

# Climbing Your Own Everest

*John Amatt has translated his climbing experience and training into a series of seminars designed to help people conquer their own "mountains."*

BY DINNA DAYAO

It's a typical workday evening in Hong Kong. In a hotel ballroom, 200 business people have formed pairs in which one takes his turn to shout at the other, "What do you want?" In a nearby conference room, 35 senior managers are throwing small, brightly colored bean bags in the air in an attempt to learn juggling.

What's going on? These professionals are all riding the new wave of leadership programs sweeping through training circles - "personal growth" training. In *Organizational Dynamics*, Jay A. Conger of the Harvard Business School writes, "This new curriculum melds together a combination of psychological exercises and outdoor adventures, aimed at empowering participants to take greater responsibility for their own lives and (ultimately) their organizations. At the heart of the personal growth approach is Abraham Maslow's idea of finding what your trueself is and wants - and perhaps in that process discovering your ability to lead.

"Personal growth approaches distinguish themselves through an emphasis on helping individuals get in touch with their innermost desires, values, and sense of personal power," says Conger. They rely largely on the methods of personal mastery, peer and trainer feedback, empowerment, and reflection, ones that focus primarily on the emotions and psyche. In contrast, other training approaches rely more on the mind and behavioral skills.

Personal growth courses range from "wilderness adventures" like Outward Bound to personal effectiveness courses like Dr. Stephen Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

This series of articles aims to present an overview of some of these courses, the experiences of those who have completed them, and the business results which can be attributed to attending these courses.

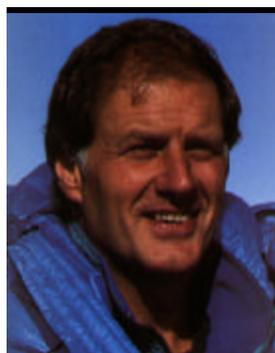
**I** had no idea it would be this tough. Today they tried to teach us basic skills in rock climbing. Still, I didn't do too bad for a first timer - I made it to the top. Now the day is almost over, I'm still in one piece, and I'm looking forward to a nice warm bath to soothe these aching muscles.

"But the facilitator says we have to complete one more exercise before we call it a day. Okay, let's get it over with. What do we have to do? What?!

You want us to lower a stretcher, with one of our colleagues in it, down that rock face?! But-but-how?"

A participant is describing a typical first day at One Step Beyond's **"TEAMPOWER!"** experiential seminar. He and others in his group found themselves outdoors, facing a series of problems that they had to solve by working together. Like the other participants, he will find that, despite his initial reservations, he can tackle some of these problems well.

"Amazingly, people who've never done this before have found that they can do it and do it well," says John Amatt, founder of **One Step Beyond (OSB) WorldWide**, a company specializing in motivational presentations and seminars. "That's what people bring back from these experiential courses," he continues, "the realization that if you want to do something, and you're willing to approach



**"Achievement is the constant process of going 'one step beyond' your previous experience." - John Amatt, founder, One Step Beyond**

it in the correct way and develop the resources required to solve the task, then there is nothing you cannot do in your life." Other professionals who've attended Amatt's presentations agree. Says one, "Even if I have not climbed Mount Everest, I know that I have been scaling the heights of life and trying to have the courage to overcome the avalanches I've encountered." Still another says, "It became clear to me that despite drawbacks you have to keep your final goal in mind and try to learn from failures."

Amatt, 49, a former school teacher and professional mountain guide, organized Canada's first successful expedition to climb Everest in 1983. He founded OSB WorldWide shortly after, and he has translated his climbing experience and training into a series of seminars designed to help people conquer their own "mountains." Amatt uses the "Adventure Attitude" which follows to inspire and motivate his audiences:

- A** - Achieve internally, success is self-satisfaction;
- D** - Dream big and dream often, imagine the ultimate;
- V** - Value your values; be true to yourself;
- E** - Excel under pressure, cultivate courage;
- N** - Never say die, endure endlessly;
- T** - Trust others, be great in a group;
- U** - Understand your commitment, give it your all;
- R** - Risk-take carefully, plan meticulously.
- E** - Exude energy, triumph relentlessly.

Bill Stewart, a vice-president at Campbell's FoodService in Canada, attributes the packaged food manufacturer's success at team development to the **"TEAMPOWER!"** seminar managers underwent last year. Says Stewart, "Of the 35 managers who attended, 19 had been with Campbell's for less than a year. We really needed to come together and develop a strong sense of trust and teamwork." Stewart believes the experiential seminar was effective because it was tied very closely to business objectives. "To integrate the outdoor experience into the business

environment," he says, "we would immediately regroup after each activity and relate it to the business setting. We asked people what specifically they planned to do to apply the learning they obtained." He says that they have since then measured participants' performance against the goals that were established as a result of the outdoor experience and found that participants have met those goals. Stewart says that the experiential seminar develops the "softer" skills of interpersonal relationships. He adds, "The only way we'll succeed is if we can tap the knowledge and expertise of everyone on the team. When you're up there on a mountain, in a pair of shorts, titles and hierarchy disappear. And we think that's critical for our success, too." Juergen Baumhoff, general manager of Holiday Inn Golden Mile in Hong Kong, was so inspired after attending "Climbing Your Own Everest" - in which Amatt expounds on teamwork, preparation, commitment, adapting to changing environments, setting goals, and the role of a positive attitude set against the struggle to reach the top of the mountain-that he initiated "A Step Beyond", an in-house program.

"At an executive committee meeting held in August 1993," says Sharon Ballack, director of public relations and advertising at the hotel, "we agreed on the hotel's vision - to become the number-one business hotel in the midmarket in Hong Kong by the end of 1996. During the next three years, A Step Beyond, officially launched last January, will play a key role in ensuring that this vision is realized."

Since then, positive guest feedback has increased tremendously, evident not only in an increase in complimentary letters from guests but also by the hotel's Guest Information Service score. (A low score indicates a high guest rating.) The hotel's 1.86 rating in January has increased to 1.63 in April.

Ballack admits that it is difficult to attribute changes in employee performance to the in-house program alone.

"The results we have achieved are due to our in-house TQM program and A Step Beyond," she says. "Though

'Climbing Your Own Everest' provided us with insights which have been shared with everyone and are being used on a daily basis, merely attending the presentation is not enough. We are continuing with our employee training and communication programs." After 70 Ernst & Young (HK) executives attended "Climbing Your Own Everest" last year, training principal David Bruce concludes, "This type of course may not be directly relevant to the individual's job responsibilities, but it can be thought-provoking. I suggest that this presentation, though one of the more imaginative types of training, be just one of a varied mix."

He also notes the difficulty in attributing business results to attending the presentation. "Some employees were very inspired by it, while others didn't see any real benefits related to their jobs. The return for the time spent is hard to measure."

Results that managers can attribute from attending personal growth seminars may be intangible, says Dr. Stephanie Jones, Academic Editor of *World Executive's Digest*, but they are real. These benefits include: a perception that

the company cares enough about each employee's personal development to send them on a course which is not business-skill based, and improvements



At a "TEAMPOWER! seminar, participants find themselves outdoors, facing a series of problems that they solve by working together.

in the level of employee commitment and morale. "Companies which encourage their employees to analyze their career directions and personal relationships are taking a risk," Dr. Jones admits, "but nine times out of ten it pays off in the form of these benefits."

Sophia Zilo, senior manager for public relations at Ernst & Young, assesses the presentation's impact: "The seminar did offer a model for leadership which can enhance the development of a professional, but it did not provide a step-by-step agenda for that change." She notes, "Lasting change is very much dependent on the inspirational value gained by each participant."

In reply, Amatt says, "We use adventure as a metaphor for risktaking. Personal growth courses encourage people to take the first step and learn the lessons of their experiences, but they are not in themselves the solution."

Amatt concludes, "What we are trying to do is to help other people who are fearful of the unknown to make the step forward and meet the challenge, and in the process they may-and I don't say they will - discover potential within themselves."

### For More Information...

One Step Beyond WorldWide offers its seminars to organizations as a part of their training programs for employees. Keynote Programs featuring John Amatt run from 1 to 3 hrs. Experiential Seminars (which OSB may bring to Asia soon) last up to five days.

For further program and price information, please contact:

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