



## Stanford eCorner

### Overcoming the Pressure of Comparison

Steve Young, *Former NFL Quarterback*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/1775/Overcoming-the-Pressure-of-Comparison>

Young explains how he was able to overcome the pressure of being compared to legendary 49ers quarterback Joe Montana. The best strategy, he notes, was to focus on finding out how good he could get, not how much better he could be than Montana. This helped him move in the right direction and got his career going as well. Later on, he became known as the fiery leader of the 49ers.



#### Transcript

You were talking about how you started out your career and Joe Montana was an icon. When you ended, you were an icon yourself. I was wondering how that happened. I know it was a process, but were there specific moments when things changed, where you had that credibility? I appreciate that. I think the first place that had changed was really within myself. For a long time, I thought I was chasing something. I don't know what the Disney story it is where the tiger's chasing something and then he turns to butter. He goes so fast, but it's like you're chasing your tail. You're just running around. It was like the whole world was saying "If you want to be as good as Joe Montana, you've got to do this," then I would go running and jump through the hoop.

I realized that I was insane. The first step for me to try and get into a place where I could accomplish the goals I had was to recognize that it wasn't about Joe Montana. It was really about finding out how good I can get. That changed everything. It made my whole life " why I did what I did " change. My incentive was different. Once I realized that the goal was really to see how good I could get, I might be horrible but I'm going to find out how good I am. That's all I really want to know. It didn't get to be about anybody else. It was really about me.

that helped get things moving in the right direction and getting my career going well. And then there are moments like big victories. Ironically, one of the most important ones was perception. I have the same possession as nine tenths of the wall. But in football, perception is nine tenths of the wall. I learned that so vividly. I've been MVP of the league twice. I'd been to the Pro Bowls. In the middle of the 1994 season, in the fourth or fifth game, we were losing horribly. Our coach, George Sefer, brought Elvis Grbac on the field, forcing me off the field.

For me, after all I'd been through and all I'd accomplished, it was galling to me that he was now at this key moment. Obviously, I took it the wrong way, but I exploded. I hadn't exploded ever before. I lost it, and I don't lose it. I decided at that moment that I was going to fight him. My head coach ? I was going to fight him. We were going to fight right there. It was like I had it and I'm fighting him. And so I challenged him to a fight. He wouldn't turn around; he was acting like he was watching the game.

I was behind him and I was saying things and doing things. I was so lost in it that I forgot that millions were watching. I was yelling at him and calling him names and telling him to turn around. "If you had any guts, you would turn around, you chicken," anything just to get him to fight me. He wasn't going to fight on national TV, but I would've fought him. I had lost it. I was

fighting. My hands were ready to fight. What happened after that was, all week long, the stories became "Steve Young - Our Fiery Leader." "It's our fiery leader!" I was like "What are you talking about? What do you mean "fiery"?" But I had put it in a way that no one saw. All of a sudden, by emoting it, people were like "Ah." That's why I got the perception associated with me.

Suddenly, I was the leader. It was, ironically, one of the more fundamental shifts in my career to how people looked at me from a media standpoint. From my teammates- standpoint, it was me screaming at my coach. Who would've thought that you would have to lose it to gain it? I just remembered that as a weird thing. If you think that you're a fiery leader, that's not necessarily the case. Everyone else thinks you're a big milktoe so it doesn't matter. You're a milktoe. "No, I'm a fiery leader!" "No, we don't see it that way." Another great concept about negotiation is "How am I perceived?" How do people perceive me? I can use that to my advantage. Also, what are my weaknesses and how are they perceived? I tell players all the time now. "Don't complain.

Don't moan. Make sure people perceive you the way you want to be perceived." That doesn't have to do anything with reality but the point is made.