

TEXTILE SERVICES

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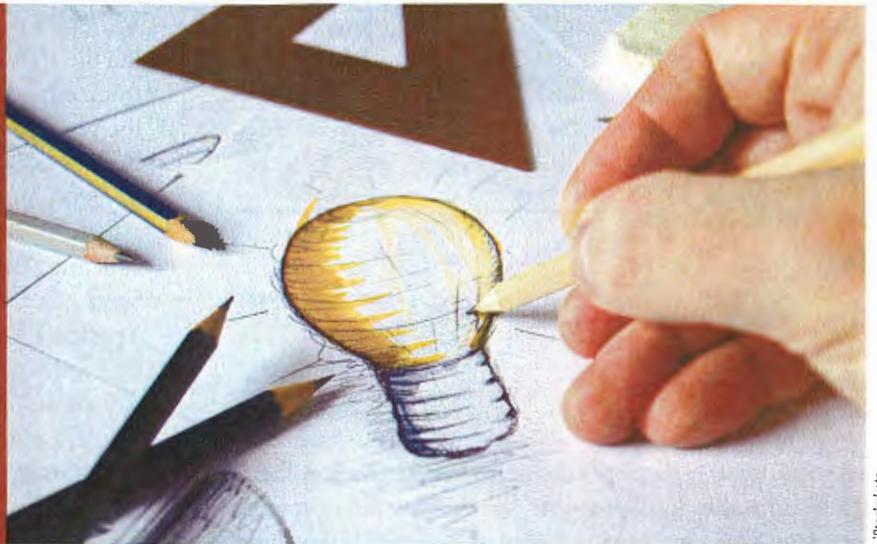
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WILDMAN UNIFORM
Measured Management

Go Live With the Whales

Get new ideas and test your management skills by leaving your comfort zone—literally!



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By Bruce Hodes

Climb Mount Rainier.
Organize an expedition to the North Pole.
Build a house for Haitian refugees living in New Orleans.

Have a big adventure.

It is not an option or a good idea. It's a must. Your physical, mental and spiritual well-being is critical to growing your business. The message here is that getting away—physically and mentally—is good for you and good for your business. Growing a business is not for sissies. In fact, growing and developing an organization is like competing in the “Business Olympics”: it's the ultimate challenge, and it attracts the best of the best. If you understand this point and are actively getting away in your life, rock on. But, if you are not getting away, read on. You might learn a few things.

Now, by the term “getting away,” I am not talking about just a vacation. Vacations are good. I recommend them. But to achieve the experience I'm talking about, you must completely remove yourself from familiar surroundings and land in genuinely unfamiliar territory. The goal is to learn and adapt, not just rest and relax.

Three personal examples of this type of “getting away” come to mind: a trip I took to the

Caribbean on a sailing yacht, a 12-day hiking trip and 10-day hiking/biking/rafting expedition through the lakes and mountains of Patagonia, an area located in the southern region of Chile and Argentina. These are examples of total immersion adventures.

What does not fit this category of experience is the week I spent at a resort in the American Virgin Islands for my 25th wedding anniversary, or the time I spent hiking in the Cascades during summer vacation. Those were fun, relaxing and rejuvenating experiences, but they were designed to be comfortable and real vacations.

BEING UNCOMFORTABLE

The Patagonian adventure took me out of my comfort zone, and this concept is the essence of “getting away.” We hiked for days, doing 8-to 10-mile hikes that took between seven and nine hours each. This challenged my head and my body. At the beginning of the trip, I saw myself as being “in shape” and a good hiker. Yikes! It is all so relative. Given the group I was in, I was at the back of the line. Me? Bruce? I tripped. I fell. I was the last to arrive. Here, I was not the star. When I returned home, I found that I was more compassionate to my clients who are uncomfortable and challenged by the work we do together.

I find that when my own saw gets dull, getting away—really getting away—has been a way to sharpen and refocus. New ideas and vistas open up in the process of truly leaving my routine behind. New perspectives appear that bless me with fresh creativity and vigor.

YOU'RE NOT THE EXPERT ANYMORE

I am a consultant, after all, and I am seen as an expert. While in Puntas Arenas (in Southern Chile), I traveled with a group mostly composed of people from the U.S. West Coast, predominantly Seattle and Alaska. These guys were outdoor enthusiasts and experienced hikers and campers. For sure, I was the Rip Van Winkle of the trip. It had been 30 years since I'd last slept in a tent and 20 since I'd curled up in a sleeping bag. The last time I'd hiked was July of the previous year, and this trip was in the middle of February.

During the hike, I learned that headlamps are useful camping equipment. There are such things as "stuff sacks," which are high-tech nylon bags with straps that compress your sleeping bag—and which require an advanced degree, in my opinion, to use. There were more lessons: wearing cotton can give you hypothermia in the damp or cold rain; wearing synthetics can save your life.

It was challenging to see that there are areas of life in which I am not an expert. There was nothing theoretical about this experience. It was action-in-the-moment. I was dependent on others to help me—once, guides had to physically assist me down from a live volcano. I learned to push aside my ego and accept the help. I brought that powerful experience home with me.

DEALING WITH STRANGERS

Another profound benefit of getting away is interacting with people with whom you wouldn't typically have contact. This is different from vacations where you hang out with folks from similar socioeconomic and educational backgrounds.

On the Patagonian expedition, there was diversity among my group. There were a bunch of burly men from Alaska who had all been friends for more than 20 years. One worked the North Slope of Alaska. He was outdoor-knowledgeable and tough. From what I could see, he slept with polar bears. I felt very sorry for those bears. Gertrude was from New York. Single and aloof, she was a good hiker who

wanted to be an artist. She had to have come from money. Other members of our group were Richard, the photographer; Big Trevor, the stoic; and Martin, our ever-vigilant, incredibly knowledgeable and skillful mountain guide.

While on the Caribbean sailing adventure I lived with people I didn't know beforehand; this gave me insights into how I deal with strangers. I noticed the parameters and barriers that I put up when it comes to people I don't know. It was easier for me to stay distant than to be curious about these strangers.

These are experiences I brought back to work. Being in a different environment gave me a new perspective on my everyday life. I recognized that there are different people beyond the ones with whom I typically interact. I'm now more appreciative of what I have and of my life as a whole.

ROLLING WITH THE PUNCHES

In Chicago, both at work and in my personal affairs, my life is planned out. It is controlled, or at least that is the illusion.

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I wake up and stumble to make the coffee and feed the dog. Off to exercise and then back to the house. Breakfast, shower and go to the office. I make calls, go to meetings and drive around. Then I come home and run with the dog. I eat dinner with my wife, Leslie, after which comes an hour of work and maybe even focusing on writing. So it goes in different variations day after day.

During the Patagonia trip, a valuable lesson was that there was no controlling things—and certainly not by me. What happened just happened. Forty mile-per-hour winds were routine, but the winds came on some days and not on others. In Patagonia, the most powerful thing to do was choose your reactions to events, not try to control the events themselves. That is an insight worthy of taking into my life. How about yours?

Another example, at the end of February 2010 when I was about to leave Chile an earthquake struck. The Richter scale measured 8.8 for Santiago and its surrounding areas. 562 people died. My tour group was supposed to be headed home but in an instant our flights got canceled. We then had to figure out how the heck we were going to get home. “Where will we spend the night?” We wondered. “Where do we cross back to Argentina?” Read on and you shall see.

The people in my group dealt with being out of control in very different ways. Gertrude became scared, bordering on hysterics, and immediately got on the phone to her sister in the states. Two of the burly boys took it in stride—no big deal. For them, rolling with the punches was the best plan. The third burly boy, however, became frantic, as he was scheduled to go to Europe the next day with his wife. I, being a business executive, found myself absolutely focused. I walked up to the front of the line and asked the attendant what to do.

Luckily Martin, our guide, and REI, the tour company, got us out of Chile and into Buenos Aires, Argentina. This was no small feat, given that all the other tourists trapped in Chile had the same idea. Martin demonstrated being responsible for us and taking that responsibility quite seriously. He and REI worked tirelessly to get us out. They swung into action both from Argentina and the United States, working with the airlines to get us from Bariloche to Buenos Aires, and then beyond. We had partners and felt supported. From a business perspective, the way REI acted in this tumultuous time made me a raving fan.

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I noticed the parameters and barriers that I put up when it comes to people I don't know. It was easier for me to stay distant than to be curious about these strangers.
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INSPIRATION

All roofs are metal in Patagonia. Okay, maybe not all, but there are a lot, and I mean a whole lot, of metal roofs in Southern Patagonia.

During the Patagonia trip, Jonathan, the CEO of a company that makes metal roofs, saw several things his business could be doing. This primarily centered on how his \$250 million company made and attached the roofs. He also discovered that he could sell his company's ideas on the subject to the Chilean and Argentinean metal roof industry. These were illuminating moments that he likely would not have had if he had stayed at his desk in Alabama.

By the way, coffee in Argentina is lousy. They drink weak coffee that is made from instant—no Starbucks or Caribou to be found. There's a business opportunity for someone who's reading this, and that is exactly what I am talking about. By getting away, you get business ideas. Open Starbucks up in Argentina and call it Estrella Pesos. Hey, that was funny—only if you know Spanish, though, and even then not so much. ...

DISCOVERING UNHIDDEN TALENTS

Who knew I can milk cows better than a gaucho? The gauchos were impressed. But then, what does a gaucho know about milking anyway? Gauchos are Argentinean cowboys, and they wear Wyatt Earp hats and serapes. My grip on the cow's udder so impressed these gauchos that they made me Apprentice Gaucho Level Uno. This was the high point of my trip. Getting away can help you discover hidden talents.

SHARPENING THE SAW

To illuminate the point of this article, let's take a classic Steven Covey tale.

We have a woodchopper who is from the southern part of Lithuania. (This made-up tidbit is totally irrelevant). In the story, the lumberjack is sawing away and noticing that he is accomplishing less than he used to. So, like the good Lithuanian lumberjack that he is, he saws harder. However, the harder he saws, the more he dulls the blade. But he is blind to what is happening. This well-intentioned, but rather dull, lumberjack just keeps sawing harder and accomplishing less.

It was a truly 'dullicious' situation (pardon the pun). Does this situation sound familiar?

For businesspeople, working harder and producing less is a common pitfall. What's missing for the lumberjack is the realization that his saw needs to be sharpened in order to keep up his level of productivity. Yet, given how he thinks, there would be no time for sharpening because he is so driven to produce. So he continues to saw, even though he might find himself getting 'board' in the process (sorry, another pun).

I find that when my own saw gets dull, getting away—really getting away—has been a way to sharpen and refocus. New ideas and vistas open up in the process of truly leaving my routine behind. New perspectives appear that bless me with fresh creativity and vigor.

This sounds spiritual and metaphysical, and while I would love to go there because it would make me look like a guru or Gandhi or something (and I love the turban and loincloth look, especially when bare chests are involved), this getting-away mandate isn't complicated. In fact, it's simple: get yourself stimulated.

Go to Antarctica. CEO Noah did this.

Climb Kilimanjaro. That is what CEO Suzie did.

Help Haiti recover. Executive Judy did that.

Rebuild New Orleans. Senior Vice President Thaddeus did that.

Go live with the whales—Bruce wants to do this.

Just make sure that you are awake to the miracle of this planet. It's good for your business, and it is good for you. **TS**

Bruce Hodes and his company, CMI, Oak Park, IL, help companies of all sizes achieve growth by developing executive leadership teams, business leaders and executives into powerful performers. Contact him at bhodes@cmiteamwork.com, 800.883.7995, www.cmiteamwork.com.

ROI Analysis, cont.

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For those companies with debt financing, the DuPont model can be expanded even further to provide an analysis of return on equity. This adds an element of financial leverage to the equation sometimes called the equity multiplier.

The expanded equation would look like this:

$$\text{Profit Margin} \times \text{Asset Turnover} \times \text{Financial Leverage}$$

The ratio for financial leverage is Average Assets divided by Average Stockholders' Equity. It measures the rate of return to stockholders and shows how a company uses debt to finance its assets. This is important for companies that rely on outside financing to know the effects that debt has on the equation. A higher equity multiplier means the company has taken on more debt, which does boost the return, but also increases the risk of not being able to fulfill creditor obligations.

TRUST, BUT QUANTIFY

Return on Investment analysis can be a powerful tool to measure a company's performance. For an ROI analysis to be successful, take the time to gather the right information and assess each component using a valid benchmark. Recognize the importance of trends. One year's data is almost meaningless, whereas three years is the recommended minimum. It's also helpful to use industry comparisons. For example, there are industry statistics published for the textile services business broken down by total assets, type of plant, and sales volume, which can be used as a benchmark. One such publication is TRSA's *Industry Performance Report*. It provides a wealth of information along those lines and more, including energy use and productivity per pound of textiles processed. To learn more, go to www.trsa.org/store.

As for tracking ROI, the bottom line is this: Running the numbers based on the models outlined above will quantify the strengths and weaknesses of your business. But always be ready to read between the lines. **TS**

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