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Embracing the Trough

- Looking for opportunities – not excuses

This article is about how we can learn about ourselves and our company by how we handle not the peaks, but the lows.

By Warren Macdonald

Why is it some companies seem to thrive during tough times while others fall by the wayside? Why is it that we as human beings tend to always opt for the easiest path, the path of least resistance, when it is a widely accepted observation that “we are rewarded in direct proportion to the effort we have made?”

I recently had the pleasure of speaking to the entire staff (over 2 separate evenings) of Edmonton-based Alberta Envirofuels Inc. I got to share my own story of overcoming incredible adversity (I lost both my legs above the knees in a hiking accident) with a group of people who together had faced the uncertainty and harsh reality of potentially losing

their jobs and careers. Here was a company that only a few years ago faced the daunting task of having to totally revamp their production plant in order to produce a new product. Studies had shown that the MTBE (a gasoline blending component that reduces tail pipe and evaporative emissions) they'd been producing was not quite as environmentally friendly as initial research had determined. The decision to revamp the entire plant to produce a safer additive, Isooctane, could not have been an easy one. A lesser company may have been tempted to give in and concentrate their efforts elsewhere.

All companies have a vision statement, or a statement of company values. Alberta

Envirofuels have a “Catalyst for Teamwork” consisting of five goals.

- Challenge
- Commit
- Listen learn and teach
- Choose your attitude
- Capture the spirit

Without going into all five, let's look at the first goal: Challenge.

We already know that when we are challenged we are provided with an opportunity. We can also go into denial and pretend the challenge isn't there. When we choose to accept the challenge, what we have done is we've chosen to take ACTION. When we take action, a mental shift takes place. We are no longer an observer. When we choose to take action we automatically become DOERS; we do

what needs to be done. We live in the present with our energy focussed in the present, not in an as-yet-undecided future all too often clouded in fear. By responding to only one of their Catalyst for Teamwork goals, the company are already in a better position to handle difficult situations that come their way.

I also discovered a stronger than usual culture of participation and responsibility, two key indicators of a committed team. Staff turnover is low (many employees have been with the company

since its inception) which tells me management are well versed in the benefits of maintaining morale and keeping staff motivated. All too often we see little importance placed upon our most valuable assets, our human resources. Little attention seems to be paid to the fact that it takes time and money to train new staff, when a little can go a long way in encouraging and empowering the people we already have.

Recognizing also that work, much like our personal lives, rarely provides us with a nice

comfortable ride, successful companies accept the reality that doing business is more akin to a rollercoaster ride than a merry-go-round, and that on the journey whilst they may experience many “peaks,” there must also be troughs to endure. It’s what we learn when we accept the reality of being “in the trough”, and begin looking for opportunities rather than excuses, that sets our course back towards the “peak” and defines who we are not just as human beings, but who we are as a company.

Warren Macdonald is an Adventurer/ Professional Speaker based out of Vancouver BC. His first book “A Test of Will” is a gripping account of his accident and triumphant return to the mountains. In March 2003 he became the first double above-knee amputee to summit Africa’s tallest peak, Mt Kilimanjaro. For information on how Warren can help you and your team change the way you see the world, please visit us at www.warren-macdonald.com or call 1 888 678 4428.