



I've learned about building world class teams the hard way: by winning the world's toughest adventure races. From the leech-infested jungles of Borneo to the towering peaks of Tibet, my teams have run, paddled, mountain biked, climbed, and whitewater rafted for up to ten *non-stop* days and nights, with no shelter, no warm food, and no reprieve from the competitors nipping at our blister-covered heels. If just one racer from our 4-person team quits, we are all disqualified. By necessity, the journey to the unimaginably distant finish line becomes less about athletic skill than about great leadership and our ability to inspire our tattered teammates.

So how do we as leaders keep a team moving forward toward those audacious goals with one heart and one mind? Here are a few essential lessons that I've learned from the toughest teams on Earth:

Be Ruled by the Hope of Success Versus the Fear of Failure

Are you consistently doing what it takes to "win" versus simply "not lose"? Fortune favors the bold. Great leaders are shattering the norm, changing the game, and doing things that have never been done. They are courageous, not only in terms of innovation, but in terms of perseverance: taking step after step, day after day, relentlessly pursuing excellence. We won many a race not only by "slowing down less" than the other teams, but by coming up with some game-changing solutions. In the Borneo Eco-Challenge, we took the lead by turning a proposed 'hiking leg' of the race into a swimming leg by jumping into the whitewater rapids and swimming for several hours downriver (just yards from the hiking trail). Much of it in the dark. It was extremely risky, but also cutting-edge cunning. We never looked back, and lead the race all the way from there to the finish line.

Offer a tow line, but most importantly, *take one*:

Leave your ego (but not your confidence!) at the starting line. You happily offer your strength to your teammates when they need it, but do you also offer your weaknesses? On our team, every racer has 'tow lines', made from thin bungee cords, hanging from the back of our packs. If we are feeling strong, we offer it to a struggling teammate. If we are having a low moment, we grab a tow line from someone stronger and get lightly pulled along until we recover. The goal? To "suffer equally," as my favorite team captain so eloquently put it. You'll get farther, faster, if you do. I believe that you have not used all of your strength as a leader until you have accepted help from your teammates. Let's face it – it's tough to do sometimes. But people are thrilled

when they have a chance to help you, and you create a connection and a bond every time you allow them to!

Always Act Like a Team --It's Far More Important than Feeling Like One

We're not always going to feel warm and mushy toward one another. We're human! But no matter how we feel, we're never allowed a day off from being the leader or teammate that people need us to be. So fake it until the good feelings come back. During the World Championships in Ecuador, my team had a major disagreement about our navigation. In fact, we didn't speak for hours. But as we approached the media crews on our exit from that hiking leg, our team captain said something that changed the game for us..... "If you want to *become* the World Champions, you need to *act* like World Champions." And I'm telling you, we could have won an Academy Award for that performance--congratulating one another on a job well done, getting food for one another, high fives and hugs all around. It was all for the cameras, of course, but guess what happened? By the time we got new gear and moved on, we were all genuinely happy together as a team. The argument never resurfaced. We were too busy winning.

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