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INTERACTION

ADVENTURE AND MOUNTAIN AIR

Your secret weapon to great leadership

Interaction Opinion – Brigid Hardy

Take a deep breath. Exhale. And let me show you how a hiking adventure can give you a great lesson in leadership. As a business owner, I sometimes experience a tinge of guilt when I allocate time for adventure and leisure. With a constant stream of tasks, it can feel challenging to justify focusing on what I want or need.

However, I have come to realise that disconnecting and breathing fresh mountain air is exactly what I need to be my best leader. It is during these times that my clarity soars, my thinking evolves, and I gain valuable business insights that can't be attained from behind the computer screen.

On my most recent hiking adventure climbing the trails of the stunning Cradle Mountains of Lutruwita, my mind was drawn to some important hiking lessons that can also be applied to contemporary leadership. Whether you're a novice or aiming for Everest, hitting the trails can help you grow as a leader in ways that you may have never imagined.

Keep your energy up

You can't hike safely or lead well if your energy levels are depleted. My nutritional needs when I'm hiking are completely different to my normal daily needs. I have learnt that if I don't refuel regularly, I crash hard. As a leader, take time to rest, re-energise and do what you need to show up with inspiring energy and verve – minus the guilt.

Leaders who take the time to care for themselves are resilient and able to quickly return to a state of balance. This means they are better equipped to handle stress and bounce back from inevitable setbacks.

Be prepared for anything

Planning your hike is crucial to your safety and the safety of others. Plan your route, pack gear for all conditions, and familiarise yourself with the territory and terrain. The same is true for leadership.

Effective leaders always plan ahead, prepare their team, and consider the potential risks and challenges. Likewise, good communication is essential for a successful hike – especially when navigating unfamiliar territory. Leaders who can effectively communicate their vision, expectations and plans to their team are more likely to achieve their goals. Let your strategic plan be the map that guides your journey and lets you know when you are on the right track.

Don't get complacent

Many of us have been leading for a long time, but the worst thing we can do as leaders is to be complacent and assume. When hiking, never assume that something is always as it appears. Is there ice on the path, is this the right path, will that branch hold my weight, is the foundation solid? Unexpected obstacles such as the icy trail I recently experienced hiking the paths of the Overland Track often arise.

Leaders who are successful problem-solvers are those who can adapt to changing circumstances and find creative solutions to keep their team on track. If you stumble, which you will, then get up, dust yourself off, and learn from the lesson.

Hike your own hike

For me, this has probably been the most empowering insight into what makes my hiking enjoyable or a total drag. It's unrealistic to keep pace with someone who is fitter or more experienced. I lose my ability to be present and find it difficult to focus on much else other than what's hard.

As leaders, we have to make tough and important decisions all the time. Don't rush decisions if you don't have to. Instead take the time to reflect, observe, be curious and fully understand the problem that you're solving.

Surround yourself with people you trust

You wouldn't head out to a summit peak with someone you don't trust so why do business with them? You want to know that you're surrounded by people who care about the same things, have similar values, and who you can easily communicate with.

Communication during times of challenge is what tests our relationships. Effective leaders understand the importance of teamwork and know how to foster a collaborative environment where everyone works together towards a common goal.

Celebrate the small wins

I often remind my clients that leadership is both a privilege and a choice. In choosing leadership, sometimes it will feel like you have chosen to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro – but it's still your choice. Just like hiking up that mountain, it's your choice, not a burden to carry, and each step should be acknowledged and celebrated. Treat leadership with the care and attention that it deserves. Otherwise, you might reach the summit, look back, and see that you're alone on the mountain.

Every day try and do a little bit better

I don't believe in born leaders. Leadership is a courageous commitment to lifelong learning and a choice that will test our resilience and judgement most days. Just like the shadow of that looming mountain, leadership can be incredibly humbling, but it's worth it – so don't ever give up.

The leadership rewards add up

The lessons from hiking have the potential to profoundly and positively impact your leadership qualities. They can enhance your planning skills, sharpen your problem-solving acumen, cultivate resilience, nurture teamwork, and refine your communication abilities. As you embark on your next trail adventure, take a moment to reflect on these valuable lessons and consider how they can be integrated into your unique and authentic leadership style. Embrace this opportunity without guilt and enjoy the transformative power of hiking for both personal and professional growth.

Now take time to feel the sun on your face and the crisp mountain air in your lungs.

See you on the trail!