

THE HUNT FOR MEANING

by Chuck Chapman, M.A.



A decade ago, I was in the badlands of the Colorado Rockies on a hunt for self-discovery. My quest was simple; find meaning in life. Admittedly, a large task, but having spent years wandering around corporate America, I thirsted for answers. Each day I spent confined in a cubical, illuminated by soul-siphoning fluorescent lights, burning questions grew; “Is this it? Is this the American Dream?” Working paycheck-to-paycheck and striving for titles on a business card had lost its allure. I felt trapped, unable to find the escape hatch.

The beauty of the Rockies in and of itself was worth the price of admission. Even now the memory of thin air, harsh mountains terrain and the smell of Western Yellow Pine takes my breath away. Unplugged from the rest of the world my mind felt quiet, and for the perhaps the first time, I was beginning to hear my heart's desires. Looking back

on this experience, I see it was the beginning of an awakening that eventually led to finding my calling as a counselor and writer.

On one afternoon particular, while on a hike, I came upon a small herd of Mountain Goats on a ridge. These fantastic creatures were climbing the tiles stones and sedimentary rocks, looking like a photo straight out of the National Geographic magazine. I watched in amazement as they ascended the treacherous rocks with the ease of the most seasoned mountaineers. I took a seat on a fallen log to witness and take in all the splendor. As I looked up the mountain side, I noticed a larger Mountain Goat. He was higher on the ridge than the others and stood statuesque as if he were himself carved from granite. He stood surefooted but immovable. For what seemed like an eternity he waited. "Why was he hesitating? Was he trapped? Was he afraid to move forward?" Thinking to myself, I could relate. Then in a single leap, he shot across more than eight-feet effortlessly to another small ledge. Continuing to scale the mountain as if on a Sunday stroll, he lead the way as the others followed the path he blazed. It was inspiring!

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The idea of "being stuck" is a frequent topic among the people I with whom I work. These intelligent, passionate folk, feel trapped as if on the side of a mountain teetering towards death or destiny. A client of mine recently lamented."I don't know what I'm supposed to do or what direction to go with my life, but I sure know that this isn't it! I feel imprisoned by my fear." This man, like many others, is looking for the magic answer that will sooth his soul, bring him the passion that creates intrinsic motivation. After our session, I recalled that distant moment on the mountain. What did I learn from that experience? What teachings from the Mountain Goat could I share? As I thought about it this is what I learned and discovered:

1. Vision: Mountain goats have stellar eyesight: They can see miles away, giving them an advantage of plotting a course in advance. The first part of having a vision is looking beyond your circumstances and developing a picture of who you want to become. When you focus on developing character, you are on your way to discovering the vision of who you want to become. Personal character is forged by defining your values and living by them relentlessly. By zeroing in on the "who" rather than the "what" or "why" your vision comes into focus.

2. Purpose: The Mountain Goat climbs mountains to survive. Their reason is simple, find food and avoid predators. Your purpose, however, is more complex than merely surviving. Purpose comes from aiming towards something larger than self-service and

instant gratification. Purpose is revealed when character is developed: A soldier's mission is to protect, a teacher imparts knowledge, doctors heal, writers inspire, and Mountain Goats climb. When you ask the question "To whom can I serve?" you are on your way to finding purpose. As Alber Schweizer said, "The purpose of human life is to serve and to show compassion and the will to help others."

3. Willingness to go where others are not: A Mountain Goat thrives in places no other creature would be willing to live. Many times I have found success simply because I was willing to do what others were not. These things are never fun: Making a cold call, working with no guarantee of a payoff, putting in overtime and going the extra mile. When I am willing to do what others are not, and fill in the gaps others leave, success will be all the more satisfying.

4. Remain Balanced: Mountain Goats have uniquely designed hooves that allow them to grip small ledges and remain balanced. Losing balance in life is easy. The tendency is to put too much effort in one domain of life can throw us off kilter. Too much focus at work can make tip things over with your family. Too much focus on achievement and you miss out on the small things that make life beautiful. Finding the balance where equal amounts of attention towards each of life's domains will create a well-rounded contentment and keeps you from slipping down the slippery slope of failure.

5. In the End You Gotta Jump: Be aware that analysis by paralyzes is the enemy. Sure you need to assess the ground, but you got to make a move. Mark Twain said "Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do, than the things you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover." Momentum happens by moving. Pick a direction, take a calculated risk, then make a leap towards your destiny.

Many times life will bring us to the edge of uncertainty. Winds may blow you off course, obstacles jump in your way, and failure might loom just around the corner. Nevertheless if like the mountain goat, you are willing to taking the time to focus your vision, develop your purpose, find your balance then jump, you will ascend the heights of any mountain life summons before of you.

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