

# THE ADVENTURER WITHIN

## MOUNTAIN CLIMBER JOHN AMATT SHOWS HOW THE SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE CAN MOTIVATE ANYONE TO REACH FOR HEIGHTS UNIMAGINED AND ACHIEVE GOALS UNATTAINED

**O**n a cold July afternoon in 1965, 20-year old mountain climber John Amatt found himself alone, staring up a particularly imposing section of the sheer face of Norway's mile-high Troll Wall. For nine days he and his companions had faced rain, sleet, falling rocks and gusts of icy wind while they inched their way up the vertical mile. Their painfully slow ascent marked the first attempt at a cliff some of the world's best climbers had declared impossible. This day the group hoped to surmount the last series of overhangs before making a final drive to the top.

Amatt was chosen to bring up the rear while the others attacked each overhang. Once his companions disappeared from view overhead, Amatt was left hanging on the cliff face with a solitary section of rope as his only connection to the people who could lead him to safety. Amatt waited for the rope to go taut - his signal to follow.

Glancing at his watch after a particularly long wait, Amatt realized that he had been dangling in midair over a drop of thousands of feet for two hours. Hanging there alone, his mind began to race with worst-case scenarios. Had someone been injured in a fall? Been knocked unconscious by a falling rock? Or worse? Each possibility spelled serious trouble for the lone climber. Eventually Amatt's grisly visions of misfortune came to an abrupt halt when the rope waved and suddenly pulled taut. With enormous relief and the extra burst of adrenaline that comes when you know your fears have been unfounded, Amatt began to climb again, soon moving beyond the last overhang and rejoining the others. The next day the group completed the last leg of the climb, becoming the first adventurers to conquer the sheer face of Troll Wall.

Today Amatt says that he has never experienced such incredible feelings of isolation and helplessness. Rather than reevaluating whether mountain climbing was still a worthwhile endeavor however, Amatt says that after Troll Wall his thirst for adventure became even more unquenchable.

In the intervening 30 years, Amatt has conquered hundreds of other peaks, both large and small. By far his most ambitious climb, however,



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occurred in 1982 when he led the first group of Canadians to scale Mount Everest. This incredibly arduous yet rewarding experience, described in detail in his book *Straight to the Top and Beyond*, helped Amatt develop what he calls the "Adventure Attitude" philosophy. Today, as CEO and president of One Step Beyond WorldWide, Amatt uses the themes of adventure, risk, courage and pushing the limits of human potential to help people from executives to schoolchildren face the challenges and obstacles of a fast - changing world.

"My definition of adventure is very tied into our goals and philosophies at One Step Beyond," Amatt says. "Adventure isn't hanging on a rope on the side of a mountain. Adventure is an attitude we must apply to the day-to-day obstacles of life - facing new challenges, seizing new opportunities, testing our resources against the unknown and, in the process, discovering our own unique potential.

"To me an adventure is a journey with an uncertain outcome. In the arena of mountain climbing Everest was one challenge where I chose to pursue that spirit of adventure. But everyone operates in a different arena. To some, selling products is the arena of challenge. To others it might be the football field. But

the philosophy of adventure applies no matter what the arena."

### Adventurers Succeed

No matter what changes are going on around us, fear of the unknown often drives people to avoid risks. While this fear can protect us from self-destructive or foolish acts, it also may hinder us from the reasonable risks that can lead to growth and accomplishment. Amatt believes that only those individuals who embrace the risks associated with change will achieve success.

"Change has always been with us," he says. "In fact change is the only constant we can expect throughout our lives. What's different today is that the pace of change has increased so dramatically that people have become very uncertain about the future. Life involves risk, but today we've created social structures that have some people believing that we can lead life without taking risks. By nature, we seek comfort and predictability, using all of our financial resources and intellectual powers to devise technologies that will make our lives easier and less stressful. It is one of the great paradoxes of human existence that once we have created the comfort we desire, we must leave it all behind if we are to move forward.

"In point of fact we take risks every day, whether we acknowledge them or not. When we make an investment we take a risk. When you talk to a stranger, that's a risk. If you expose an idea to someone else, you risk ridicule. I believe that in the future the people who succeed will be those who are proactive about taking risks. People who wait until they are forced to take risks will not succeed.

That is the choice that each of us faces: Do I want to be proactive and move forward or am I going to try to just protect what I already have and be reactive?"

### The Adventure Attitude

Whenever he travels and speaks to groups, Amatt says he inevitably encounters people who admire him for his accomplishments but can't seem to tap into their own spirits of adventure. His advice to them? Just take the first step.

"People are always coming up to me and saying, 'Boy, I really wish I could do what you've done,' " Amatt says. "My answer to them is always, 'Just go and do it.' It's no good saying, 'Gee, I wish I could do it,' because in truth you can do it if you just take control and set your mind to figure out how you're going to accomplish your goals.

"A lot of people dream of doing great things but never act on those dreams. And that's where they lose out. I always tell people, 'Unless you make a committed step forward, nothing happens. As long as you're in the procrastination mode, nothing

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will occur. It's only when you make that first step that things start to happen to you.' "

### Move Toward Your Fears

While Amatt acknowledges that fear plays a significant role in keeping people from pursuing their dreams, he does not feel that success stems from eliminating fear. In fact, he says, fear is a very important facet of life and one that we should embrace.

"When we move from the known world into the unknown, no matter what field of endeavor we're talking about, we experience fear. Often these feelings cause us to create in our minds a whole host of worst-case scenarios. We can all think of times when we've been lying awake at night worrying about something we had to do the next day. But then once we have confronted the situation the next day, the reality of the event was not as bad as what our minds had conjured up. "But that's what we've got to realize when we feel fear- that when you move toward fear, it recedes. When you run away from it, it grows in your mind. I believe that fear is merely nature's way of focusing all your mental and physical resources on the problem you face.



That's why it's so important to confront the fear directly. That allows you to move forward and get on with the job at hand. This ability - to confront fear and move forward despite all the anxiety and uncertainty you feel - that's courage."

### Life's Greatest Teacher

While today many may admire John Amatt, the adventurer and conqueror of great mountains, he is the first to admit that each of the lessons he espouses came to him only through years of personal struggle. "This surprises some people," he says, "but when I was growing up I was a very shy, insecure person who took few risks. It wasn't until I started climbing mountains that I found something I was good at that gave me the self-confidence to keep exploring. And then I started to realize that there was all kinds of hidden potential inside me."

In 1968, the English-born Amatt moved to Canada and, after trying his hand at a variety of business ventures, took a job teaching high school students in the town of Banff. Banff is situated in the heart of the Canadian Rockies, and Amatt took



## CONQUER LIFE'S ULTIMATE GOALS - AS A TEAM

From motivational posters to Hollywood films, the image of the solitary climber struggling to conquer an unforgiving peak represents the threshold of physical and mental endurance. While most climbers would probably agree that nothing beats a sheer cliff for pushing the mind and body to the extreme, Everest alumnus John Amatt believes that climbing also demonstrates what a team can accomplish by working together.

"Compared to other people," Amatt says, "every individual has certain strengths and certain limitations. That is certainly true of me. When we strive for life's ultimate goals - for me, that was climbing Everest - it's almost essential that we get help from other people. Only one person has climbed Everest alone, and that was only after gaining 30 years of experience with other teams of people. That's why I say that in most cases the ultimate goals are only achievable by teams of

people working together, applying their individual strengths toward accomplishing a common goal."

In his book, *Straight to the Top and Beyond*, Amatt describes in compelling detail the challenge he, some fellow Canadian adventurers and a group of Nepalese Sherpas faced in staging their 1982 assault on Mount Everest. While the Canadian climbers were all experienced mountaineers, they nonetheless needed help from the local Sherpas who were more accustomed to surviving in the rarefied air of the Himalayan mountains. In looking back on this experience, Amatt believes that without a superhuman dedication to the team goal and a trust that they could rely on one another in life and death situations, their effort would not have succeeded. But as he explains, few of life's ultimate goals, whether in sports, business or personal life, are ever realized without a group working together.

"When you take on the ultimate goal," he says, "you almost assuredly need the support of other people. That isn't to say that one individual alone isn't capable of climbing Everest - or winning a championship, building a successful business etc. -

but those individuals are few and far between. If you're an average kind of guy like me, you have to acknowledge that you have limitations and that you can only offset those limitations with the help of other people.

"The story of our Everest climb was clearly a story of a group of men from Canada who had climbing ability, but we weren't able to adapt to the environment as well as the native Sherpa people who live at 12,000 feet year-round. So recognizing our limitations we built a team where the strengths of the Sherpas offset our limitations, where our climbing strengths coupled with their adaptive strengths to make it possible to go to the summit.

"And that's why I believe it's so important to analyze yourself and those around you to recognize everyone's strengths and weaknesses and build teams where people's strengths all help build toward achieving that ultimate goal. Once you've done that you're halfway to conquering your own Everest, whatever it may be."

## "Change is the only constant we can expect throughout our lives."

advantage of the local topography to organize physically challenging outing trips for the students. Through these expeditions Amatt soon realized he could help his students confront their fears, overcome physical adversities and build self-confidence.

"My objective in teaching school was not to teach math, social studies or physical education," he explains. "My objective was to teach those kids and help them discover what they were good at so that they could develop their potential the same way that I had through climbing mountains.

"That helped me understand that in life it's important that we help people discover their potential by applying this same philosophy. And a major part of it is by learning through personal experience. People don't learn by just reading a book about something; we learn by applying what we've read in a book to a real-life challenge."

### Conquer Your Personal Everest

Today, when speaking to groups of business executives, Amatt likes to relate his experience climbing Mount Everest to the challenges everyone faces when trying to accomplish a daunting goal.

"People are always fascinated by the Everest experience," he says, "because that accomplishment represents the utmost achievement in the arena of mountain climbing. But it seems that sometimes people think I must be different from them because I've climbed Mount Everest. Well I'm not different from them; I just operate in a different arena. And I think it's important for people to realize that they can conquer their personal Everest if they just apply the same kind of dedication, commitment and endurance."

Amatt says that you can view any goal as a kind of mountain waiting to be climbed. And just like an assault on an imposing peak, a sales target can only be achieved through a series of stages.

"If you view that sales target as a mountain," Amatt explains, "then you can also view the stages along the way to the top. You don't climb Everest by starting at the bottom and just walking up the mountain. You climb Everest by first establishing a base camp at 18,000 feet - a place where you can sleep in safety. Then you establish Camp One at 20,000 feet. And it might take you two weeks to get up to Camp One. Then you go back and forth between base camp and Camp One carrying eight tons of equipment up. And then you start moving up toward Camp Two and so on. Finally you get your fourth camp into place 3,000 feet

below the summit and it's from there that you launch the summit bid.

"We can apply this same philosophy to a sales target, where you don't shoot for the summit right away, but rather make your way incrementally toward the goal. Focus on the small steps along the way. Don't ever forget the big goal, but also don't try to get there in one quantum leap because that's not the way it happens.

"Vision is the ability to keep your eye on the big goal while accomplishing the necessary smaller goals along the way. In my life, some of the things I've always wanted to do have taken me 20 to 25 years. Everest was a goal I set for myself when I was 18 years old and I didn't get there until I was 37. I think that if we can view the great challenges in life in the same way, then nothing's impossible."

### Sleep In Safety, Otherwise Explore

In addition to being one of the world's top mountain climbers, Amatt has also researched the lives of other great adventurers, pioneers and explorers. His favorite quote comes from eminent French explorer Samuel de Champlain, the first European to navigate the Great Lakes. Champlain said, "The advice I give to all adventurers is to seek a place where they may sleep in safety."

"That, to me is the essence of life today," Amatt says. "We need a secure place to sleep in safety, but we've got to leave that behind every day as we push forward into the unknown, confident that at night there is a place to sleep in safety. Security is a foundation to come back to. Security is not an all-encompassing comfort zone to live our lives without risk."



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