

THE LEADERSHIP MOMENT

The first decision was the composition of the initial summit party. Blum knew this decision could not be made cavalierly, nor could it be imposed without the others' concurrence, for this was an enterprise of consent. She told her team that the first summit party would comprise three women and they would go for the top between October 14 and 16. A second attempt, by two women and two Sherpas, would follow two days later, and a third team of those who still wanted a stab at the summit might come later.

Alison Chadwick objected that the numbers did not add up. Realistically, a third assault was unlikely to materialize, and even a second attack was a long shot. After a Himalayan expedition places a first group on the summit, Chadwick knew, the momentum tends to reverse completely. The summit climbers are spent, risks no longer seem acceptable, and descent becomes the mental imperative. Four previous expeditions had reached the summit of Annapurna, and in each case it was only the first pair who had made it.

Chadwick persisted. "I think all the members of the team—all nine of us now that Liz has left—should have a reasonable chance for the summit," she argued. The first two teams totaled only five climbers. "What about the rest of us?" worried Chadwick. "Everyone should have some guarantee of being on a summit team after they've risked their lives doing carries to Camp 3." She proposed that the second party consist of three women and only one Sherpa, and that a third try should be elevated from possible to definite. Blum responded that she could not guarantee a second attempt, let alone a third. If anybody felt that a shot at the summit trip was the price for continuing to traverse the avalanche chute in support of others, said Blum, that person should stop carrying supplies to Camp 3.

The Sherpas weighed in with their own objections. A tribal group of Tibetan origin, they had become a standard component of most Himalayan expeditions, experienced and conditioned mountaineers whose strength and tenacity had been

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