

# ADVENTURES IN TRAINING

## THE PEAK PROVIDES LEADERSHIP AND TEAM BUILDING FOR RETAIL OPERATIONS

by Lori Lee

*"The strength of the pack is the wolf. The strength of the wolf is the pack."*  
 –Kipling, from *The Law of the Jungle*.

Greater success requires greater thinking. Greater thinking is found when the status quo mindset is challenged and expanded. Status quo mindset can most easily expand when one leaves the status quo environment. In other words, your best employee training may not be in the office.

Few groups have team work down to a science like the U.S. military. Through special operations training they learn to communicate, listen to a leader, respect and trust one another, and ultimately perform for the good of the whole –the same things a good business needs to summit its commercial and management mountains.

The Peak, located in the broad expanses of Butte Montana and the surrounding mountains, provides specialized training for these military groups as well as corporate and civilian groups wishing to take their performance to a higher level for the growth of the individual, company and profits. Highly qualified instructors take groups out of their comfort zones and up Montana rock spires, across mountain ranges, over rivers and down ATV trails all in the name of deconstructing old mindsets established in the warmth of an office or university school room, and rebuilding a better team. And what better place to learn than in the natural environment that we in the outdoor industry love best?

The urgency found in a real-time experience such as summiting a mountain or learning to let yourself over the edge of a cliff with your life in co-workers hands far exceeds what a

company meeting or even months in a class room can teach your team. This type of team building experience lets each of your employees get to know one another as an individual, not just a suit or a name badge. It builds a team who understands teamwork.

"We only grow in environments that are challenging, and the challenge of the mountain develops leadership skills

### THE VALUES OF TEAM BUILDING

- Teams better appreciate the unique set of talents of each team member = understanding how to best utilize each employee
- The team becomes more inclusionary in the decision-making process = more personal accountability and a desire to see success
- More acceptant of novel and unconventional approaches to old problems = keeps the cutting edge
- More willing to ask for support because of increased trust and understanding of how to support one another = a cohesive feel of support and trust within your employee group, which builds loyalty
- More willing to support without being asked = ease of growth
- Team camaraderie allows the team to deal more effectively with tough problems = accumulative problem solving/exponential improvement
- Establish personal relationships = how many times have you said, "The people you work with sure make the difference between disliking or liking your job"?
- Only extraordinary teams can undertake and deal with extraordinary situation = excellence



Swift-water crossing on the Big Hole River, Wise River, Mont.

and the capacity to lead others, work with others, look after others, and that's the primary responsibility of leadership," says Roy Smith, one of the Peak special instructors and a past mountain guide, safari guide, Arctic and African National Geographic expeditions participant, and graduate of Yale School for Organizational Management.

"Under stress the teams learn to come together. They increase their comfort level with one another because they are sharing a common experience," he says.

Good leaders in a retail or office environment use the same skills as those needed in wilderness situations. A good leader must make decisions on the fly, deal with conflict, communicate, support, listen to all parties and have the courage to make decisions under pressure. Here, in these training courses you are not just talking about leadership and management skills but learning and implementing them in real-time.

Gene Rawson, The Peak's rock and ice climbing instructor points out that when he takes you to the rock face, you are confronting a challenge. You must make decisions on where to move, how and where to make adjustments and how to support your team members as they face their own challenge on the rock .

"Sometimes the most important and most difficult decision is to actually attempt something. Leadership is taking people to places they've never been and helping them know they can do it," says Smith.

"When you're at a crossroads on the rock, and its move or fall, and your belayer says, 'You can do it!' the support develops personal relationships and everyone goes higher than they could go on their own," says Rawson. The concept learned between employees is one of trust and understanding how working together can help everyone succeed together – whether you are on the mountain or in the office.

I recently watched a group of MBA students climb Mount Katahdin, Maine's highest peak, to

learn the real meaning of team work. The students found strength and confidence from just being with others who were trying to tackle the same challenge. When fear rose or disbelief in one's ability reared its head, the fact that they were together and had support made the difference of success and failure. They weren't training to become mountaineers, the mountain was the medium that allowed them to adapt and deal, help one another to



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Group rappelling lesson, off Road-side Rocks, Butte, Mont.



Nursing students tackle an obstacle together to foster better team work.

the top and determine which leadership styles work best with groups.

In their post-climb interviews a repeated theme included that if they had known how difficult and often scary the challenge would be, they would not have undertaken it, but because they did, they were able to gain a learning experience that taught them how to work together, that

bonded them as only experience can, and they gained real understanding of the things that had only been spoken of to that point in their education.

It was a life experience none of them would have changed for the world. In poor teams, members are alone, vulnerable and operate at a low level of effectiveness. In business this can be the kiss of failure.

Randy Santifer, one of The Peak's ATV instructors, and a 20-year ATV Safety Institution instructor, teaches class

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participants the skills needed to ride and control the ATV four-wheelers, then moves on to how to traverse obstacles, how to weight the machine and help other team members get across their obstacles as they tackle advanced terrain across Montana's backcountry. Sometimes it takes one of your buddies weighing down one side of your machine to keep you in balance and get you across your obstacle, Santifer explained.

Whether your team of employees is finding their route across a mountain ridge, supporting one another as they rappel over the side of cliffs, climbing their way up rock spires, making their way across a swift river or learning to work an ATV together in order to cross the obstacles before them, team development and leadership training can have a profound effect on the productivity of individual members who in turn create exceptional teams.

Teamwork is essential for competing in today's global arena, where individual perfection is not as desirable as a high level of collective performance. The single most valuable factor that contributes to high levels of excellence and quality in a team stems

from the individual team member's ability to work with others. Communication, social intelligence, levels of cooperation and trust are all skills that can be taught and developed through the right training.

The Peak is owned by Dr. Gus Varnavas and Rod Alne. Alne is retired from the U.S. Air Force as a Chief Master Sergeant with 27 years as a Pararescueman and a list of certifications a page long. He says that retail and corporate groups spend three to five days in his leadership and team-work training workshops. Each training session is designed for the specific group and the goals your group wants to reach. Options are available for the type of challenges you'd like your group to experience. He works with you to develop the training your employee team needs. The peak also understands the importance of using highly experienced instructors with current certifications and vast experience in the course content you choose. 

*To contact The Peak for more information on setting up team-building and leadership training for your group, call 406.533.6845 or go to [www.thepeakinc.com](http://www.thepeakinc.com).*

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