



Irene Miller

her pack, Kramar discovered to  
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and was now frozen white. An eye  
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and more than a mile lower on the  
crossing the avalanche zone one  
when she spotted another climber  
o contact with the top. "Did they  
The nod was affirmative. Miller,  
s had stepped onto the summit at  
we set out to do," Miller wrote in  
t higher." Emotion overwhelmed  
h for the summit, relief at having  
slope for the last time, exhaustion

*Vera Komarkova*

from the tension of the descent, and, most of all, joy in know-  
ing that a woman's place was indeed on top." Irene Miller would  
say that getting to the summit was "the hardest thing I've ever  
done in my life."

### *A Second Decision*

ARLENE BLUM'S second critical decision was made the same  
day, not long before the first party reached the summit, but its  
consequences would be felt tragically two days later. The sec-  
ond summit party was to consist of three Americans: Alison  
Shadwick, Vera Watson, and Annie Whitehouse. A fourth  
member, Margi Rusmore, had also been named, but a frozen  
leg would force her to sit it out. The team was already at Camp

3 on the Dutch Rib, just two days' climb below the summit now that the higher camps were well established.

"I'm so excited about going to Camp 4 today!" exclaimed Watson, hoping that the others felt the same. Chadwick was ready too, and the weather was holding nicely. But Whitehouse was strangely ambivalent, worrying about whether they had sufficient support to ensure they would get up and back safely. "I've been thinking about it all night," she worried. "I just don't feel our team is strong enough for a second summit attempt. It doesn't really seem safe to me."

Watson was crestfallen. Chadwick was shocked: "Don't be silly, Annie. Come with us. We can do it—I know we can." Whitehouse feared that the Sherpas, who might be essential for evacuation if anything went wrong, would not even wait at Camp 5, let alone accompany them to the top. Two Sherpas would soon reach the summit with the first party, and the Americans recalled the earlier warning that one Sherpa on top would be enough to make them "all very happy and go home." M. Tsering of the summit party would drive the point home the next day, when he reached Camp 2. "Let's go to Kathmandu," he said, "and have a party." Still, Chadwick believed that some Sherpas would stay, and she insisted that "we can do it ourselves if not," but Whitehouse was not swayed: "The weather could change in a few hours, and then where would be?" Without "oxygen or support from Sherpas, I don't feel safe."

Even though Blum had named Whitehouse to the summit team, she did not press the point. "Annie has to make her own decision," Blum warned, and "you can't talk someone into taking that kind of risk" against her better judgment. Whitehouse soon announced a firm decision not to proceed.

Undaunted by losing a third of their team and knowing that support was thin, Chadwick and Watson prepared to move up on their own. They might try for a subsidiary summit—itsself an unclimbed 26,000-foot point—or they might simply turn back. The important thing was to make an attempt. Indeed, in some ways, the less support they had, the better. Chadwick had ear-

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Two days' climb below the summit now were well established.

"Going to Camp 4 today!" exclaimed the others felt the same. Chadwick was never was holding nicely. But Whitehouse was worrying about whether they had sufficient oxygen—they would get up and back safely. "I've got all night," she worried. "I just don't feel confident enough for a second summit attempt. It's up to me."

Chadwick was shocked: "Don't be discouraged. We can do it—I know we can." He talked to the Sherpas, who might be essential for the ascent. If they went wrong, would not even wait at the base to accompany them to the top. Two Sherpas had accompanied the first party, and the others had given an earlier warning that one Sherpa on top would be needed to take them "all very happy and go home." The second summit party would drive the point home to the base of Camp 2. "Let's go to Kathmandu," Chadwick said. "Still, Chadwick believed that some day she insisted that "we can do it ourselves if the weather was not swayed: "The weather could change, and then where would we be?" Without the help of the Sherpas, I don't feel safe."

Chadwick had named Whitehouse to the summit to lead the party. "Annie has to make her own decision, and you can't talk someone into taking against her better judgment. Whitehouse has made her decision not to proceed.

With only a third of their team and knowing that Chadwick and Watson prepared to move up to the next point—might try for a subsidiary summit—themselves at that point—or they might simply turn back. The decision was to make an attempt. Indeed, in some ways, the more they had, the better. Chadwick had ear-

lier told Blum, "For this Annapurna trip to really mean something, we've got to get to the summit alone, with no Sherpas along." She had come close to doing it alone three years earlier when climbing without oxygen at nearly 26,000 feet on another Himalayan giant, Gasherbrum III. Watson herself had been the first woman ever to make a solo ascent of Aconcagua in Argentina, South America's highest mountain at 22,835 feet.

"Be careful. Don't take any risks," Blum cautioned Chadwick and Watson as they left Camp 3 at 11:30 that morning. Watson's enthusiasm had waned during the course of the discussion, and now she talked of achieving just a personal best, ascending above 23,000 feet. Chadwick remained eager to go as high as possible, and she left for the heights with an air of confident optimism: "We'll be fine."

On October 16, a day after the first summit success, Chadwick and Watson were pushing above Camp 4 when they met the exhausted summit group on its way down. The Sherpas were not the least bit interested in going back up with them. Still, Chadwick and Watson were now determined to go for the unclimbed subsidiary peak, and by radio they asked Blum to describe a guidebook photo of its ramparts. Blum warned that the steep rock near the apex "seems risky for a party of two."

By the next morning, all the rest of the expedition had descended to Camp 3 or lower, leaving nobody at the two highest camps to render assistance if required. Blum made one last appeal by radio: "I'd rather you wouldn't go up there without Sherpa support. You've done a great job already, and you can come down now." Chadwick and Watson remained resolute, and late in the afternoon the expedition's film crew spotted the two of them well on their way to Camp 5, the last camp before the summit.

At dinner that evening, Arlene Blum tried to make radio contact with the climbers, but she could not raise them. Radio failures in extreme temperatures are not uncommon, but the next day, the film crew could detect no movement through its giant telephoto lens anywhere below or above Camp 5. Another night

passed with no radio response from above, and still another day with no sign of human movement.

M. Tsering and another Sherpa went up to search, and a few hours later an agitated voice crackled on the radio with an alarming discovery: not far from the Camp 4 they could see a red jacket, much like Chadwick's. A crevasse blocked them from approaching, but from fifty yards they confirmed the worst: The two climbers had evidently lost their footing somewhere on their way to Camp 5, perhaps where the icy route steepened just below the tent platform. The path was steep enough for descending climbers to have to belay one another down it, but ascending climbers tended to move up it without such protection, knowing that facing into the mountain going up was more secure than facing outward going down. Even then, if a boot crampon were to come loose or a snow step give way, a secure footing could vanish in an instant. Whatever the cause, the two women had fallen more than a thousand feet.

The slightest misstep on an icy slope can mean disaster. Had the Sherpas accompanied Chadwick and Watson, they could probably not have helped. In all likelihood, the Sherpas would have been on a separate rope, tied to each other but not to the others, as had been their practice throughout much of the expedition. "I kept wanting to play the record backward—to change the summit teams, the lead climbers, the mountain; to change ever having wanted to climb an eight-thousand-meter peak," remembers Blum. "But the record would not reverse."

### *Becoming a Leader*

LEADERSHIP IS A learned skill, and Arlene Blum was enrolled in the school of direct experience. She had not begun with a blank slate, for she had already helped lead a group of six women up Denali. At the Denali summit, her group's leader had collapsed from altitude sickness, and it had been Blum who had organized a grueling and dangerous evacuation of the stricken climber. Still, the scale of an Eight-Thousander is another mag-

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nitude, as are the human challenges and natural risks. Without  
formal tutoring in the skills of expeditionary leadership, she  
would have to acquire them as her team moved up the moun-  
tainside.

Launching the expedition itself had been an act of creating  
something out of nothing, of transforming a transcendent  
vision into the mundane matters of permits, tents, and teams  
that would make it happen. Many dream of building an enter-  
prise, of walking on clouds, but few carry their concepts to ful-  
fillment. As Blum and her companions passed through customs  
at the Kathmandu airport on August 9, 1978, it was opening  
day.

Moving a band of mountaineers from civilization to wilder-  
ness requires a deft but firm hand, and such did not come  
naturally for Blum. Her penchant was for companionship and  
collaboration, not command and control. But chaos would have  
been the consequence, and as the team was assembling its gear,  
porters, and Sherpas in Kathmandu, Blum was already appreci-  
ating the need to revise her instincts. “I was learning the hard  
way,” she remembers. “Although I didn't yet sound like an  
authentic army general, I was moving in that direction.” But  
since she was presiding over a consensual enterprise, “the trick”  
was “to move just far enough.”

An early test for Blum came in the person of Joan Firey, a  
team member with years of climbing experience and a paragon  
of certainty. Ever optimistic about the team's prospects and con-  
fident of her own judgment, Firey was responsible for organiz-  
ing the food supplies, which should have included prodigious  
quantities of local rice, fruit, and meat. Her frugal nature, how-  
ever, had led her to minimalist buying, enough for lean cuisine  
but little more on the mountainside.

Viewing the larder, Blum anticipated a motivational debacle.  
In her experience, at high altitude the correlation between food  
sufficiency and human energy was close to exact. Luxury foods  
would add verve when it was most needed, but Firey asserted,  
“We will have to make do with what we have.” Blum would not

have it: "Buy that food today, Joan. I'm not going to see this expedition fail because we don't have the food we need."

Several months earlier, in a Stateside meeting with a clinical psychologist, Firey had confessed that she did not trust Blum's leadership and would even prefer to be the leader herself, but other team members now rallied to Blum's defense, and in doing so they presented her with a dilemma that would plague her in the months to come: "They wanted me to be a strong, decisive leader, but they also expected to contribute to major decisions." The principles resonate with modern sensibilities, but the challenge is in the application. "What does it mean," Blum asks rhetorically, "to be the 'strong leader' of ten tough-minded women who all want to contribute to each decision?" She knew that she would have to resolve the dilemma.

Joan Firey, charismatic and decisive, already represented one side of the divide. The other side was more familiar to Blum. She recognized that her motives for going on prior expeditions had been a blend of personal sharing and self-understanding, "to know my companions and myself better." But those would not suffice when larger responsibilities demanded more: "My primary goal would have to be the overall success of the expedition, not friendship."

As soon as the expedition had established Camp 2 at 18,500 feet, Blum's solution was put to a test. She announced her plan of attack on the Dutch Rib: the four most experienced ice climbers—Komarkova, Klobusicky, Kramar, and Chadwick—would lead, two Sherpas would support them, and others would transport supplies. Her marching order seemed squarely in the interests of the collective, even if it was disquieting for some individuals, but it was greeted with stony silence by all. Later that evening, Blum overheard a comment from another tent: "All Arlene cares about is public relations with the Sherpas, not about giving women a chance to climb."

At breakfast the next morning, there were more gripes. "I think we should have a discussion about how decisions are made

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in this group," Kramar complained. Watson struck home: "I think the climbing plan was made undemocratically and should be changed so that everybody gets an equal chance to lead. . . . If I get to the summit on someone else's fixed rope all the way, I'm not going to feel like I climbed the mountain." Added Firey, "A lot of us are unhappy about the way that decision was made." Remaining silent in her growing distress, Blum finally heard soothing words. "I think most of us have forgotten how hard Arlene's job is," said Miller, "and I don't think we're giving her adequate support. She's getting pressure not just from us, but from many other directions, too, every day, every hour."

Hours of acrimonious exchange followed. Near lunchtime the problem of the privileged position of the Sherpas became moot. They had just washed their clothing and announced that they had nothing dry for that day's climbing in any case. By then, Blum had become convinced that her plan was right but the process all wrong. "I had learned another lesson about leadership," she wrote. "If there had been an open meeting, my plan would probably have prevailed, and at a much lower cost." She knew where she wanted to go but was less sure of how to get there: "I'd had the confidence in my plan to get it accepted but had lacked the confidence in myself necessary to do it openly."

Blum promised more consultation during the days ahead, saying she would discuss decisions personally with those at her own camp and by radio with others. Yet one of the comments during the morning's discussion suggested the limits of communal decision making. Margi Rusmore, though the youngest on the team, was not without experience. She had "majored" in mountain climbing in high school and at age seventeen had reached the summit of Denali, the youngest woman at the time to have climbed to North America's highest point. Youth is no inhibitor of insight. "We can't all be a bunch of prima donna climbers and lead the whole mountain," she cautioned. "If the plan is best for the expedition as a whole, then we should try it." Later, reflecting on the fateful determinations that Blum was

reaching, many with implications for summiting or surviving, Irene Miller would say, "I was grateful that I didn't have to make the decisions."

In constituting the final summit teams, Blum conferred more but still decided which plan was best. She heard members' concerns, tested their moods, gauged their stamina. When Chadwick and the Sherpas protested that some would miss having a chance at the top, the dispute was amicable and short-lived by comparison. When Whitehouse dropped out of the second summit team, and when Chadwick and Watson decided to move up, it was a decision made within a consultative framework that Blum had finally created. If at 14,000 feet she had not appreciated all the pitfalls of team leadership, she had mastered many of them by 21,000 feet.

*By implication:* A new position of leadership will engender the experience you lack on arrival, and seeking feedback on your performance in the position will ensure that you take advantage of the experience.

### *Managing Motives*

ALL ORGANIZATIONS ARE challenged by the need to link personal goals to collective welfare. Common objectives can be reached only if individual aims become aligned with the goals, if private purpose and public aims are matched. Though researchers have mastered the science of creating light coherence to produce laser power, leaders still struggle with the art of human coherence to generate organizational muscle. Two motivational issues account for much of the struggle.

The first is the diverse set of motives that lead participants to join an organization. While all seek to set foot on a summit, their reasons for doing so are as varied as people are. For Blum, it was not to prove that women could reach great summits, which she already knew, but to send that message "to people all

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over the world." Watson wanted to summit in the Himalayas;  
Chadwick hoped to prove she could do so without men or oxy-  
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Even in far more narrowly defined activities, the diversity of  
human motivation is impressive. Consider one of the most  
clearly defined sporting events of all, the men's one-mile race.  
Since Roger Bannister first broke the four-minute mile, a dozen  
runners have successively held the world record. In broad terms,  
what they had to endure to achieve such excellence—the end-  
less hours of training, the pain, the self-denial—was much the  
same, but each was driven by distinct personal motives:

*Roger Bannister* (1954, 3:59): "Running presents a perfect test  
of judgment, speed, and stamina."

*John Landy* (1954, 3:58): "One's effort could be pinned down  
and quantified precisely."

*Derek Ibbotson* (1957, 3:57): "I ran to prove to my father that  
I was better than my brother."

*Herb Elliott* (1958, 3:54.5): "I ran at first to remorselessly beat  
everyone I possibly could."

*Peter Snell* (1962, 3:54.4): "I ran for recognition."

*Michel Juzy* (1965, 3:53): "I ran so I would not have to fight  
the war in Algeria."

*Jim Ryun* (1965, 3:51): "I ran to get a letter jacket, a girl-  
friend."

*Sebastian Coe* (1981, 3:47): "I ran because I was meant to run."

*Noureddine Morceli* (1993, 3:44): "I run to be known as the  
greatest runner . . . of all time."<sup>4</sup>

The issue for Arlene Blum—or any organizational leader—is  
to recognize, understand, and work with such varied motives. "I  
focus on the fact that everyone wants to win," offers Robert L.  
Crandall, chief executive officer of American Airlines, but he  
adds, "You must recognize that everyone has a different reason  
for wanting to win." Only late in the expedition did Blum

appreciate all that was behind Chadwick's early resistance to Blum's plans for the summit and Chadwick's later determination to reach the summit herself.

The second motivational issue derives from the scarce space at the top. While all are drawn to climb to the summit, few in fact will get there. Nor is much value added to an expedition if a second group reaches the top. Had others followed Herzog and Lachenal on Annapurna, or Hillary and Tenzing on Everest, they would have contributed little to their enterprises' essential success, the first ascent. Worse, second- or third-party efforts can detract from a mission if they end in disaster, tainting an otherwise unambiguous success. And given the mood and momentum of a climbing team after one party has reached the summit, the probability of accidents worsen, as time passes and support wanes.

The leadership imperative for Blum was to keep the contest open as long as possible, not only for the summit but also for the critical challenges on the way up. As long as the prospect of pioneering the route and reaching the summit remain alive for all, everyone's energies remain alive as well. This may have been one of Blum's miscalculations in announcing that the four most experienced ice climbers would lead the way up the Dutch Rib: her associates were not yet ready to recognize the collective limitations to their own aspirations. Each would have to struggle up the slope and face repeated risks if the expedition were to be successful, but the willingness of each to do so depended on the perception that she might lead on the Dutch Rib and have a chance at the summit.

After Chadwick and Watson departed for their ill-fated attempt at the top, Blum found satisfaction in the fact that everyone who was still able and aspiring has had a chance. The Sherpas had placed two of their own on the summit; Miller and Komarkova had reached it; Whitehouse had declined the opportunity; Kramar and Rusmore had frozen limbs; and the others, including Blum herself, had by now opted not to try.

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Thus, finally, after an initial misstep she managed to offer upward opportunity for all who would avail themselves of it.

*By implication:* Recognizing people's diverse motives for participating is an essential first step in mobilizing their contributions. Creating an opportunity for all to succeed—whatever their motives—is an essential second step in harnessing their contributions even when the room at the top is not big enough for all.

### *Managing Uncertainty*

UNCERTAINTY IN ACHIEVING a summit is a given. Were it not, there would be little mystique in reaching the top. The degree of uncertainty, however, can vary widely from moment to moment. On some days, victory looks clinched; on others, much the opposite. Bright sun, calm air, and working limbs inspire the former attitude. Heavy snowfall, cruel winds, and frostbite make for the latter. Prospects can even change by the hour. Early on the afternoon of May 10, 1996, Jon Krakauer, a writer for *Outside* magazine, and more than a dozen other climbers were nearing the summit of Mount Everest with clear weather all around. Late in the afternoon a sudden storm hit the summit pyramid, plunging the wind chill to -100 degrees Fahrenheit, and half of the climbers would not survive the night.<sup>5</sup>

Such cycles of hope and despair present a countercyclical enigma. When optimism and confidence run high, they can be self-defeating: one's adrenaline level drops, one's attention drifts, and what should not be taken for granted becomes a given. It is said that one of the most dangerous moments during a climb is just after the summit has been reached. It is then, in the elation of victory, that distraction can be greatest. Conversely, when pessimism and discouragement run deep, they can also be self-limiting. A victory that seems beyond reach

can undercut the will to achieve it even when it is not out of the question.

The challenge is to compensate, to mitigate both the optimism and the pessimism. Too much of either can be counterproductive. This helps explain why Blum's teammates were so reluctant to acknowledge overtly that the avalanche dangers between Camps 2 and 3 were far greater than had been anticipated. Talking about them would have brought subjective perceptions too closely into line with the objective reality. Avoiding such a discussion allowed the luxury of downplaying the reality, a hedged assessment essential for continued commitment to the climb. Chadwick helped Blum understand the collective conscience: "The problem with talking about it at all is that if we admit we are really worried and try to have a rational discussion, we would inevitably come to the conclusion that we should give up."

Later, Blum accompanied the first summit team for part of its final climb from Camp 3 to Camp 4. The wind was savage, stinging their faces and obscuring the treacherous route. Blum announced that she was turning back, and Irene Miller understood Blum's implicit assessment: "Yeah, this wind really takes it out of you." Miller herself looked wan from the high-altitude slogging through thick snow, and she acknowledged a fatalistic state of mind. "I've left some letters at Camp 2 for my friends in case I don't come back," she told Blum. "Will you make sure they get them?" Blum accepted the task but none of the mood: "Oh, Irene, you'll be all right." She offered Miller chocolate and counsel: "You've done really well so far—it's going to be beautiful up there—it looks like you'll have a full moon if you have to come down in the dark." And a final bolstering for a faltering perception: "I think the weather's going to be good for the next couple of days."

To the second summit team, Blum delivered a different message. She reminded Alison Chadwick of the risks she was facing in going for the summit, dampening her optimism to ensure she did not misread the dangers. Conversely, when Whitehouse

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n, Blum delivered a different mes-  
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voiced her ambivalence about a summit bid with Chadwick and Watson, Chadwick played down the hazards. "When you came along on this expedition, you made a decision to take risks," she argued. "Every time you crossed that avalanche slope, your life was in danger. This risk isn't any larger, and the rewards could be so much greater." But Blum responded with a counterpoint. "I'm uncomfortable with the sparse support left for your attempt," she warned, and "I think you should give it up if the Sherpas all go down."

As Chadwick and Watson were about to leave Camp 3 for their ill-fated attempt, Chadwick was ever the optimist, telling Blum not to "worry so much." Chadwick had earlier enthused over the prospect of reaching an unclimbed summit: "What a coup that would be—the two of us doing a first ascent of a twenty-six-thousand-foot peak. That would make the climbing world sit up and take notice, wouldn't it?" Once again, Blum counseled caution: "Remember, if you don't feel strong or the weather looks like it is changing, don't go any higher."

At first glance, such efforts to dampen high spirits might seem the antithesis of leadership: Why not go for it all while you're on an emotional high? But counterinterpreting objective conditions can be more than caution; it can be a survival skill. In 1963, an American expedition set out to place the first U.S. climbers on the summit of Mount Everest, the roof of the world. Two of the climbers achieved the summit by the route pioneered by Hillary and Tenzing; two others made it by an entirely new way up the more difficult west ridge. In all, the climbers spent more than two months above their base camp, often in harrowing conditions. But a research study of the expedition showed that one of the team's most potent weapons had been a collective psychology that was consistently countercyclical: when objective conditions offered reason for optimism, the climbers' collective mood turned cautious; when conditions were dismal, their mood turned upbeat. Thus their spirits rarely got too high to encourage recklessness or so low as to cause despair.<sup>6</sup>

If the subjective interpretation of an uncertain objective verges toward one end of the spectrum or the other, a team's realization of the objective can be undermined. Blum and her fellow climbers cautioned one another against both overoptimism and excessive pessimism.

*By implication:* When a summit, product, or project seems well within reach, dampening overconfidence can ensure that energy remains focused on achieving it; when it appears almost out of reach, encouraging greater confidence can ensure that the motivation remains focused on achieving it.

### Managing Meaning

THE EXPEDITION'S SLOGAN, "A Woman's Place Is on Top," and its title, the Women's Himalayan Expedition to Annapurna, established an expectation. If the expedition were not only for climbers to conquer the summit but also for women to climb an Eight-Thousander on their own, it would augment the rewards of success. If successful, it should help pave the way for women's admission into mountaineering's inner circles.

Several months before the ascent, *The Washington Post* provided its readers with its answer to the inevitable question of why. "America's first all-female Himalayan expedition sets out this August for Annapurna, the world's 10th highest peak," wrote reporters Ron Brodmann and Bill Curry. Organized by Arlene Blum, the "10-woman team plans to storm Annapurna's summit by a . . . difficult route. If they succeed, they'll be the first American group to make it to the top of the 26,545-foot mountain." Women across the country, they noted, were volunteering their professional services as lawyers, accountants, and publicists to support and raise money for the expedition. An all-female film crew had been recruited, and the climbers wanted Sherpanis, not Sherpas, to guide them.<sup>7</sup>

Inevitably, such high expectations entail high risks. If the expedition were to fail, the pain would be all the greater because

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When a summit, product, or project seems dampening overconfidence can ensure that focus on achieving it; when it appears successful, encouraging greater confidence can ensure motivation remains focused on achieving it.

### Managing Meaning

THE SLOGAN, "A Woman's Place Is on Top," for the first all-female Himalayan Expedition to Annapurna, was a statement of intent. If the expedition were not only for men to reach the summit but also for women to climb on their own, it would augment the rewards of the climb. Successful, it should help pave the way for women's mountaineering's inner circles.

Before the ascent, *The Washington Post* prodded with its answer to the inevitable question of why a first all-female Himalayan expedition sets out for Annapurna, the world's 10th highest peak, "Why?" on Brodmann and Bill Curry. Organized by a 10-woman team plans to storm Annapurna's difficult route. If they succeed, they'll be the first to make it to the top of the 26,545-foot peak. In an across the country, they noted, were volunteered professional services as lawyers, accountants, and support and raise money for the expedition. An all-female team had been recruited, and the climbers wanted Sherpas, to guide them.<sup>7</sup> The high expectations entail high risks. If they fail, the pain would be all the greater because

so much had been laid on it. "We felt all the eyes of the world were on us," Blum would later say. Americans would have fallen short, but, even more important, women would also have fallen short. While nothing is gained if nothing is ventured—and the climb promised to strike another blow for women's equality—the operational downside may be an excessive willingness to tolerate risk. Ascending any serious peak is a risky business, but ascending with one gender's reputation contingent on the outcome may require the climbers to tempt fate once too often.

In laying the mantle of "cause" on the expedition, its leader anticipated the downside. "I am concerned about this expedition," Blum cautioned four months before departure. "If a man doesn't make it to the top, nobody says, well, men can't climb mountains." She sought to dampen public expectations to avoid untoward pressure on her team to succeed: "There's so much focus on our attempt, I worry. For us the expedition will be a success if no one gets killed."<sup>8</sup> Later, as the climbers deliberated continuing in the face of the violent avalanching, Blum told her team, "It's not worth it if anybody dies." As the first summit team was ascending the final mile, she reminded herself, "All that mattered was that some of us get up this mountain and all of us get off it alive."

Knowing that she and her associates might be tempted to compromise their judgment, Blum pressed for clear thinking, shorn of context. In deciding to go for the second summit bid, Chadwick argued, "You've got to remember that this attempt is what our expedition is all about—a real all-women team. No Sherpas, little oxygen." But Blum remained skeptical, fearing that Chadwick's determination to "make the climbing world sit up and take notice" could lead to an underestimation of the mountain's hazards.

The larger-than-life context and the successful surmounting of the summit would later strike, as hoped, a symbolic blow for equality. Arlene Blum would become, in the words of Nina McCain of *The Boston Globe*, a "world-famous climber who in 1978 led an all-women's team on the first American ascent of

Annapurna." Maurice Herzog, the first on Annapurna, would write, "I am convinced that this success will lead to further triumphs of women in the fields of adventure, exploration, and discovery."<sup>9</sup>

For those still trapped in gender bias, the expedition would establish that women could equal what men had achieved. But in guiding the expedition to its triumph on the summit, Blum's actions remind us of one's responsibility for managing both one's actions and their attendant risks when the end results have symbolic power.

*By implication:* Infusing collective action with transcendent meaning can add greater reward to successful completion of a task, but it can also add greater risk to those involved. When a broader purpose is aimed for, crafting an appropriate balance between expectations on the outside and risk taking on the inside is the challenge.

### *An Enduring Legacy*

ARLENE BLUM went on to climb other mountains. She walked the length of the Himalayas on a 2,500-mile trek in 1981-1982, and she carried Annalise, her four-month-old daughter, on a two-month, 600-mile hiking trip across the Alps in 1987. She also joined Amelia Earhart, Mary Leakey, and Margaret Mead as one of only eleven recipients of a Gold Medal from the Society of Woman Geographers. Along the way, Blum's work as a professional biochemist played an important role in the U.S. government's decision to ban makers of children's sleepwear from using the fire-retardant chemical Tris, which she helped identify as a possible carcinogen.<sup>10</sup>

But her Annapurna expedition, at age thirty-three, was a turning point. "The experience of leading that historic expedition," Blum says, "changed my life." Before the expedition she had been a scientist and mountaineer; now she is a writer and



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**Enduring Legacy**

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*Arlene Blum and Annapurna*

leadership developer. With aging and becoming a mother, she  
has become more leery of taking personal risk: "When you're  
young, you think you can beat the odds. You think you're  
immortal. I don't think that anymore."<sup>11</sup>

Blum brought a unique blend of qualities to the slopes of  
Annapurna: She dreamt of a team on a summit, and she trans-  
muted a private idea into public ambition. She persisted in her  
pursuit, aligning thousands of small steps, one at a time, to  
achieve a far larger step. Despite being a natural worrier and  
friendship seeker, she mastered the unnatural skills of making  
decisions with confidence and directing others. "I learned that a  
group of ordinary people, when they share a vision, can take on  
an incredible challenge and do things they never dreamed pos-

sible," she recalls. "If you can get a clear picture of your goal—really see it, feel it, taste it—then I'm convinced you can make it happen."<sup>12</sup>

A midcareer manager in one of my teaching programs offered a parallel portrait of his boss: "He is a calculating adventurer, deriving a thrill from taking a risk and watching it pay off. He dreams and creates visions that enable others to do their best. He motivates team members by emphasizing that the team is doing something that has never been done before." Behind it all is "his strong confidence in himself and in those he trusts." Like Arlene Blum, this boss makes his vision his team's vision. Through trust and confidence, he creates the conditions that allow both individuals within the team and the team itself to reach whatever summits they have set for themselves. Thus, on both the frequently hazardous slopes of the Himalayas and the often slippery terrain of the workplace, is "calculated adventure" turned into tangible reward.

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