



## LEADERCAST

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#### Executive Summary

I want to take you on a trip up Mount Everest on the first American Women's Expedition.

You're going to spend 10 days hiking to base camp. There you spend a few days to acclimate to the altitude. Then you hike to Camp One. Then you hike back to Base Camp. Then you hike to Camp Two. It is then back to Base Camp again for a few days. You have to keep coming back to Base Camp to eat, drink, hydrate, and get some sleep. It is not only hard physically, but also psychologically. It is frustrating because you are spending a lot of time going backwards, but you're still making progress—you're helping your body acclimatize. Sometimes you have to go backwards to get to the place you want to be.

Once you leave Base Camp, there are ice chunks the size of school buses. They move at a rate of four feet each day. You are in constant danger of being crushed. There are also huge ice crevices. You have to span the crevices with ladders. It is a scary part of the mountain. One of the best lessons I learned is that fear is a normal human emotion; complacency is what will kill you. You have to be able to react to the environment around you.

Mount Everest is an ever-changing environment. The peak of Mount Everest could change at any time. The storm is always temporary. When you're in the middle of a storm you have to keep your bearings because the clouds will clear up. You have to take action based on the situation, not on a plan that you wrote a long time ago. Focus more on executing and less on planning.

On the way up to High Camp, we were at 26,000 feet. This is called the "death zone." At 26,000 feet, your body is slowly dying. You are taking 5 to 10 breaths for every step. After we made it to High Camp, we headed to the summit at 10:30 pm. We needed to be at 29,300 feet to reach the summit. I got overwhelmed as I did the math of how long it would take to get there by taking a step, 5 to 10 breaths, another step, and so on. I took the strategy of breaking it down into smaller increments. I picked out a rock a few hundred feet in front of me and focused on making it to the rock. Then I would find another goal.

We climbed through the entire night that way. By 6:30 am, we made it to the South Summit, but storm clouds started to come in. We had to make a hard call. We decided to turn around and go back. Turning around and walking away is harder than making it to the summit. You have to make hard calls when the circumstances are less than perfect. It doesn't matter how much you have put into something; sometimes you have to cut your losses and go back. Mount Everest will always be there.

The next day we started going back to Base Camp. It's easy to think when you're headed back down the mountain that the risk is lessened. We had gone through the section with the moving ice chunks successfully seven times. The eighth time was different. A huge ice avalanche was coming crashing down. The whole ice crumble came to a stop about four yards away from me.

I went back last spring to attempt to reach the summit. At the High Camp, a storm started to come in again. The wind was insane – we got a foot of snow that night. We met climbers turning around and coming back down.

Visibility was horrible. It was a 10,000 foot drop on one side and an 8,000 foot drop on the other side. I realized you don't have to have total clarity to put one foot ahead of the other.

On May 24, 2010, I summited Mount Everest. I am one of about a dozen people to complete the Adventure Grand Slam. The Summit wasn't all that cool. Being on the Summit doesn't change your life. It's about the lessons you learned on the way. The people who get to the top aren't any better than those who don't make it.

There are always going to be more mountains to climb. You have to be willing to push yourself. You have to be willing to weather the storms. You can't be afraid of risk. Use those lessons you learned to be even better.

**ACTION ITEMS:**

- ❖ What challenge are you facing that is daunting? Can you break it into smaller increments? Like Alison, take a step and breathe. Then take another step and breathe.
- ❖ As a leader, sometimes you have to cut your losses and make the hard call. Is there a leadership decision you have avoided making? Take the courageous step. Make the tough call.