to walk or climb with little
effort. I can move very quickly yet still find a pause in every step.

The awareness of pace I owe to my teacher has served me whether I am seeking the world's
highest summits, sharing my love for the mountains with others or kneeling to look my sun,
Gus, in the eye when he has a question.

It serves me as I drive, adjusting my speed to gain a bit of calm and reach my destination
only minutes behind the "record time" a faster lane might provide. It serves me at home
where we maintain a tradition of gathering each night at the dinner table to eat and talk to
each other.

In times of crisis, pace comes to my aid. Another of Petzoldt's lessons was when faced with
an emergency, sit down, collect yourself, and make a plan. When needs seem most urgent -
even life threatening - the practice of slowing down offers calm and clarity.

In 1987, I was in Pakistan to climb Gasherbrum II, one of the world's highest peaks. We
were a small group and it was a very big mountain. Our expedition faced more than its share
of difficulty: A long storm wiped out most of our food rations and an avalanche devastated
our camp, obliterating our tents. One of our party developed altitude sickness; blood
poisoning threatened another. In the face of each disaster, we carefully developed a new
plan. Snow caves replaced lost tents. Soups replaced full meals. Eventually we climbed
slowly to the top, then made our way safely down.

Concentrating on how I move through the world is important. It's why I reach mountain
summits and life goals with energy to spare.

There is magic in any faith. Every once in a while, rushing about, my belief in pace rises up,
slows me down and grants me a view of a sunset, a smile from a stranger or a conversation
with a child. I owe these moments to what I learned from an old mountain climber and have
practiced ever since.

http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5316322