



mhca's e-Newsletter

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3 Lessons Learned from Climbing Mount Everest

A Guest Article from Alison Levine

Everyone has their mountains in life to climb. Most people's are figurative. Mine are literal. I started climbing mountains in 1996 — about eighteen months after my second heart surgery to correct a congenital heart defect called Wolff-Parkinson-White Syndrome—and I haven't stopped. I have since served as the team captain of the first American Women's Everest Expedition, climbed the highest peak on every continent (known as the "seven Summits"), and skied to both the North and South Poles – an accomplishment known as the Adventure Grand Slam (Denny's should get in on this action and give me a free breakfast). I realize the majority of people who read this have absolutely zero desire to climb anything other than the corporate ladder (if that), but I think everyone can learn from my experiences, as many of the lessons I learned on the world's highest peak can be applied to everyday life. Here are a few of the takeaways:

1. Surround yourself with people who will look out for you and help you muster up the courage to conquer things that intimidate you. On Everest, one of the most frightening parts of the mountain is the Khumbu Icefall—two-thousand vertical feet of these massive seracs that can shift around at any moment and come tumbling down in a gigantic ice avalanche, crushing everything in its path. The Icefall was the scene of a tragic accident this past spring that claimed sixteen lives. In total, I have climbed through that area about fourteen times, and it

never gets “less scary.” What gives me the courage to get through it time and time again? My team; the people climbing alongside me and encouraging me and cheering me on and waiting on the trail for me so that I don't have to approach the terrifying parts alone.

2. Progress does not always mean going forward. When you're climbing Mt. Everest, you don't just climb in the upward direction to get to the top. You also spend a lot of time climbing downward —back toward basecamp. Why? Because you have to let your body get used to the altitude very slowly (a process called “acclimatization”), and that means coming back to a lower elevation several times throughout the expedition so that you can regain some strength since your body starts to deteriorate at elevations above 18,000 feet. Coming back down to basecamp each time before climbing to the next higher camp can be both physically and psychologically exhausting. But it's part of the process, so don't look at “going backward” as losing ground. Look at it as an opportunity to re-energize so that you're a stronger climber when you head back up the mountain again. Backing up is not the same as backing down.
3. Grit is more important than speed. Rarely (if ever) am I the strongest, fastest climber on an expedition. But I am determined. Pain is often part of the process when you're pushing your limits. Junko Tabei reached the summit of Mt. Everest on May 16, 1975, and became the first woman to stand on top of the 29,035 foot peak. What makes this accomplishment even more impressive is that she and her teammates were struck by an avalanche at 20,600 feet and it took six Sherpas to dig them out. Junko was in agonizing pain after the accident and could barely walk. Yet she powered on. When commenting on her historic climb she said, “Technique and ability alone do not get you to the top - it is the willpower that is the most important. This willpower you cannot buy with money or be given by others - it rises from your heart.” You don't have to be the best climber to get to the top of a mountain; you just have to be relentless about putting one foot in front of the other.

This guest article was provided by Alison Levine. Alison is the First American Women's Everest Expedition Team Captain, a faculty member at the Thayer Leader Development Group at West Point, and New York Times bestselling author of *On the Edge*. Allison will be presenting at **mhca's** Summer Conference in Boston next week. If you won't be in attendance, we encourage you to watch the video that will be posted to mhca.com the following week.

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5 Key Industry Trends

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