



Grit Part 1

Thoughts on leadership
by Karl Pister



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I grew up in the Owens Valley in California. Truly world-class climbing, hiking, and backpacking. To the west of my home town of Bishop are three major peaks, just under 14,000 feet in altitude. To the north of those peaks is a wall of granite called Wheeler Ridge. In the summer, at sunrise, the entire ridge reflects almost a blinding light. It is no wonder that the Sierra was called, by John Muir, 'The Range of Light'.

Just 80 miles northwest of Bishop is Yosemite Valley, with some of the best rock climbing in the world. Central to it's fame is El Capitan, a 3,000 foot, multiple-faced wall of beautiful granite. It has challenged many climbers throughout the decades. It was on one of the climbing routes that the Academy Award winning documentary Free Solo was filmed.



I watched a Netflix documentary called "The Dawn Wall". It was 90 minutes of example after example of the type of accomplishment that focus, dedication, and determination can bring. That rock wall, one of the faces of El Capitan, which catches the first light as it enters the Valley, had never been successfully climbed. The documentary focuses on the renowned climber, Tommy Caldwell, who, after having climbed most of the existing routes on El Cap successfully, decided it wasn't enough for him. I won't be a spoiler with the details, but it focused me on some questions I wanted to pass along:

When is the last time you were in "the flow"?

Now what is "flow"? The author, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, in his book by the same title ("Flow, The Psychology of Optimum Experience, is on my lifetime top-ten book list), calls it "the psychology of optimum experience". To make it simple, reflect on a time that you were in an activity that was so important, interesting, essential, or enjoyable, that time collapsed and you had no sense of the clock.



That is flow. Caldwell, the climber, notes that there were some parts of the climb where "looking back, there was 50 feet that I couldn't remember going over". Why? The focus of the moment required so much concentration that nothing else mattered. Flow brings an energy that is practically self-sustaining.

Why is that important for leadership? Leaders are asked to see the big picture. A necessary perspective. However, creativity and innovation require "flow" moments... true thinking exercises that few leaders are able to have due to their schedules. Even more importantly, as the author and leadership expert John Maxwell said just this morning on an international broadcast, "few people follow anyone that is on autopilot". Flow inspires an energy that kicks people out of autopilot into the real action.

When is the last time you copiously prepared for an event or situation?



Caldwell spent months, even years, pouring over photographs of the Dawn Wall. He spent weeks dangling from ropes carefully inspecting the details of the wall, piecing together what would be the most successful climbing routes.

All right...I can hear you saying *"that's great, Karl, but he was a sponsored, professional climber who could take his time for his little hobby and while this is a nice story, how does it apply to executive medical leadership"!!?!?!?*

This is how it applies:

- People follow leaders that are competent, passionate, and prepared. When you live your life putting out fires, it compromises those three characteristics. You don't have time to prepare, which puts competency on thin ice and it is impossible to sustain passion in areas in which you are not competent.



- Two great principles:
 - Malcolm Gladwell's point, in his book *Outliers*, speaks to the 10,000 hour rule. That amount of hours is what some say is needed to be masterful at any enterprise.
 - Zig Ziglar, one of the founding fathers of the psychology of sales, noted that one hour of study per day for five years will qualify a person as an expert in the field.

Whether 10,000 hours or five years of study, you get the picture. You cannot not prepare, and, as I have noted before, you can't lead without being a learner





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