



Moving On Up

What does it take to conquer the summit—of your career?

By Kristy Holland

If only you could actually *climb* a ladder. Or if one quick swing with an ice ax would wipe out a glass ceiling. If advancing a career was as physical, or as literal as the euphemisms suggest, this industry of peakbaggers and semi-pro athletes would be laden with CEOs and overflowing with VIPs.

The reality is that there are only a few career pinnacles in the outdoor—or any—industry. And the competition to get there is fierce. "A full 87 percent of the membership of the Outdoor Industries Women's Coalition's (OIWC) have a college education," says Amy Luther, the non-profit's Director of Membership and Education Programs. Luther says that might help explain why career advancement and professional development ranked as top priorities for respondents of the OIWC's 2009 career satisfaction survey.

In response to their members' requests and priorities, the organization chose "Advancing Your Career" as its theme for 2010. "Whether you're an executive, a mid-level manager, or in an entry-level position—you're always considering how to advance," Luther says. The OIWC hopes that a year-long focus on career development skills through seminars and regional events will translate to a leg-up for its membership, many of whom have already developed self-confidence and capability through their experience as guides-, athletes-, and adventurers-turned-professionals in the industry.

But paddling technique and expertise on the trail—while they might help accomplish personal goals—don't always translate to skill sets that will land you atop the Everest of your career path. Grunt-and-muscle determination counts for something, but the OIWC has identified nine career-related skill sets to address in an effort to help women achieve their professional goals: business planning and financing; verbal and written communication; decision making; interview preparation; financial basics; marketing; becoming a leader; collaborative leadership; and listening. The 2010 agenda begins March 25th with a panel discussion on *Advancing Your Career* in Burlington, Vermont.

Perusing the list of skills, Colleen Clark, one of the panelists in the upcoming event, identified listening skills as the most important one in her rise from the retail floor where her career began. Clark has been the Senior Director of People, "basically human resources," she says, at Eastern Mountain Sports for more than 22 years, and credits her listening skills as giving her an edge when it comes to her success. "When you're a good listener, you start to hear where there is potential to collaborate and you see places to start finding solutions," she says, "there are a lot of times when the idea being presented doesn't fit everyone's needs, but good listening helps us collaborate and get to something even better."

For Carolyn Cooke, another panelist lined up for the March 25th event, her go-to skill isn't as clear cut. "They're all really important," she says. Cooke is President and co-founder of the women's apparel company Isis, but started her outdoor industry career in retail and as a guide. "You'll learn different things in large or small companies," she says, "but the people who are successful are the ones who tackle whatever project that's in front of them and use the opportunity to master skills that may not be part of their current job description."

Cooke suggests that by exposing yourself to skills one at a time and whenever the opportunity arises will help you make progress toward your goals and maybe even help you define them. "Trusting that you've got the basics mastered gives you the confidence to move on to new challenges," she says.

The first step toward mastering the basics? Exposure, mentorship and education: the goals of the OIWC's panels, seminars and networking nights. With the same amount of training you might devote to self arrests or navigating singletrack, you can hone your career-advancement skill set and begin the long climb to the pinnacle of your career.

Start the journey at the OIWC event in Burlington on March 25th, or check out their website (www.oiw.org) for additional career-development resources.

Kristy Holland is the Editor in Chief of *Women's Adventure* magazine, the only sports, travel, fitness and lifestyle magazine published specifically for active women. The magazine's spring issue hits newsstands March 17th and is also available online at www.womensadventuremagazine.com.

Outdoor Industries Women's Coalition is a membership community of professionals in the outdoor industries united to provide power, influence and opportunity for women in outdoor-related businesses and to generate champions to inspire other women. For more information, visit their website at www.oiw.org.