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TECHNOLOGY

Productivity in Practice: Business Sherpa

To say that John McQuaig has conquered mountains is not just reusing a tired metaphor. When the CPA and certified management consultant (CMC) from Wenatchee, Washington, steps out of his office onto a deck over the Columbia River, the Cascade Mountains and colors of autumn beckon him.

Dec. 01, 2005

To say that John McQuaig has conquered mountains is not just reusing a tired metaphor. When the CPA and certified management consultant (CMC) from Wenatchee, Washington, steps out of his office onto a deck over the Columbia River, the Cascade Mountains and colors of autumn beckon him. So when he is not advising his business clients on their finances, taxes and business strategies, you're more likely to find him bicycling with his wife and children, or perhaps in any corner of the world literally climbing a mountain. And we're talking about the big ones.

He has scaled Africa's Kilimanjaro (19,336 ft.) and Kala Pattar in Nepal (18,200 ft.), from which you can see Mount Everest. A little closer to home, he has frequently climbed Washington's Rainier and Baker, two mountains that as a youth helped instill in him a love of nature and a drive to conquer goals.

This personal drive has been obvious to those around him throughout his life: from when he helped thin apple orchards as a

Name:

John D. McQuaig, CPA, CMC

Firm

youth to running a successful painting business as a teenager to working for a “Big 8” firm in Alaska after college to finally starting a CPA and business consulting practice, McQuaig and Welk, PLLC (www.mcqw.com). The six-person firm is primarily focused on business services for midsize and larger clients, offering business planning, write-up and tax services to a selected client base of businesses with revenues that range from \$1 million to more than \$200 million. His firm relies heavily upon innovative technologies to help them service their clients, including multi-screen monitors on all workstations, secure client

portals on their web site and wireless capabilities. The firm earned an exceptional score of 430 on The CPA Technology Advisor’s Productivity Survey, a free technology utilization assessment tool located at www.cpatechadvisor.com/productivity.

A major key to his success in business has been applying the goal-setting skills he learned through mountaineering to his professional ambitions and helping his clients utilize the same practices. “Preparing for a mountain climb and preparing a business for success are similar,” according to John. “Both require tackling the peaks, chasms, glaciers and slippery slopes of figurative and literal mountaintops.”

But he says the first step that many businesses fail to perform is setting achievable and measurable goals. “When climbing mountains, the goals are very clear and everyone on the team can easily understand the mission of reaching the summit. It is concrete and tangible, and anything short of reaching that point is a major disappointment.”

Unfortunately, business goals or “summits” are not usually as clear and, he says, the lack of clarity often sends the business’ stakeholders off in many different directions working toward what they assume to be the business’

Name: McQuaig and Welk, PLLC

Location: Wenatchee, Washington

Productivity Score:

430

Website: www.mcqw.com

Practice

Specialty: Consulting to “Swashbuckling Entrepreneurs”

Tallest

Mountains Climbed: Kilimanjaro (19,336 ft.) &

Kala Pattar

(18,200 ft.).

Honorary

Title Given Him by The CPA Technology Advisor:

Business Sherpa

summit. “If business leaders can learn how to set a clear vision, they are more apt to take their business where they want it to go.”

The concept of teamwork is another key factor that can benefit from a mountaineering perspective. “When undertaking a major climb, every person on the team knows that every other person has a specific role to fill. The failure of any one of the team members on the rope with you jeopardizes not only the success of the mission but can also be a life-or-death matter.” While entrepreneurs do not usually face life-or-death consequences, the effect on the success of a business can be just as significant.

That’s why having an experienced mountain guide help lead the way is essential. Sir Edmund Hillary was the first person to reach the top of Mount Everest, John notes, but he could not have done so without the experience of Tenzig Norgay, his Sherpa guide. “Tenzig had lived in the shadow of this fierce, daunting mountain day after day, learning its intricacies, weather patterns and trails. He also understood the human body’s capabilities. Without his knowledge, the summit would not have been reached.”

An experienced guide is just as important to an entrepreneur, according to John, because the risk of mistakes is very high. “Having someone who has been up the trail before can be a tremendous asset, helping not only avoid known pitfalls, but also properly planning and preparing, setting measurable goals, and executing the plans.”

This essentially makes John a Sherpa for entrepreneurs, and he is in the process of writing a book about it. In “Parallel Peaks: Business Insights While Climbing the World’s Highest Mountains,” he will offer advice on building and managing a successful business or department based on hair-raising, inspirational and occasionally humorous anecdotes drawn from his mountaineering adventures.

As if his practice and writing a book haven’t been enough, John was also one of the founding partners of North Cascades National Bank, a \$250 million institution with 100 employees in its seven branches. He continues to serve as chairman of its board and also serves on the boards of several community organizations including his church and the performing arts center he helped build. At the time of this article, John was also auditioning for a role in the community staging of “Beauty and the Beast.” He is involved

in development of residential and commercial properties, and has a 70-acre organic cherry, apple and nectarine orchard.

He obviously isn't the type to "veg out" in front of the television on a Saturday afternoon. And yet, despite his devotion to his family, community and business clients, he still manages to find time for mountain climbing.

The next summit on his list: 22,381-foot Mount Aconcagua, the tallest mountain in the Americas. □

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