



Letters on Leadership #7: Mt. Everest

Recently, the movie about the 1996 climbing disaster on Mt. Everest was released. If you are unfamiliar with the story or the movie, the “1996 Mount Everest disaster” refers to the events of May 10-11, 1996, when eight people, while attempting to ascend or, having achieved the summit, descend were caught in a blizzard and died.

I summited Mt. Everest on the morning of April 23rd, 2010. Although I climbed the north side (Tibet) of the mountain and the disaster took place on the south side (Nepal) of the mountain, I have still been asked by numerous coaches and business leaders about the 1996 disaster.

I wasn't on the mountain in 1996 and am hesitant to pass judgment on the climbers' decisions which led to the disaster. Instead, I speak about an avalanche that my climbing partners and I were caught in during our own attempt as seen in the accompanying photograph. A hanging serac, an immense block of glacial ice, toppled from its perch and sped down the mountain killing two climbers and covering my climbing partners and me in snow.



The reason for our being caught in an avalanche and almost losing our lives? A thousand, bad little decisions that we made the night prior and the morning of our ascent. I know that you should leave camp, climb and be settled in your next camp prior to the sun hitting the mountain and creating unstable conditions. No exceptions! Instead, I got complacent: I listened to other climbers questioning my start time, I slept in, I ate a full breakfast, I packed my climbing gear when I awoke rather than the night before. Ultimately, I left camp three hours after I knew that we should start. That series of bad decisions almost cost me my life. And if it did, everyone would have blamed the avalanche, but it would not have been the avalanche's fault. It would have been my fault!

I recently read *The Compound Effect* by Darren Hardy. I recommend it. The premise of the book is that a thousand, little good decisions made over time ultimately have a huge, positive impact on our lives and livelihoods. The same, of course, can be said for a thousand, little bad ones. In either case, take ownership of those decisions and challenge your teammates (family members, co-workers, coaching staff and/or players) to do the same. ***Don't make excuses and don't let others make excuses for you!***

Don't blame the avalanche.

Attack!

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