

Teamwork

Definition

Individual commitment to a group effort.

Story

Perhaps the greatest tragedy in the history of mountaineering happened on August 1, 2008. On the mountain in Pakistan known as K2, 11 climbers perished while trying to reach the summit of the world's most dangerous mountain.

Pakistan's K2 is the world's second tallest mountain and the most dangerous. On the border that separates Pakistan and China, K2 rises 13,179 feet from base to peak, which equals the height of 23 King and Queen Towers in Atlanta. Though Everest is taller by nearly 800 feet, a journey from foot to peak is actually greater. While Everest has a fatality rate of approximately 5% for year-round climbs, K2 has a fatality rate of about 25%, meaning that one out of every four climbers have died. Before 1990, it killed 41 percent of the climbers who tried it.

In August of 2008, the worst single accident in the history of K2 occurred when an enormous ridge of ice fell during an avalanche. The avalanche severed the ropes along the route and stranded climbers in the "death zone," above 26,250 feet, where there isn't enough oxygen for humans to breathe. Many deaths in high-altitude mountaineering have been caused by the effects of the death zone, due to the loss of vital functions or wrong decisions made under stress and physical weakening. In the death zone, lack of oxygen causes deterioration of bodily functions, loss of consciousness, and death.

This climb was not only the date of the greatest tragedy in mountaineering history; it also illustrates the consequences of bad teamwork. The most important element in climbing a peak like K2 is the fixed ropes. According to witnesses, on the morning when the summit climb began, the climbers noticed that the fixed ropes had been planted where they were not needed. They also discovered that a team member had only brought half of the amount of rope needed. As a result, there was no rope at the most dangerous part of the climb. This caused a dangerous delay in the schedule.

Although a giant piece of ice falling from the mountain and destroying the ropes was completely out of the climbers' control, the other problems could have been avoided if each individual team member had done their part. On this particular day, poor teamwork contributed to the greatest disaster in mountaineering history.

Quotes

“None of us is as smart as all of us.” *Ken Blanchard*

“The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team.” *Phil Jackson*

Interaction

1. What is essential for a team to be successful?
2. What is your role on this team and why is it important to the overall success?
3. Show the importance of teamwork by contrasting the effort required in cutting a single cord rope vs. a multiple cord rope. (Items needed: scissors, single cord rope, threefold cord rope)

Main Idea

Teamwork is an individual commitment to a group effort. You must trust the coaches in their assessment of your role for this team, commit yourself to working with your teammates in achieving the stated goals, while competing against your teammates in preserving your position or winning it.

Take Away

None of us is as GOOD as ALL OF US. We are better together.