



14 Tips for Climbing (and Moving) Mountains

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A snapshot of Mark's Matterhorn expedition

Last week, I did something I had only previously dreamed of doing: I climbed the notorious [Matterhorn](#) and parts of [Mont Blanc](#). The experience was life-changing and was made even more meaningful by the more than \$22,000 I was able to raise for [USGBC's Project Haiti](#).



Following the trip, I sent an email to all the generous donors and well-wishers who helped make this trip successful, as a reflection on everything I learned from the experience. Here are the life lessons I shared with them and gladly share with the entire USGBC family - whether you're climbing the Matterhorn or moving mountains of any size.

1. Setting goals is key to accomplishments. Set them high.
2. Perspectives on an issue are so powerful and so variable.
 - From a distance and from one direction, the goal of climbing the Matterhorn seemed personally impossible. By simply changing the angle of my view, it become maybe possible. From a distance, some parts looked tough and ended up being easy, and vice versa.
 - From up close, each rock was just an easy step or a hard one, but just a step. In the dark of night, with only a small field of view from a head lamp, that seemingly easy step is just an easy step. That same step in the light of day became almost impossible when the consequences were apparent.
3. It is always the combination of the probability of a mis-step and its consequence that expose the true risk and logical level of protection. Ignoring this equation could be fatal when climbing a mountain.
4. There are loose rocks everywhere and you try to avoid them, but sometimes you just get hit by them no matter how cautious you are. That's what helmets and ropes are for.
5. A guide, an expert, or a mentor expands one's definition of what is possible, safe or dangerous. Situational awareness expands exponentially with experience. They likely know your limits better than you do.
6. Often, it is just encouragement - mere words at the right moment - which can bring you to an entirely new physical or mental level. "I can't" or "I don't think I can" becomes "I did" with a simple firm statement of, "Yes, you can!" Positive thoughts that you truly believe, even if based on inaccurate information, are huge multipliers.
7. Teamwork is another huge multiplier.
8. One misstep can be life changing: focus your mind in the present. I've never been more focused than walking a two foot wide stripe of snow in crampons for 50 feet with a 5,000 foot drop-off on either side and a swirling wind from both directions (and yes, I was short-rope to the guide and I assure you he was focused too).
9. God is truly with us and demonstrated His presence clearly to me on this trip. And no, I don't

care or mind what you think when I write that. Go ahead and chalk things up to coincidence or serendipity if you'd like. To each their own. And for those who believe, thanks for your prayers. I know they helped this dream become a reality.

0. Preparation is critical. There is no faking physical conditioning. A good night's sleep, though desirable, is overrated and not vital because the adrenaline kicks in.
1. Break big obstacles into pieces you can easily relate to: something more manageable in your own mind. The last 1,000 feet is not 1,000 feet, it becomes climbing the 36 floors in my building only three more times, something I had done many times in preparation for the trip.
2. The goal is not always obvious so try to define it clearly. The elation upon reaching the top was quickly muted when I realized the real goal was to safely walk away from the mountain, another six hours of careful climbing away.
3. When the once-in-a-lifetime scene is before you, either figure out how to capture it or wake up the photographer (in this case, my sleeping son in the next bed over who is a professional photographer). Sleep is not worth missing the opportunity to capture the moment forever.
4. What a person chooses to do is not just their own business. It has major ramifications to those around them. Be aware and diligent with that responsibility.

I'm sure I've learned all of these lessons at some point in the past, but this trip brought them all into clear focus. I hope they have some lasting meaning for you, too.



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Chapter members, Member employees

1 comment

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Daniel Whittet

1 year 14 weeks ago

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Fantastic and inspirational post on so many levels. Climbing mountains, literally and figuratively, is a good way to remind yourself of the value of being fully alive. When you step onto that "next rock" it may seem incredibly difficult, (or tedious or just annoying) but if, when you reach the once in a lifetime experience, you are aware of it, you can remind yourself later of the steps it took. I will be here in my cubicle working on LEED data today and be reminded to set my goals higher as well. And to get out there! Congratulations.

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