

If you only have a minute: Rooted and Unwavering is all about connecting deeply with ourselves, others and our service in the world. What combination of connectedness with ourselves and others does it take to reach the summit of Mt. Everest?

Mount Everest: A Place for Vision, not Self-Doubt

By Esther Groves and Hylke Faber

Risk death. Eat bad food. Feel sick and dehydrated. Sleep in a tent and wear the same clothes for weeks. Wake up blind in one eye. And keep climbing a treacherous mountain for two months. Erwin Visser wouldn't trade the experience of summiting Mt. Everest for anything in the world.

Like the climb itself, Erwin's journey started one step at a time. Born in the Netherlands, Erwin learned an important lesson from his father who tolerated a low-level job and died a month after he retired without ever doing the things he dreamed of. "If you don't do it now, you don't know if you'll get a second chance," he says.

In his 20's, Erwin found a passion for climbing the mountains of Europe. A presentation by the first Dutch climber ever to summit Mt. Everest fascinated him but he never thought he'd be capable of doing it himself. "It was like flying to the moon for me," he remembers.

Then, he moved to Microsoft's headquarters in Redmond where Mt. Rainier reawakened his love of climbing. For ten summers, he climbed Rainier, sometimes with his kids. Erwin, now a General Manager at Microsoft, didn't have Mt. Everest in his sights until he met people who had completed the climb. He started to piece together what it would take to do it himself.

"You hear about the importance of mentorship and coaching," he reminds us. "You cannot be converted to what you can't see. But, if I have the practical knowledge and the self-confidence to do ABC, I have a

"If I have the practical knowledge and the self-confidence to do ABC, I have a chance to reach my goal." - Erwin Visser

chance to reach my goal." When he discovered that a friend also had Everest on his menu, they began training together, and the plan to summit accelerated.

Erwin's climb took 60 days and started at 17,000 feet in base camp in Nepal. Oxygen was 50% of what he had at home. His body immediately started deteriorating, impacting his ability to digest food; his cognitive power went down; he felt lethargic and out of breath. And he had a lot of time to himself for reflection. "You have to be grounded in your ability to master technical difficulties. "You have to always believe you can do it," he says. "Any self-doubt is a negative spin and when you start hesitating, the technical parts can become very dangerous."

One adversity he encountered was the Khumbu Ice Fall, a glacial stream of gigantic ice blocks moving 3 feet per day. The trip takes 10 hours to ascend and 5-6 hours to descend. Before the summit, you have

to cross Khumbu six times. Shockingly, three sherpas recently died when ice fell on them. “Not even the sherpas, who know the ice fall the best, have a guarantee for their own safety,” he points out. “You really cannot look up and think, oh, man, this ice could fall down on me. The moment you decide to go through it, you have to trust that you’re going to have a certain level of luck. And don’t question your decision when you’re on the ice because you have no choice at that moment.”

“Another thing is the reflection around the journey versus the goal,” he recalls. I wanted to go to the summit, but my family reminded me it was about the experience. You have to enjoy your day. I became more and more determined that I wanted to reach the summit. You have to build this passion. If you don’t care enough about the outcome, why continue to struggle day after day?” On the other hand, people can get overly focused on the goal and start taking overly large risks. “This year was the deadly season on Everest - 17 casualties in the climbing season,” he remembers. “Very unfortunately, one of those casualties was somebody in our team, which was like a traumatic experience to me and my teammates as somebody [we were] closely connected with for seven, eight weeks.”

Mountains have a way of putting your entire life in perspective. Bad decisions and mistakes can be a life-or-death situation. But most challenges in life, like speaking in front of an audience, confronting a team member, or learning to swim, are not life-threatening. “You become more comfortable in jumping into the rest of your life,” Erwin reminds us, “because you realize the impact of bad decisions is never at that level. It’s...something you can probably manage.”

“I wanted to be role model for my kids. I hope they take the same growth mindset.” -Erwin Visser

What would happen if you trusted yourself a bit more today to do what you deep down really want to do?

