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# The 3 P's of Success: The Climb to Peak Achievement

*By Susan Ershler*

Until college, I was an indifferent student with little ambition. I had never even considered climbing a mountain, let alone scaling the Seven Summits — the highest peak on every continent. Yet, by age 35, I was leading a major account sales organization of a Fortune 50 technology firm and beginning a journey that would lead me to an executive level position and the summit of Mount Everest with my husband and mountain guide, Phil.

Along the way, I honed a set of skills that have enabled me to overcome seemingly impossible physical, emotional and career obstacles. The key to my personal transformation is what I call the “3 Ps” — Projection, Preparation and Perseverance.

## **Project**

I don't think it's possible to achieve any worthwhile goal without making an unequivocal commitment to attain it. This begins with a clearly articulated vision. I live by the bywords, “Vision drives activity.”

When I resolved to climb Mount Everest, I started by visualizing myself standing next to Phil on the summit. It was an image I would re-visit every day until it was so real, I could almost feel the icy wind and snow. This helped me prepare my mind and focus my energy.

I took exactly the same approach as a sales leader. For example, I placed placards showing my team's revenue objectives throughout my office, and then visualized our





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CEO congratulating us for exceeding our numbers. This kind of sustained visualization re-calibrates your expectations about what is possible. Eventually, achieving our “unthinkable” numbers became not only possible, but inevitable.

### **Prepare**

When it comes to preparation, “specificity of activity” is essential. You prepare by “doing what you’re going to do.” Ideally, I would have trained for Mount Everest by undertaking a series of progressively more challenging high-altitude climbs. Given my demanding job and leadership responsibilities, I was forced to improvise. For a year, I spent my lunch hours climbing the 35 flights of our Seattle high-rise several times as quickly I could, wearing a weighted backpack.

Of course, action alone is not enough. You need a detailed plan that breaks down even the most daunting goal into manageable steps. As a senior sales executive, I helped my team prepare for success by creating activity, territory and account plans that generated \$600 million in annual revenue. For 13 out of 15 years, we exceeded our quotas by 120% to 200%.

### **Persevere**

Perseverance is a process, not an end in itself. In 2001, Phil and I were forced to turn back from the summit of Mount Everest when we were just 1,400 feet from it. After assessing the conditions, Phil turned to me and shouted, “I can’t take you up in this storm. We need to go down.” It was one of the greatest disappointments of my life.

As we began our descent, I noticed that Phil kept losing his footing. He turned and asked me if something was wrong with his eyes. I was shocked to see that his brown eyes had frozen over, turning a sickly purplish hue. If we hadn’t turned around, Phil might have





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lost his vision permanently. We were right to stop when we did. Perseverance in the face of blindness is no virtue.

After another year of training, we returned to Mount Everest and reached the summit. It was a moment I will always treasure; a dream fulfilled. Since then, I've launched my own business as a corporate keynote speaker and workshop leader, sharing my experiences with other executives. But climbing remains a vital and exhilarating part of my life.

The strategies that brought me to the Seven Summits are available to anyone who is ready to commit fully to a cherished dream. Whether your goal is to secure a place in the boardroom or ascend to the top of the world, nothing is ever truly out of reach when you project, prepare and persevere.

*This post is by Susan Ershler, co-author of "Together on Top of the World." For more than 20 years, Ershler has served in leadership positions in some of the nation's largest corporations. She also climbed the highest mountain on each continent, including Mount Everest, with her husband Phil, making them "the first couple in history to climb the Seven Summits." For more information about her work, visit [her website](#).*

