

Name:

Instructor:

Course Title:

Date:

Into Thin Air by Jon Krakauer: Book Report

Jon Krakauer documents the fatal events that befall Mount Everest climbers on May 10, 1996, in his book *Into Thin Air*. In the record of the facts, Jon was a journalist sent to cover the commercialization of Everest by the magazine *Outside*. To accomplish the climb, Jon was attached to the Adventure Consultants expedition group headed by Rob Hall. However, the communal nature of mountain climbing enabled Jon to interact with another team such as the Mountain Madness led by Scott Fischer. In the detail of the account, various implications in the tourism industry ranging from effects of the tourism product in the Khumbu region of Nepal to leadership influences in the service sector arose.

In the book, Mount Everest crowns the Khumbu region of Nepal hence tourist firms offer guided mountaineering as the primary product. Tour companies such as the Adventure Consultants and Mountain Madness offered guided expeditions as different people attempted to ascend to the summit of the world. As a result, the increased presence of tourists in the region led to a reorientation of economic activities towards mountaineering. Due to increased commercial activities resulting from mountaineering, the area witnessed a multiplier effect. The multiplier effect is evidenced by the lucrative \$1400-\$2500 paid to experienced climbers in addition to other incomes derived from the expeditions (Krakauer 20). The increased construction of lodges and tea houses reveal the influence of leakage of revenue into the area. Despite the multiplier and leakage effects, the Sherpas experienced poor working conditions as Krakauer notes, "Barefoot

Sherpas straining beneath back-wrenching loads of firewood and kerosene and soda pop (Krakauer 18). Various mountaineering activities have resulted in the economic improvement of Khumbu region.

Apart from the evidence of economic multiplier effect in the Everest mountaineering region of Nepal, the record of events by Jon Krakauer reveals various socio-cultural impacts of tourism in the developing nation of Nepal. To begin with, there has been a shift from traditional subsistence activities towards mountaineering activities. As a result, paradigm shifts from the traditional dressing in robes towards stylish jeans and t-shirts have occurred (Krakauer 20). Furthermore, there have been changes in social activities as more families engage in the viewing of video players. These changes can be largely attributed to the exposure of Sherpas to Western Civilization. Additionally, the area has witnessed a surge in a number of schools, hospitals, hydro-electric power, and footbridges. As a result, there has been a decrease in infant mortality rates and thus higher living standards.

In addition to changes in clothing and leisure activities, tourism has also led to resentment among many traditionalists. The bitterness among conservatives is because they viewed that the highest point in the world was being sold like a commodity to the rich, some of whom have no experience in mountain climbing. As a result, the conservative views indicate that the sports tourism of mountaineering was soiling the sacred mountain. Additionally, the writer notes that there has been increased deforestation to meet demands of wood needed in different mountaineering expeditions. However, the author proceeds to note that a majority of Sherpas do not mind the effects of tourism on their socio-cultural organization as they do not wish to remain as the cultural anthropological relics in a modern world.

The examination of Krakauer's book outlines different measures that made up the corporate culture in the Everest expeditions. Corporate culture is the activities and organization carried out to facilitate the achievement of mission and vision. First, it is important to note that the excursions were expensive and people had to pay more than \$65,000 (Krakauer 11). As a result, most mountaineers sought the sponsorship of corporate entities. Krakauer admits that he was sponsored by the magazine Outside and indicates that there was an IMAX expedition during the period of the disaster. Additionally, the South African expedition was sponsored by a national newspaper in South Africa. Consequently, the organization and composition of various expedition teams were primarily determined by the corporate sponsors.

Apart from the corporate sponsorships for the mountaineering activities, the structures in tour companies that operated guided expeditions revealed various organizational cultures. As several commercial mountain-climbing companies, one corporate culture was that the leading group got paid by the subsequent groups. Furthermore, the companies were organized into different informal departments which consisted of Sherpas, Guides, Clients, and the Leaders. Among these departments, Sherpas were tasked by load-hauling while guides trail blazed and installed safety features such as fixed ropes. Leaders' roles were the coordination of various activities, logistical organization, and ensuring clients had the requisite equipment for ascents on the mountain. Clients tasks were only to take care of themselves and ascend the mountain.

Besides corporate culture, the work by Krakauer illuminates on various management failures in the expeditions. One massive management failure observed from the book is the lack of an established turnaround time and its effective enforcement. Krakauer finds that this failure played a significant role in the death of Scott Fischer as he notes, "...and by 2:00- the designated turnaround time -there was still no sign of Fischer..." (Krakauer 84). Moreover, there was the

minimal management of duties and composition of the different parties. Chief among the failures in management include the participation of inexperienced climbers in the expedition and neglect of responsibilities such as the installation of fixed rope that is vital for safety. The delays in installing fixed ropes resulted in a delay in commencing the ascent to the mountain thus leading to hurried rises and late turnaround times. Furthermore, there was minimal management and coordination among teams of rival companies. As a result, three expeditions ascended the mountain on the fateful day of May 10, 1996, in a haphazard manner (Krakauer 61). The mismanagement of activities carried out by different expeditions resulted in bottlenecks along steps such as Balcony and Hillary which led to further delays. Management failures contributed significantly to the catastrophic events that occurred.

Other failures were witnessed in communication, and one crucial aspect is the limited supply and technical issues with radios that are essential in times of emergency. Evidently, the lack of receivers among different parties inhibited the rescue efforts. Additionally, the vague communication by leaders regarding turnaround times confused people and affected the dispersing of groups thus leading to fatalities. The employment of more and technically capable radios would have easily remedied the communication challenges resulting from inefficient radio infrastructure. The expedition leaders should also have communicated firmly, the strict turnaround times.

One of the most profound failures that led to the disaster occurred in the organization of the expeditions. Among the organization failures, planning was the most evident. There lacked a specific scheduling of groups to ascend the mountain, given the nature of different passes. Furthermore, various companies failed in their organization as there was limited supply of oxygen bottles that were critical for survival at the high altitudes. Additionally, the lack of

contingency plans in case of emergencies resulted in the unnecessary deaths of different parties. One such demise is that of Rob Hall who stayed with a sick client at the peak of the mountain and lack of evacuation contingency plans led to both their deaths. Furthermore, there existed no plans to evacuate people who fell sick at the peak of the mountain.

The events narrated by Krakauer in his book reveal the various effects of leadership on the overall result. One aspect of leadership that is apparent from the book is the importance of confidence and trust in leaders in determining the outcome of events. The confidence in Rob Hall and Scott Fischer's abilities in mountain climbing skills attracted more people to their teams. Furthermore, the belief in abilities of leaders results in followers not questioning various motives. In the Everest situation, Hall even prohibited any dissenting views as the expedition mounted the final push for the peak. Consequently, leaders influence perception and beliefs among their followers and Hall's follower's perceptions prevented them from asking vital questions regarding the turnaround times.

Additionally, the compensation differentials among the guides created a perception among multiple employees regarding their status in the expedition. As a result, the impressions influence the motivation of employees in performing their duties. A good example is the reaction of the South Africa's expedition team's Sherpas in the installation of fixed rope (Krakauer 55). Another leadership implication of the book is the need for leaders to balance between competitive pressures and the lives of employees and clients. Evidently, leadership plays a significant role in motivation and general safety of employees.

Finally, Krakauer's book presents various lessons to be learned by multiple managers in service industries. First, any enterprise needs to bring benefits and the multiplier effect in the region they operate. Second, corporate culture is essential for achieving the mission and

activities of a company. Additionally, management, communication, and organizational skills such as planning are necessary to the success of a service-oriented business. Furthermore, it is clear that effective leadership is crucial for the profitability and good reputation of a service enterprise.

Work Cited

Krakauer, Jon. "Into thin air: A personal Account of the Mt. Everest disaster". *New York: Villard*
(1997).