



One Step at a Time

I just got back from a climbing trip on Mt. Rainier. When you first see the mountain, you wonder how anyone could climb so high. You are excited and apprehensive at the same time. After all, it's a completely new experience. Totally outside your comfort zone - especially if you're a flatlander from Houston.

Fortunately we had experienced guides to help us along the way (one of them had just climbed Mt. Everest). Our attitude was to listen to the guides and do everything they said - the proper mentor-mentee relationship.

The guides taught us two techniques we would need right away - pressure breathing and the rest step. It is much harder for Oxygen to be absorbed into your lungs at high altitudes because of the low air pressure. So we were taught to inhale deeply and to purse our lips as we exhaled to increase the air pressure in our lungs and "push" the Oxygen into the lungs. It takes conscious effort to do this, but as they said, it's like putting money in the bank because by pressure breathing, we are keeping our cells and muscles well oxygenated.

Conserving energy as you are climbing the mountain is very important. The rest-step is a special technique that saves a lot of our energy. As you step up the mountain, you lock your lower leg straight for a second so all your body weight is being supported by your bones, not your leg muscles. When you're carrying a 40 pound backpack, energy conservation becomes a big deal.

These techniques slow you down considerably but they allow you to be able to climb for long periods of time without stopping. It turns out that climbing a mountain is a lot like running a marathon - it's all about energy management and pacing.

It took me about three hours to figure out my ideal pace. You want to move steadily but not so fast to where you lose your breath and have to stop. Once I figured out my ideal pace, my whole focus was on taking the next step. One hundred percent of my focus was on planting my foot on the next footprint as we climbed up a snowfield that looked like a black diamond ski run. One...step...at...a...time. Breathing hard all the way but just short of being out of breath...one...step...at...a...time.

We did not even look up at the scenery. We couldn't. Doing so would have thrown us off balance and could have made us fall. We just focused on the next step. Pressure breathe, rest step, pressure breathe, rest step, over and over again. After each hour of climbing, our guide would make us stop for a 15 minute break. We would drop out backpacks, turn around, and be amazed at how much altitude we had gained... one...step...at...a...time. We were climbing at about 1000' an hour. One...step...at...a...time.

Our guides broke climbing Mt. Rainier (a huge mountain) into manageable goals (several one hour climbs) and then broke those goals down into small tasks (pressure breathing and rest-stepping). As long as we focused 100% on the tasks, the goals and the dream took care of themselves.

Whenever we lost focus or made a mistake, our guides were right there to help us out. We never would have been able to climb the mountain without our guides. Our mountain guides had the experience and the expertise to get us where we could not go on our own.

No matter how huge your dreams seem, if you will break them down into manageable goals, then break the goals into simple tasks, and relentlessly focus on the tasks, and rely on an experienced coach or mentor, you'll be amazed at how much you accomplish.

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Put it into action:

Break your goals down into small manageable tasks. Focus on accomplishing your tasks one step at a time, and find a mentor or coach who can take you to heights you could never reach on your own.

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