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## What Extreme Sports Can Teach You About Work

by  
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**Respecting the challenge, practicing extreme preparation and honoring your passion are vital on a steep climb and in your work. The photo shows Mark Richey on the spectacular East Ridge of Shivling during an ascent of the Himalayan peak in India.**

Photo: John Bouchard

Your idea of extreme sports may be watching three football games at once at the local sports bar or playing more than eighteen holes of golf in a day. You may think there is nothing to learn from people who jump out of planes or hang off the sides of mountains. That would be wrong. While you may have no interest in participating in extreme sports, you can still gain valuable insights from successful business people who do.

I'm a world record skydiver, MBA and former corporate Chief Operating Officer. My co-author Maryann Karinch is an adventure racer, former corporate manager and the author of twenty books. Our careers span both business and extreme sports. We found forty highly successful senior executives and entrepreneurs who are also accomplished extreme athletes to share their success insight with us.

More than half of these athlete/executives are Presidents or CEOs. One third are entrepreneurs and one third women. They are an extraordinary group. Think of them as CEOs who also have climbed

Mt. Everest, because in some cases they have. The result is our book *Business Lessons from the Edge* (McGraw-Hill).

So, what can you learn from these amazing high achievers? A lot. Here are some of the key lessons from the book that can benefit you:

- Respect the Challenge,
- Practice Extreme Preparation, and
- Honor Your Passion.

**Respect the Challenge** – Whether they're climbing one of the world's highest mountains, competing in an aerobics competition or trying to wrestle a major account away from a competitor, athlete/executives respect the challenge they're facing. They do not take on life-threatening activities or critical business challenges lightly.

You should do the same. When you respect the challenge you're facing you give it the weight it deserves. You seek out all the right advice. You don't go after it ill-prepared. You put forth the effort it requires to be successful.

Don't go overboard. Don't make a challenge larger than it is and allow it to intimidate you. Just respect it. By respecting it you will significantly increase the chances of prevailing over it.

**Practice Extreme Preparation** – A logical extension of respecting the challenge is practicing extreme preparation. The athlete/executives in *Business Lessons from the Edge* do exactly that. In both sport and business, they engage the challenge exceedingly well prepared so very little is left to chance. They identify the most likely outcomes and how they will respond to them. In sport they practice and condition. In business they do their research and rehearse. By the time the competition starts, they're better prepared than their competitors whether it's an auto race, a strategy session or a sales presentation.

*“When you respect the challenge you're facing you give it the weight it deserves.”*

Extreme preparation will always serve you well. How do you know you have prepared enough? When you and your team can't come up with a single contingency you haven't addressed.

**Honor Your Passion** – A third common trait of the highly successful athlete/executives in *Business Lessons from the Edge* is that they honor their passion. They are keenly aware of what excites them and they incorporate it into their working lives as much as possible. They know that passion leads to commitment and commitment leads to higher performance.

Your first step is to identify your passions. What are you exceptionally good at? What activities are so engaging that they almost don't seem like work? These are clues to your passions.

With your passions identified, the next step is to work to utilize them as much as possible in your work. If that is not possible today, rest easy. Work toward blending them into your work as you move forward. Keep them foremost in your mind when you consider career options or just your next assignment.

While you may have no plans to ride a bull, trek to the North Pole or even compete in a triathlon, you can still learn a lot from people who do and have also been very successful in their careers. When you respect the challenge, practice extreme preparation and honor your passion you will win the most important race – the race to be personally successful and fulfilled.

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Jim McCormick is the Founder and President of the Research Institute for Risk Intelligence. His books include *Business Lessons from the Edge* (McGraw-Hill), *The Power of Risk* (Maxwell Press) and *The First-Time Manager* (AMACOM). More information is available at [www.JimMcCormick.com](http://www.JimMcCormick.com).

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