



Teambuilding to Team Triumph!

A Case Study-The AAA Everest Expedition 2001.



The Army Alpine Association (AAA) is the body that supports mountaineering for all the Australian armed services and successfully climbed Mt Everest via the North side in May 2001.

The idea for the expedition to Everest was first mooted in 1993 and training started in earnest in 1997 with an expedition to Dhaulagiri, which is the 7th highest mountain in the world. The 1997 expedition was the first time the AAA had decided to use a formal approach to team development. This new approach came from the past experience of high altitude expeditions being extremely taxing on relationships amongst the team members.

One of the civilian members of this team was Bob Killip, who applied his knowledge and experience of working with corporate teams to the challenges of high altitude mountaineering. Bob had used a number of different psychometric tools over the years with his company Outdoor Insights and felt the *Team Management Systems (TMS)* suite of products were the best tool to act as a foundation on which to base formal team development.

Bob noted that this time spent in formal teambuilding certainly came into its own on the mountain. Many difficult situations were avoided by individuals reflecting on what they had learnt about the diversity of the group and how best to work with different individuals to avoid conflict. This was the first successful Australian ascent of Dhaulagiri with three members of the team summiting.

In March 2001, the AAA team finally left for Everest, with Bob Killip the only civilian climbing member appointed as Expedition Manager. By this time the team had a number of successful expeditions to their credit and were accustomed to facilitated discussions to aid their team development. On arrival in Nepal the team spent some structured training time reviewing their individual *TMS Profiles-TMP* and also the *Team Management System-QO2* profile, which looks at how individuals focus on either opportunities or obstacles in their life!

The expedition team were heading out next day for a trek to help bond the team and start the acclimatisation process. Tragically a freak ice avalanche killed three members of the trekking party who had gone on ahead. They lost the expedition documentary maker, his partner and her daughter who were accompanying him just for the trek.

The accident shattered the expedition team members, with Bob reflecting that: -
"The formal afternoon the expedition spent using TMP and QO2 certainly helped the team understand how different people coped with the situation and what support they might need. Extroverts and introverts certainly went to their extremes sometimes! Just knowing more about each other made a huge difference."

Finally after a huge amount of support from the Governor General, the Chief of Army, Sponsors and the Australian people the team members decided the expedition should continue and headed off to Tibet to begin climbing the mountain.

On Everest, Bob noted that the use of these powerful psychometric tools provided a valuable starting point for discussions regarding personal and team development. Bob recalls: -

"There was one evening when the expedition was holding a meeting to try and fix a logistical block on the mountain. The tension was rising as some members just wanted to decide on a solution and get on with it. Luckily our work on the understanding of individual preferences was mentioned, and we made our selves' search for better quality solutions from sharing more information. The best solution in the end came from one of our non-climbing support team!"

Eventually after spending nine arduous weeks on Everest the expedition was successful in getting an Australian climber and two Nepalese Sherpas to the summit before extreme weather forced a retreat of the team from the mountain.

Bob Killip believes: - "The time spent using the Team Management System profiles and facilitating the teambuilding process certainly made a very positive difference to the outcome of the expedition. We used our strengths and made sure we knew about our weakness so they did not sneak up and get us because of poor planning. Most importantly, we came back from Everest as friends after spending nearly three months together sharing triumph and tragedy."

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