Reflections from Nepal: Connecting to self, others and community through outdoor experiences

Part 2: Connecting with Others

This is the second in a three-part series of my reflections from this epic experience.

In December 2023, I embarked on an extraordinary journey through the Khumbu Region of Nepal, completing the Three Passes Trek—a 14-day adventure covering over 111 miles and ascending more than 44,500 feet in elevation. This outdoor experience not only had epic trekking and landscapes; it offered experiential learnings connecting me with self, others and community. This is the second in a three-part series of my reflections from this epic experience.

Outdoor experiences provide an opportunity to connect with others through a shared experience. Beyond reflections on self, this trek enabled me to reflect on the importance of being part of a team. The Three Passes Trek is not an individual trek. It takes many people to get you up and down the mountains. You and your actions impact the entire team.

Building Trust: *Trust in your leaders and team is essential for physical and psychological safety*.

> Outdoor activities often involve inherent risks, such as navigating difficult terrain, unpredictable weather conditions, and changing environments. We had to rely on and put our faith in our guides to safely master these challenges. They earned our trust quickly with their experience and expertise, and the trusted relationships they built with local guides. The local team who spoke the language, intimately understood the culture and had technical expertise with the terrain were essential. Whether trekking peaks or navigating new and challenging situations closer to sea level, having trusted relationships and support are critical to build confidence and achieve your goals.

Building Community: *Creating spaces for authentic connections is vital for fostering a team.*

Connections with each other as human beings develop with hours of side-by-side conversation. Face-to-face exchanges can be a bit intimidating for some. However, barriers are down while walking shoulder-to-shoulder. The conversation flows. During a pause, there is not an awkward silence, but a moment of reflection and processing. There is an ease of moving in the same direction … together on a shared path.

Grieving the loss of a spouse/love of one's life, transitioning into a new career, building a business, embracing retirement—everyone came with a story that they were willing to share in a trusted community. Creating the space to build relationships on the trail significantly impacts the group dynamic and overall effectiveness.

Self-Awareness: *Being an effective team member begins with self-care and awareness of how our actions impact others.*

To be an effective team member, you need to focus on yourself. Not being self-absorbed, but hyper aware. Putting the oxygen mask on yourself before helping others on the airplane is a perfect example. It begins with preparation and requires diligence. Physical self-care begins with prevention. On the mountain, this includes aggressive hydration, tending to blisters before they become wounds, protection from snow blindness and sunburn, having the appropriate gear and focusing on staying warm versus getting warm.

Ensuring your own well-being significantly impacts the team. Being with a group of new people, as well as stretching ourselves physically and psychologically, it was important to find time to recharge. We found this in journaling or solo hiking and connecting with nature. It was difficult to sleep at times, but resting your body and allowing your mind to process the experience was necessary.

Self-awareness of how your actions impact others is critical. When hiking with a group, you have an opportunity to understand your abilities, limitations and learning needs. It is important to know how you impact others. This can pose significant safety risks and must be monitored. When several people were not able to complete the trek, it was hard for them to come to grips with it. But they were thinking of others and the overall health of the team.

Asking for Help: *Recognizing when to ask for and accept help is a sign of strength, not weakness*.

> Whether it's unloading burdens or delegating tasks, seeking assistance is crucial for reaching our summits—both literally and figuratively.
>
> Mid-way through the trek, we did an optional hike to Goyko Summit. I was really hurting. About 500 yards to the summit, our guide said, "You have been coughing all day and lost your voice, just give me the pack and let's get to the top." Giving up my backpack was harder than powering through, but accepting help gave me the strength to continue. What gets in the way of reaching our "summit"? True strength lies not in shouldering every burden alone but in recognizing when to lean on others and allow them to share the load as we navigate the rugged terrain.

Hiking the towering peaks of Nepal isn't merely about the physical challenge or the breathtaking scenery; it's about forging bonds of trust, building communities rooted in authenticity, nurturing self-awareness and embracing the strength in seeking assistance when needed. This journey taught me that personal summits are not solitary endeavors but collective achievements, woven with shared experiences.

You don't have to travel to Nepal and trek the Himalayas to find your epic and connect with others. In founding All Forward, I am committed to designing outdoor micro experiences in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park and surrounding areas. These experiences focus on leadership, team building and well-being. Activities include hiking, navigation, kayaking and more. Learn more at www.allforward.us.

Check out Part 1: Connecting with SELF and Part 3: Connecting with COMMUNITY.