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Taking the Next Turn

Notes on Faith and Making Big Changes

By Libby Wagner, Founder and President

Recently, I had the great fortune to ski in Colorado for the first time. Now I know what all the fuss is about. When you get used to skiing in the Northwest, where the conditions are often wet and the winter season feels mostly like spring skiing (slushy, heavy snow) even when it's not, the prospect of a sunny, crisp day with even a dusting of powder, is pretty heavenly.

I'm a solid "intermediate" skier and my choice is "blue" runs, wide open spaces, tree-lined paths and fresh air. This is an area of my life where I do not fall under the moniker of daredevil. I like being active, outside, and engaged in the magnificent vistas. If I were skiing double black diamond runs, and I was actually still upright, I'd be clenched and focusing on surviving, which is not my idea of a recreational activity. I stick to the blue.

My skiing companion, Freddie, a native of Utah, is a former ski instructor and racer who's delighted approach to just about anything garners enthusiasm wherever she goes.

Lucky me: I had great skiing conditions and someone who was willing to give me some pointers and new skills to try. On day two, with my legs feeling strong but a little wobbly, we headed up for a mid-day run down a beautiful slope at Beaver Creek Resort near Vail. Their tagline is "Not Exactly Roughing It," and I'm guessing this has something to do with the escalators that help you effortlessly glide with your gear almost to the lift line itself. This equals minimal schlepping—my kind of resort!

I had been following Freddie's lead all morning, letting her pick her favorite runs and making our way down the slopes. She suggested that I try to follow her lead exactly, making the turns as she made them, keeping pace with her speed, and concentrating on my body rather than my head. This was good advice! I was having fun, going faster, and really improving my confidence. All I had to focus on was the next turn ahead, the next curve of my skis, the next rounding of the corner. I didn't look all the way to the end, I just followed Freddie, and trusted my skis and my legs. It was great!

At one point, we stopped to take a breath and a look at the gorgeous day. She checked in with me to see how it was going and how I was feeling. "Great!" I said, "Let's go!" She used to teach little kids, so it was easy for her to turn around backwards on some runs and watch me as I came down, offering feedback as we went. This time, we struck out and I followed her, concentrating on the next turn, then the next, then the next. Finally, we reached the bottom of the hill. "Look back up there," she noted, "can you believe you skied that?" I was pretty impressed. It looked steep for my usual run. "That was a black diamond run," she said, "but I knew you could do it!"

Here were the essential elements of this venture:

1. A good teacher or coach. This person is better than you are. They have done it, they've thought about it, and they can teach you new skills so you can be better. They can also give feedback, both positive and constructive, so you can see how to improve while you are improving already.

2. Competence. I've skied since I was twelve years old. I know how to do it, but I don't get to do it that often, and I'm older and stiffer than I used to be . . . that was creating an excuse for limiting my own performance and enjoyment. Bottom line is that I had skills upon which I could build, and your employees or teammates often do, as well.

3. Trust. I trusted Freddie. This made it completely easy for me to follow her and not question what we were doing, where we were going, or whether I could actually do the run. She knew I could because she's a good teacher, and I trusted her to have my best interests in mind, and not to lead me over a cliff or down a mogul face. This allowed me to let go, have faith, and trust my legs and my body. Your

employees will go with you and push to gain better performance *if they trust you first.*

To those of you confirmed daredevils, this is no big deal, but since I'd already made up my mind about what kind of runs I'd do and what sort of skier I was, I probably wouldn't have agreed to do the steeper run beforehand. However, with a good teacher, some decent skill, and a big dose of trust, just about anything was possible! In fact, in our leadership work, sometimes we are trying to inspire others to grow, to step out of what they know as comfortable or safe, and to reach a different potential. If we can get them to focus just the next turn, then the next, they may indeed be skiing those black diamond runs, having fun, gaining confidence and contributing more to the company and the team.

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