

=====  
ChangeAbility  
The Newsletter of KoenigCoaching  
Volume 1, No. 2, December 2002  
www.koenigcoaching.com  
=====

Welcome!

You are reading ChangeAbility, a newsletter published by Business Coach Urs Koenig MBA, PhD.

ChangeAbility brings you actionable, hands-on tips and cool resources for starting or building your business on a bimonthly basis.

In each newsletter, you will also find threads of my passion for endurance sports. I will provide you with business lessons learned from the world of competitive sports.

I would love to hear from you. Each email will be responded to. Simply reply to this newsletter.

Want a friend or colleague to read ChangeAbility? Please forward this issue with a brief personal note. Thanks for your support!

To subscribe or unsubscribe go to the bottom of this message

++++NO SPAM/PRIVACY STATEMENT++++  
I never sell or give away subscriber info

-----  
IN THIS ISSUE:

- I The Interview: Leadership in the Eco-Challenge: Lessons from the World of Extreme Adventure Sports
- II Quick Tip: How to Encourage Real Growth
- III Resources 4 You
- IV Meet the Coach and Media Mention

-----  
**I The Interview: Leadership in the Eco-Challenge: Lessons from the World of Extreme Adventure Sports**

My good friend Alina McMaster (Canberra, Australia) spoke with me about effective leadership and team work from the perspective of an Eco-Challenge. Alina just returned from her third Eco Challenge in Fiji where her Australian team 'Air Pacific' placed third.

Eco Challenge is an intense expedition race. Each team of four, comprising men and women, race non-stop for 6 to 12 days, 24 hours a day over rugged terrain using mountain biking, river rafting, horseback riding, mountaineering, kayaking and navigational skills (For more info see: <http://www.ecochallenge.com>. )

Q: What have been the most challenging leadership moments during an Eco Challenge for you?

A: The most challenging leadership moments are when your team gets lost or team members are overtired or sick. In the case of one or several members of the team being overtired or sick you need to sit down and solve the problem at hand which is should we sleep now, and if yes for how long? The team also needs to rethink its overall strategy which got it into trouble in the first place. It's all about adjusting to the new situation and being flexible.

In the most recent Fiji Eco Challenge I got severely sick three days into the race. The team decided to take a really long 12 hour sleep brake to give me some rest. To be honest we all felt that that was the end of it. We decided to press on nevertheless. We readjusted the gear so I had to carry less. I recovered slightly, but was not able to hold any food for the next three days. I lost around 10 kg but we nevertheless started to catch up again. So the ability to stop, adjust quickly to a new situation and then press on is crucial.

Q: Everyone is totally exhausted and suffers sleep deprivation: How do you make good decisions under these circumstances and what kind of leadership approach is needed?

A: While each team has an appointed captain, my teams always included all members when reaching a decision. Importantly, this includes the person who is really overtired or sick. I strongly believe that the autocratic leadership approach does not work in an Eco challenge. It is too important that everyone is buying into the decision. However, it is crucial to come to a decision very quickly. Lots of teams find it very challenging to decide fast.

My observation is that a lot of the U.S teams work themselves up too much and waste a lot of time and energy in arguments and are not very productive in their decision making. You see a lot of that on the TV coverage of the event as the media love that kind of drama. Both Australians and New Zealanders tend to talk much less and get on with it.

Our approach is to sit down, throw up the options, briefly talk about the pros and cons. The informal leader in the team, usually the navigator or the most experienced adventure racer, then says something along the lines of: "Ok, let's do X, everyone ok with it?" and we are off. It is important for everyone to have the ability to back off from their own initial idea and accept and carry the team decision once it has been made.

Q: What makes a great leader of an Eco-Challenge team?

A: You need to be able to motivate your team mates when the going gets tough. You need to encourage them, focusing on what is going well rather than on the weak parts. You also need to be a person who can initiate a decision. I have said before that our teams are using a collaborative leadership approach. You still need a leader who is initiating decisions and making sure that they are carried through. All this means is that you need to be a good communicator.

Q: What is the main lesson you have learned from your Eco-Challenge adventures for your professional leadership role?

A: The Fiji race really drove one main point home for me: You need to care for your teammates to get the best result out of them. You need to push your teammates, but you have to understand when they really need something and you have to give it to them.

I, myself, have made some mistakes in the past in that regard. During the Southern Traverse Race in New Zealand, one of our team members suffered from serious sleep deprivation. He thought he was in a nightmare and was talking about wanting to wake up. We tricked him to keep him going. We would lie him down for three minutes and then tell him that we had just slept for twenty minutes. In hindsight, we realized that we were too harsh on him and that we almost certainly would have done better had we given him longer rests to start with.

After I experienced being the weak link in Fiji, I understood better how important it is to be caring as a leader. I try to lead the same way in my job, making sure my staff have what they need to get their jobs done.

Q: How do you prepare for an Eco Challenge?

A: A lot of training...A peak week looks something like: Three trainings each around 2 hours during the week. Maybe two paddle sessions combined with a run or ride. On the weekend we do long stuff, mostly a combination of disciplines: running/hiking/cycling/paddling. One day up to 10 - 12 hours and the other day up to 5 hours.

Q: Do you train sleep deprivation?

A: No, I don't think you can train sleep deprivation. It's a waste of time to try and train it.

Q: What about mental preparation?

A: It's all about being organized. I need to know that we have all the gear together. The logistics is the most stressful thing about adventure races. You spend days getting gear together, going through the gear lists over and over again, trying everything on. I tend to do a lot of visualization of the race either by myself or in discussion with my teammates.

Unlike the U.S. teams, we don't train a lot together. My team for the Fiji race was spread all over Australia. I knew all of them though, and they are all extremely experienced racers - they compete in up to 8 adventure races per year. I actually think it is a good thing not to be too close before the race. I found that a lot of the teams who trained three to four times a week together almost knew each other too well. As a consequence, they were less patient with each other during the race. So not being too close to my teammates prior to the race has worked really well for me.

I also want to stress that the selection of your team members is absolutely crucial. If you have the right people, experienced and preferably people who have competed together before, everything is just that much easier. I think that is true in business as well. You want a team who has gone through difficult times before and has pulled it off.

**BIO ALINA MCMASTER:**

Alina is a former Australian cross country ski champion, and a double 'All-American'. She has won every major multi-sport race in Australia and holds numerous race records. She has competed in three Eco-Challenges placing 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and in the most recent one 3<sup>rd</sup>. Alina is a solicitor and has worked in commercial law and as a contract

superintendent for a major Australian mining company. Together with her husband she is about to launch her own adventure racing company A.R.O.C. (Adventure Racing Outdoor Challenge) in Canberra. If you want to learn more about Alina's experience, make contact at [tomalina@bigpond.com](mailto:tomalina@bigpond.com)

## **II The Quick Tip: How to Encourage Real Growth**

Real growth and break throughs often happen outside of where we intended them. Remember how often you sit on your desk pondering over a seemingly unsolvable problem? You decide to get a bit of fresh air and sure enough while you are walking down the street, this great idea hits you. Sounds familiar?

I for myself get some of my best ideas while exercising. I don't consciously think about a problem but things just come to me.

How do you or your staff get your best ideas? Where and when do you think best? What is the most productive rhythm of work and play for you and your business? What structures, systems and spaces can you put in place to make sure you get a lot of 'real growth time'?

## **III Resources 4 You**

Some great reading over the holidays:

Growing Your Business (Fireside 1988) by Paul Hawken

This is a great book for building a business based on your true values. Hawken - who still runs the premier mail-order garden tool company Smith&Hawken - shows that the successful business is an expression of an individual person. His main hypothesis is that the most successful business, your idea for the business, will grow from something deep within you which is so unique that anyone else who tried to execute it would fail. This is an easy read and an inspiring book for anyone in a small business.

The Origin and Evolution of New Business (Oxford University Press 2000) by Amar V. Bhide

If you don't shy away from a bit of economics and appreciate a certain academic rigor, this is the book for you. The author - a Professor at Harvard Business School - who has been featured in the October Inc. Magazine which such controversial statements as: "in these highly

turbulent markets, the cost of doing the analysis or writing a business plan exceeds the benefits." studied hundreds of successful ventures and combines this with modern theories of business and economics. One of the many insights he provides is that the stage of the market a business is playing in (e.g. growing or mature) has a much greater impact on the success of a new venture than for example the personality or management capabilities of the owner.

#### **IV Meet the Coach and Media Mention**

For our Seattle subscribers:

##### **BUSINESS START UP WORKSHOP**

If you are thinking of, or are in the process of, starting your own business or if you want to learn how to run your business better join me for a three hour workshop: 'THINKING OF BECOMING YOUR OWN BOSS?' at Centerpoint, the Northwest's leading center for life and career renewal, based in downtown Seattle. For more information send me an email or check: [www.centerpointonline.org](http://www.centerpointonline.org)

The workshop will be offered on:

- February 25<sup>th</sup> 2003 6pm and
- April 8<sup>th</sup> 2003 6pm.

And will cost \$54 for non-members and \$45 for Centerpoint Associate Members

##### **TRAINING TO REJUVENATE**

With the new year approaching fast, it is time to think again about getting back into shape. If you enjoy a good cycling work out please join me for my weekly indoor power cycling (spinning) class:

- Mondays from 12 noon to 1pm at the Sound Mind and Body Gym - Seattle's premier Gym for Power Cycling classes. ([www.smbgym.com](http://www.smbgym.com)) on 1165 Eastlake Avenue. For non-members: \$10 per visit or \$80 for a 10 visit punch card.

##### **SPORTS ETC STORY**

Check out the December issue of SPORTS ETC, for a story about the lessons I learnt from my athletic career for my business coaching. (Sports Etc Volume XV, Issue 12. December 2002)

+++++LET ME KNOW WHAT YOU THINK+++++  
Simply reply to this newsletter. I would love to hear from you.

---

ChangeAbility is published by Business Coach Urs Koenig MBA, PhD.  
Visit his website: [www.koenigcoaching.com](http://www.koenigcoaching.com) and make contact  
Via [urs@koenigcoaching.com](mailto:urs@koenigcoaching.com)  
or call: ++ 1 206 322 1335

Copyright KoenigCoaching, 2002. All rights reserved

To subscribe send an email to [koenigcoaching@mktengine.com](mailto:koenigcoaching@mktengine.com) with the  
work "SUBSCRIBE KC" in the subject line.

To unsubscribe send an email to [koenigcoaching@mktengine.com](mailto:koenigcoaching@mktengine.com) with  
the work "UNSUBSCRIBE KC" in the subject line.