



## **Jim and the Art of Mountain Leadership**

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Picture yourself in the heart of the Himalayas, majestic, snow capped peaks all about you, the distant clanging of bells as yaks graze below, a fresh breeze on your face and fire in your belly.

For many, the mountains are a place of great beauty and tranquility; an opportunity to reflect and step back from the normal pace of life. For others the mountains are a place of personal challenge, to create new paths and step where no other human has before. And for the reckless or those who choose not to pay proper respect they are a place of great danger. One only has to think of John Krakauer's book 'Into Thin Air' about his tragic expedition to summit Mt Everest in 1996. Whilst attempting the summit in deteriorating weather conditions, several guide's leadership values were put to the ultimate test in the face of over bearing opposition from clients determined to push on for the summit – at all costs! They compromised their 'turn around' safety time resulting in a heavy loss of lives.

These guides had led many successful expeditions before and this begs the questions,  
How did these highly experienced guides create these situations to happen?  
What are the pitfalls along the way?  
What do they look like?  
What areas of your own life do you create situations where your leadership can be compromised?  
Knowing that pitfalls exist, why do so many still choose to blindly walk into them?  
What if you could learn how to avoid creating such situations?  
Would you like to know how to?  
How useful would it be for you to understand what is required to walk the leadership talk?

Want to know more...

Using the realm of mountain leadership has served as a useful analogy to many businesses wanting to master the nebulous subject of leadership. Some even take it the next step further and embark on the ultimate leadership journey. Having led and worked with such corporate teams, discussion on what leadership is or isn't is usually hotly debated around the camp fire. The one thing that leadership is - and it's a subject that seemingly few teams recognise it for what it is, is 'Creation', sound a little abstract?

Well, separating *creation* from *creativity* which I will come on to later, it's also about attention, choice and the consequences that follow those choices.

Ask yourself,

How often you have overlooked what would later appear in hindsight as an obvious step in the wrong direction?

What has been the impact to you?

How have you felt as a result of this?

I know I have, I have caught myself and seen other mountaineers nearly compromise themselves when racing against time or battling against foul weather in haste to get necessary tasks done. Probably from bitter experience, we all know that when we've chose decisions made in haste they usually carry a heavy price tag. Some people choose to carry these experiences as scars, others as badges of honour. From the mistakes I've made, I always seek the learning and ask myself "What did I do to create this situation to happen?" This immediately places me on the cause side of the cause and effect equation. I know I caused the situation to occur, no one else is responsible. Therefore, as I am responsible for my actions I have the ability to take positive action to remedy it.

What if, instead of rushing ahead to take action, we took an alternative course and chose to slow down? Slowing down enables us to search for the heart of the matter. When we do this we reduce the potential for frustration and heartache further along the track. In fact, creating time to gain clarity of purpose and intention is essential to creating 'well formed' outcomes.

All we have to do is simply start by asking the obvious questions like:

What is my positive outcome?

What does it look, sound and feel like?

Where and when will it occur?

What are the steps and stages along the way?

How will I know when I get there?

Relating it to Krakauer's book, the most important question the mountain guides could have asked is "Is this outcome of team members reaching the summit safe to me?" "Is it safe to others?" "Is this safe in this environment?" These are simple questions. Questions that if asked, could save lives. The power and beauty of these questions lay in their simplicity.

Consciously setting the scene this way commences the leadership process. More often than not we intuitively know when something feels either right or wrong for us. We get a gut feel, a vibe that resonates with us and we feel good or we feel dissonance and are repelled by the idea.

The leadership challenge arises when life throws curly situations in to the equation, such as when strong minded clients insist on reaching their summit. This presents us with leadership challenges. When we have ambiguous feelings, part of us is tugged in one direction and another, perhaps more conservative part, is being tugged in the opposite direction. During these

times articulating what we're experiencing can be tough – we simply know we're struggling with making a decision.

When we feel the pain of the struggle it's time to start asking

What's coming up for me here?

Why do I feel the way that I do?

Listening to our emotions, clearing through our internal defenses and bypassing our ego, we allow our mind to settle. When we step back from the scenario, we are able to move beyond our subjective experiences and provide ourselves with the ability to objectify and bring balance to the situation by bouncing our experiences and feelings against our values system. This is so important, as this is where that funny gut feeling is emanating from.

Listening to and embracing what our values about the situation at hand is telling us requires one of the pivotal elements of leadership... *Courage to do the right thing*. Courage is only courage when the person experiences fear concerning the course of action they are about to undertake, and choose to do it regardless. It requires great honesty and perception to stand up in the face of popular thinking when it would be easier to fly below the radar and simply go with the flow. Many of us face this challenge daily with friends, family, bosses and colleagues alike. Exercising courage, we are creating our own destiny and by remaining true to ourselves, in the process we remain true to others too. Had the lead guides in Krakauer's book been true to themselves, tragedy could easily have been avoided.

For those engaging in leadership really there is no choice to be made, as leadership requires living consistently to a set of values that keeps our integrity constantly in alignment.

This same willingness to stand up in the face of popular thinking is imperative to creation and by its very definition involves change. For instance, had Copernicus the 16th century Polish Astronomer, not been ready to depart from popular thinking on planetary movements and exercise the courage to dispute the notion that the earth was the centre of the solar system, we may still be living under the misapprehension that the world is flat. By daring to challenge the status quo, Copernicus' dismantled the scientific paradigm of its time and reordered how the earth was viewed: One day flat, the next day round!

Looking at other great inventors it becomes apparent that innovation does not come from mediocrity nor conformity of thinking. Creation starts with accessing creativity.

Here's an exercise to help you get in the mood for the creation process:

1. Find a place to feel relaxed and comfortable.
2. Take three long breaths and wait till you feel composed.
3. Start by asking yourself "do I have permission to be creative?" Once you have arrived at a Yes, access a state of curiosity, notice how that feels.
4. Layer on to that a sense of fun and playfulness.

5. Now focus on and apply this to the subject or area that you want to create. Start by asking 'what if' questions. Remove all thoughts of money, time, resources and the possibility of failure and allow yourself to indulge your desires.
6. Access the discovery process, exploring new ways of looking and doing things. Notice how you're feeling and what comes up for you. Being patient with your self and taking time to sit and just be. Accepting that the creation process will come if it's not forced.
7. Imagine opportunities opening up to you, whether it be on yourself, new designs, images, innovative solutions or products. Allow these thoughts to swim around, taking time to fully understand all thoughts before dismissing them, distilling what's left until you achieve absolute clarity.

Having created your ideal state, the next leadership step requires *patience* and *tolerance* to work through the 'structural tension' between the gulf dividing your current reality and the ideal state. In traversing this divide, the process of leadership defines the framework for obstacles to be addressed and removed along the way. Such actions are the *result* of leadership, not the mark of leadership, as ultimately leadership is about being and not doing.

Understanding leadership necessarily involves a departure from the beaten track; after all beaten tracks are for beaten people. Those engaged in leadership journeys enter a realm of their own. This is well stated by Sir John Hunt, leader of the first summit expedition on Mt Everest "...The true result of endeavour, whether on a mountain or in any other context, may be found rather in its lasting effects than in the few moments during which a summit is trampled by mountain boots. The real measure is the success or failure of the climber to triumph - not over a lifeless mountain, but over him or herself."

To learn more about James Holden and The Ultimate Leadership Journey, please contact Equilibrio on 9363 9998.

***Inspired by the writings of:***

*Jona C Nadar, 'How to Lose Friends and Infuriate People'*

*John Krakauer 'Into Thin Air'*

*Sir John Hunt, 'The Ascent of Everest'*

*Dr Michael Hall – International Institute of Neuro-Semantics*

**Author:** James Holden, Executive Leadership Coach has developed a specialised corporate program called 'The Ultimate Leadership Journey'. Conducted as a 'real time' journey into the unknown, team members discover new insights about themselves and their capabilities - to enrich and develop their personal & professional lives, and to build powerful performance teams.

James is the only person in the Southern Hemisphere who has a specialist background in designing & leading expeditions to remote locations AND provide coaching before, during & after the expedition. He is both outcome and process driven to ensure that your team reach your 'Mountain of Success', and all key learnings are successfully transferred back to the workplace.