

REACHING YOUR NEXT SUMMIT!

9 Vertical Lessons for Leading with Impact

Manley Feinberg II

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PRAISE FOR *REACHING YOUR NEXT SUMMIT*

“Manley’s Vertical Lessons have made a significant impact on me, our organization and our customers. He has written a business and personal leadership book that is truly exceptional. The narrative is intensely engaging, worth a read on its own. Not only that, the insights he puts in your hands are easy to implement and will help you climb from where you are, to your vision of what’s possible. Put this book in the hands of your people and you will be better for it.”

Vance Brown, Executive Chairman and Co-founder of Cherwell Software, author of *No Matter the Cost*

“Reaching Your Next Summit! gives us an inspiring inside view of Manley Feinberg’s truly extraordinary journeys toward life’s summits. His fascinating stories range from one of climbing to rarely-reached heights in remote Kyrgyzstan, to one of leaving a longstanding corporate leadership role to pursue his passion for speaking—actions that may seem equally out of reach to most of us. With authenticity and heart, Manley inspires us to deeply reflect, reconsider perceived limits, and take action to reach our own personal summits, however out of reach they may seem. This is a book that impacts life and leadership, at work and at home.”

Laurie Ferrendelli, Director of Organizational Development at Barry-Wehmiller Companies, Inc.

“Reaching Your Next Summit! is a captivating cliff hanger with real life experiences translated into mind, heart, and soul inspired lessons. Anyone searching for inspiration, motivation, and encouragement to reach beyond the obstacles holding them back must read this book. You will not be able to put this book down from the moment you open it.”

Daryl Pint, CEO of Ceva Biomune

“This book isn’t just about leadership and breaking barriers. It’s about heart. It’s about grit. It’s about tapping into the core of who you are to find the greatness that lies within. Anyone looking to scale the next summit in their life should read this book.”

Lt. Col. Rob “Waldo” Waldman, New York Times bestselling author of *Never Fly Solo*

“I found this book captivating, the lessons both powerful and immediately accessible. After a lifetime of sales and leadership experience, I can say this is a book that will make a difference in the hands of your people. Your sales teams will see the way to building more meaningful relationships and gain clarity to reach the summit of the mountains your business is climbing. Every person who reads it will be both inspired and equipped to bring their best to life everyday. Read it and you will be rewarded.”

Andreas Buhr, entrepreneur, speaker and author

“Reaching Your Next Summit! will help you drive ROI for your business and life! I was mesmerized and completely engaged by Manley’s writing style from start to finish. I found his principles fully aligned with strategies and tactics that I have seen develop and grow strategic partnerships for decades. This is an exceptional work that will help you climb the mountains of life, and achieve more.”

Ed Rigsbee, Author of *Developing Strategic Alliances*

“Amazing. And beautiful. Manley’s genuine spirit and soul bring an inspired journey for all leaders to breathe in, contemplate, and put into action. With a scenic backdrop, walls to scale, and Manley as your guide—you will be embracing your new summit! On belay!”

Julie L. Mohr, International Speaker and Author

*“Are you wanting to thrive in your business and life and ultimately find the pinnacle of joy and success? Practicing the right skills not only gets you there, it is mandatory. In *Reaching Your Next Summit!* Manley uses his experience in mountain climbing and the business*

world to give us practical lessons we can implement now. He lays the foundation required for entrepreneurs, career decisions, or life aspirations throughout every chapter. It's a must read for any leader who wants to stand on their next summit."

Mike Kublin, President of People Tek and author of 12 Steps For Courageous Leadership: Start your Journey now!

"In this book Manley Feinberg does a great job of reminding us all that anything is possible when you lead with gratitude and speak heart to heart. In each Vertical Lesson he spells out how leaders can reach their next summit."

Thom Singer, author of Some Assembly Required: How to Make, Grow and Keep your Business Relationships

"A mind-blowing metaphorical journey into the world of practical leadership, wisdom and application. With so many books and perspectives in this paradigm it can be difficult for potential readers to determine where they should endeavor their time. Manley craftily takes you by the hand onto the ledges of a pulsating journey which engages you to re-define and re-articulate a strategic vision on both a personal and business level. On Belay Manley...and a most sincere thank you for your brilliance and ultimate sophistication to tackle such a misunderstood principle. Your metaphor pours across the pages and impacts the reader whether they are in a boardroom, parenting, coaching or working in a business environment. I can't wait for the next book. A great book's influence is never neutral. Manley pushed this theory into overdrive."

Mark Maloney, CEO Maloney Global Group of Companies

"Feinberg's Reaching Your Next Summit! weaves page-turning personal climbing narrative with astute and insightful Vertical Lessons, a must read for those who want to lead with integrity and thrive in today's uncertain environment."

Matt Walker, author of Adventure in Everything

“Vertical Lessons provides inspiring, thought provoking insights and examples on how to be a better leader and teammate. Things we can all do to lead from wherever we are.”

Phil Gerbyshak, leadership and sales expert, author of Leadership Gone Social

“Reaching Your Next Summit! is unlike other leadership books. It challenged me. It made me uncomfortable. And it was exhilarating! Read this and take your life and business to the next level.”

Stephen Shapiro, author of Best Practices are Stupid

“You don’t need to be a leader, climber, or have a title to benefit from this book. I could not put this book down and have already benefited directly from it in my business and personal life. Page after page is filled with my notes, highlights and personal epiphanies. I am recommending this to all my clients. I don’t know of a more effective resource to help those who are ready to grow their business and their personal contribution to the world. Read it. Engage in the simple and effective exercises. Then reflect, and get ready to step onto Your Next Summit!”

Ed Tate, CSP and World Champion of Public Speaking

“I am a goal-driven, purpose driven person and my long-term ambition is to empower others. Manley’s Vertical Lessons brought me clarity through his real-life stories, pictures, and words of wisdom. His guidance and lessons are used to answer our doubting questions, ‘Is it worth it? What should I do?’ Thank you Manley for your ability to motivate others through your personal examples of Vertical Lessons.”

Deb Bostic, Senior Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer, First Bank

“What a great book. Manley Feinberg teaches us how leading others to their success will take us to new levels of success as well. This fun and compelling book is filled with great stories that captivate, teach and show us how to grow.”

Sam Silverstein, CSP, author of Non-Negotiable and No More Excuses, Past President, The National Speakers Association

“What an amazing story to help leaders climb to the next level. Manley has used his spectacular adventure to illustrate lessons that every leader should learn. Get your copy and apply these principles today!”

Stephen Tweed, CSP, CEO of Leading Home Care

“Manley has redefined the meaning of reaching your personal peak! His leadership lessons will take you straight to the top with his engaging and practical approach to success. Open your heart and mind and get ready for a life changing experience that will have immediate and lasting effects!”

Jason Young, Founder LeadSmart, Inc., author of Culturetopia and former Leadership Development and Customer Service Trainer at Southwest Airlines

“In this smart, fast-moving book, Manley Feinberg lays out your foundations for success in leadership, in business, and in life. Manley takes climbing principles and practices, breaks them down into actionable “do-this-now” steps giving leaders at every level the mindset, skill set, and toolset for lasting impact. If you’re looking to upgrade your career, your team, or your organization—look no further. THE leadership book for the rest of us is here. Buy a copy for everyone on your team. Yes, it’s that good.”

David Newman, CSP, author of Do It! Marketing

“This book is a rare work. Part epic mountain adventure, part guidebook to leading a more productive life, it is both engaging and practical. Manley connects in a very personal way and motivates people to step up and lead, regardless of their title. It will help light the fire in you and your employees, and drive the performance you need to impact your bottom line.”

Eric Chester, Author of On Fire At Work: How Great Companies Ignite Passion in Their People Without Burning Them Out

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Foreword

I was lost in the depth of the Amazon jungle for weeks, bare to the bone, no food, no knife, no fire; one man against the most extreme natural elements, alone. Torrential storms swayed the giant trees, causing them to collapse all around. Flooding rivers chased me in the woods trying to drown me; deadly swamps held me prisoner for long, sticky hours. Jaguars were stalking me day and night, wild boars, venomous snakes, wasps, and parasites; my body was one open wound. I hadn't eaten for days, reduced to skin hanging on bones. My lifelong dream of grandeur and famed adventure had turned into the worst nightmare. It is there that I found myself, and from there I rose, a different man, a hero, for sometimes you must get lost to find yourself.

Maybe this is why we do crazy things.

George Mallory famously said he attempted to climb the Everest because it was there. Mallory never made it to the summit, but he died trying. And so died Colonel Fawcett in his obsession to find Eldorado. The mad longing for the unattainable; insatiable passion; pushing oneself beyond what's possible, just to touch the aloof. An urge that defies rational thinking just as it defies gravitational laws, as it breaks the barriers between the force of nature and the human nature in a holy reunion, making them one and the same.

One cannot conquer a mountain, said Hillary, after his ascent to the Everest, but rather the mountain allows us to conquer ourselves.

And then comes Manley. He knows he cannot subdue a rock. The rock is simply there, ever protruding, omnipresent, deep in its silent contemplation, oblivious. The rock is there, untamable, unbeatable, mute and dumb, indifferent to your desires and efforts.

And yet it is encouraging you, Manley; it inspires you, it dares you, and in its infinite generosity, it allows you to shape your life's meaning against it. No, you don't try to conquer it; it is your fears that you want to meet. It will set your demons free; you will have let go of your pretense before you can soar free like a peregrine. You did it Manley; you broke the limiting shackles of your consciousness that kept you affixed to the ground and anchored your body to the vertical rock, ready to die or to reach the top.

But why did you leave the safety of your home Manley, why did you travel so far beyond the remote prairies of Kyrgyzstan to those hidden valleys? For the same reason I was lost in the depths of the Amazon; you came to live or die here because you knew life is meaningless unless you find yourself. And what an adventure you lived to tell, what a wall you chose to climb; the madness, the passion, the punishment.

Placing your life in the hands of a brooding, epileptic stranger? And in turn holding his life and that of his wife in your tired, blistered hands, on belay? There, on the rock, light-footed as an ibex, you were finally free, and you knew you belonged.

But there, at the summit, like the Buddha, you understood something else. Attaining it for yourself couldn't be the goal. It was sharing "the way" with others that is your true, noble calling.

And we follow you, riveted to your stories, joyously crying at the summit, tragically shedding a tear for the loss of a beloved friend. You use the rocks as metaphors, drawing from their silence the deepest insights that have transformed your life forever and will transform ours as well, if we dare to let go, knowing we've got you on belay.

Yossi Ghinsberg

International best-selling author of *Jungle*

Preface

It was November 3, 2014, in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. I had just wrapped up the first of fifty keynotes to the management team at Menards, the third-largest home improvement retailer in the United States. In the audience was fellow speaker and friend, Bob Phibbs. That evening I was looking forward to the opportunity to get to know Bob, learn how I could support his efforts, and listen carefully to his feedback. I had learned from my father and stepfather in fourth grade that being coachable and seeking feedback from others was an essential key to dramatically speeding up the pace of improvement in any pursuit. I was not seeking validation (although that is helpful to keep the wind in the sails), but I valued Bob's qualified perspective as a successful professional speaker.

We connected for dinner at our hotel, then drove for what felt like an hour to the other side of Eau Claire to the one luxurious steak house in the region to celebrate the day. I'll never forget the single essential question Bob asked me in the first five minutes of dinner. "Manley, I have a pressing question, and I bet that the rest of the audience wants to know too—why do you climb? I don't get it. It looks pretty challenging!"

For the next seventy minutes, I tried my best to explain to Bob what had inspired me to seek out adventure and extraordinary physical challenges in my life. It was a struggle, at best, and I don't

think I ever *did* come up with a reasonable explanation. I did, however, stumble up a realization.

I believe the reason I climb is the same reason you may be reading these words right now. That is, you have caught a glimpse of what is possible in one or more areas of your life, and you just can't settle for the way things are anymore.

Have you ever walked into your home after a challenging day and vented your frustrations to a loved one? And then heard this response? "If it is so stressful and challenging, why don't you do something different?"

But you don't quit. You keep coming back to face the challenges.

What is it about challenges that engage us at a deeper level and bring out our very best?

Challenges expose our vulnerabilities, forcing us to examine our weaknesses while leveraging our strengths. Of course, there is always an alternative: stop stepping up to challenging scenarios and accept mediocrity. This is a course taken by many people. I don't believe it is always by deliberate decision, but through a life of choices and circumstance, they find themselves, as Henry David Thoreau said, "leading lives of quiet desperation."

If you believe there is something more, this book is for you. You know a more engaged, fulfilled life is possible, and you believe your work on this earth is not done yet. You can't stand the thought of just coasting under the radar, and are ready to leverage new strategies and tools to help you realize more. More focus, more courage, more commitment, and more momentum to reach your next summit—and beyond.

That is why I climb mountains.

Most of my time is spent climbing the same mountains you are facing, though. Not physical mountains; the challenge of growing my business. The challenge of engaging my team at a deeper level. The challenge of making the personal choice to exercise and eat well. The challenge of ensuring I have enough of my very best to serve my family and friends every day. The challenge of supporting my clients in a way that enriches their lives and helps them achieve their work and life objectives.

When we are able to live life in a way that brings more joy to our time here, and helps us share the best of what we have to give with those who love and need us most, life is good. That's why I climb the physical and day-to-day mountains we face.

I believe the human drive to improve is within us all, calling us to realize more of what is possible. I want to invite you to join me in renewing your commitment to keep climbing, to reach for excellence and to realize more of your potential on this life journey. In the pages that follow, you will learn nine lessons and one essential question from *The Vertical* that will dramatically improve your ability to reach your next summit and beyond.

The Vertical is what I call the realm in climbing where you have left behind the comfort and security of your day-to-day horizontal existence. You have sharpened your focus and committed to something worth reaching for. In *The Vertical*, the more you *embrace the exposure*, the more you thrive.

If you choose to implement these lessons in your life, I can confidently promise you three things:




ONE: You will master the *Art of the Restart*, and you will realize more momentum.

TWO: You will learn to battle emotional gravity every day in the small choices you make between *what is* and *what could be*.

THREE: You will see intangible and tangible results in your life.

Enhance your experience:

I invite you to visit ReachingYourNextSummit.com for free resources, full color photos and video to enrich your experience with this book.

-  Access to free content updates, templates, and exercises
-  Vertical Lessons Strategic Summary PDF
-  Full color photos and videos

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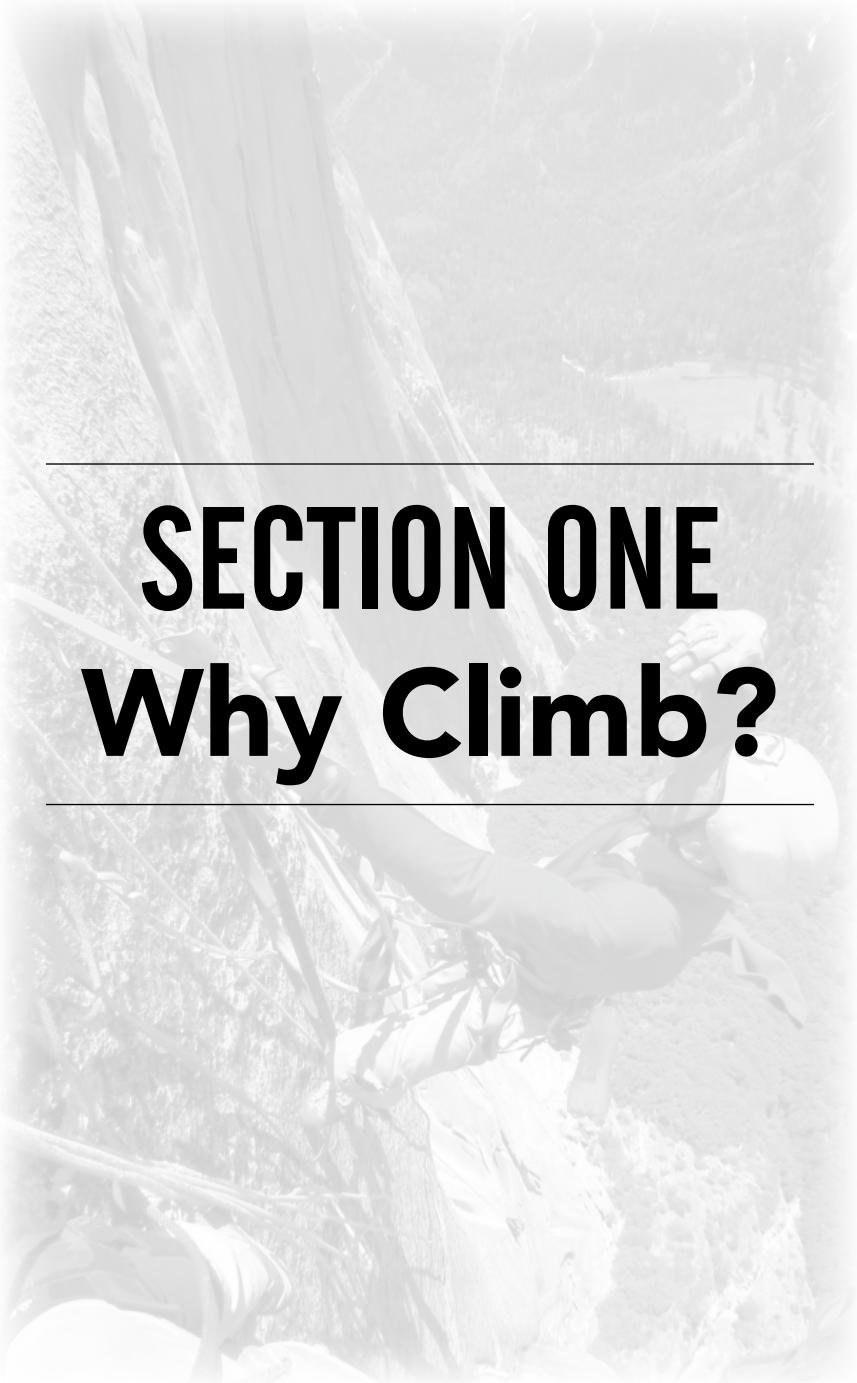
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SECTION ONE

Why Climb?

CHAPTER 1

The Call to Reach Your Next Summit

The seed was planted in my mind in the fall of 1997. As I opened an issue of *Rock and Ice* magazine, I was swept away into a mysterious and remote corner of the world. The 20-page special report was about a country whose terrain was more than 90 percent mountains, most of which had yet to be climbed: Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia. A primary focus of the piece was the Aksu Valley; considered to be one of the last frontiers in “big-wall” climbing, due to the size, magnitude, and incredible number of sheer granite faces in this region.



Big-wall climbing is a type of rock climbing in which a climber ascends a rock wall so tall that you typically have to live on the sheer vertical face for anywhere from a few days to multiple weeks to reach the summit. Big-wall climbing is often logistically complicated by the need to haul heavy amounts of gear to eat, sleep, and survive in The Vertical, completely self-supported.

In 1983, the first Soviet climbers had entered the Aksu Valley. In 1995, the first American climbers visited as part of the elite North Face Expedition team. Something about that area, as described in that article, captured my spirit more than the typical coverage of the latest hot spot on the planet. I believe it was primarily how it was accurately positioned as the ultimate exotic big-wall climbing destination in the world. So many walls with so much potential. An extraordinary culture in a region that was rich with uncharted opportunity. Of course, there's always a catch. Not only was the region very difficult to access due to its remote location on earth, but the logistics of traveling in the area were further complicated by political instability, corruption at all levels of government, and extensive social disruption fueled by Islamic fundamentalists who were active in the region. This was surely enough to scare me right out of my dream were it not for a serious advantage that developed next.

Less than a month later, I was sitting with my brother, Craig, at lunch in Louisville, Kentucky. He announced a recently materialized opportunity to go to Kyrgyzstan to fight poverty from the ground up through the efforts of microcredit banking. Craig had joined the Peace Corps after college and was on the frontier of microcredit financial development in Third World countries. It has proven to be one of the most effective tools for stimulating and reversing poverty in developing countries. From the villages to even larger cities, people have no means to get small-business loans or even basic resources. This revolutionary approach works by avoiding corrupt governments and the trickle-down flow of traditional aid monies. Microcredit instead flows directly into

the hands of those who need it most in the suppressed economic environments.

I remember sitting at the table when Craig enthusiastically described the region and made his invitation official. “Bro, you must come visit and do some climbing! The climbing is way above my skills level, so I won’t make a great partner on the walls, but I can help you get there. Regardless of what you climb, we’ll have the time of our lives. It’s going to be amazing.”

For two years I trained, researched, planned, and scraped up money to fund the expedition. My father committed to helping me with my plane ticket, and my fiancé committed to being there when I returned. This allowed me to check off two of my top concerns. There were several obvious questions to answer, and many I’d never even imagined. What mountains would I climb? How would I get there? What was the weather like? What was the nature of the rock in the region? Was a climb even possible for me? Answers to those questions quickly revealed that climbing in Kyrgyzstan would, at best, require skills beyond my current skill set, and without question be way beyond my comfort zone.

Another critical challenge would be to find the right climbing partner.

I knew from past climbing failures and successes that *climbing with incredible partners only* was an essential element for success—but who was going to be willing to go with me to Kyrgyzstan? I tried persuading all of my former partners and friends who were serious climbers, many of whom were professional climbers at that time. Despite my best efforts, I struggled for months to find a partner from the United States to join me and make the epic

adventure. Most of my professional climbing friends were not available due to other expedition commitments, and my other friends had an impressive list of reasons and excuses why they couldn't seize this opportunity. Three months before I was due to leave, I still did not have a partner lined up, but other possible options emerged.

My brother made friends with an American climber based in Kyrgyzstan who was interested in climbing with me. This was better than no partner, but not ideal. I had never met "Josh," and had no idea whether he even came close to fitting the profile of my *Incredible-Partner-Only* principle. I had to make a difficult decision. Was I willing to travel halfway around the world without a partner and hope that a someone I had never met might work out?

By this point, I was quite discouraged and overwhelmed at the thought of traveling with 280 pounds of baggage by myself. I decided it was worth a shot. The breakthrough that helped me take the leap was accepting the reality that this was *my only chance* to get over there and possibly climb.

Finally, the moment to leave arrived. July 1, 1999. My fiancé, Emily, made the three-hour drive from Paducah, Kentucky to the St. Louis, Missouri airport. She dropped me off and I hopped on a TWA flight. I landed in Detroit, Michigan, and was held over on the tarmac by a three-hour thunderstorm. This put me into the JFK airport at 11:30 p.m., missing my Turkish Air flight into Istanbul, Turkey the next day.

Little did I know, the challenges were just beginning.

I remember approaching the TWA counter and how callous the agent was. She didn't seem to care that the trip of a lifetime that I had planned for two years was in jeopardy. My heart sank

as I listened to her solution. “I’ve booked you through Moscow in five days; until then, you’ll need to find your own hotel and accommodations in New York City while you wait for our next available route into central Asia.”

I tried to explain to her that if I didn’t make it into central Asia within forty-eight hours, it would completely throw off the tight timeline of my expedition and ruin my entire trip. She had no sympathy whatsoever. “Well, you do have one other option. I can fly you back to St. Louis in the morning—that’s it. Take it or leave it.”

Great. “I guess I’m going to Moscow.”

The walk from that ticket counter to the baggage claim counter one level below was a long sad trudge. I tried to stand patiently in line at the baggage counter where there were three agents working. By the time I got to the front, my face had grown so long and depressed I probably looked as though I had just lost a dear friend.

The baggage agent looked at me and said, “What in the world is wrong with you? You’re not having a good day, huh?”

“No. My dream trip has just been completely destroyed.”

She asked what I was referring to. I explained.

“I have a dream to go to central Asia to climb. I have been planning for two years and am desperately trying to save this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. If I do not get out on a flight tonight into Istanbul, there is no way the trip will happen due to the limited flights into central Asia and the logistics of the entire journey.”

She turned to her colleague, a gentleman on her left, and started mentioning a few airlines and codes. He jumped on the phone and made two calls. Meanwhile, she and the agent to her right were frantically typing on their keyboards.

Then he hung up the phone, reached down below the counter,

and broke out a little metal lockbox. It was a cash box, maybe 4" tall × 8" wide. You know the type, with the three dials on top that you might have used when you were a kid to put your allowance in, and a few collectibles?

I'll never forget him looking up with a smile. "It just might be your lucky day," he said, as he whipped out a paper airline ticket. I didn't even know such a thing existed, but there it was, a three-layer, carbon-copy form about the size of an old manual credit card slip. He proceeded to hand-write a plane ticket on American Airlines for me to fly through London into Istanbul, narrowly getting my itinerary back on track—if all the flights were perfectly on time.

Realizing that these people might be saving my dream expedition right in front of me, I immediately switched into gratitude mode, even before I was convinced that their efforts would save the day.

The Magic of Gratitude Momentum

This is a little technique I stumbled upon that evening. As soon as you see someone making *any* effort to help you, immediately start thanking them for helping you. I have seen this build what I call *gratitude momentum*. As you continue to thank people for helping you and express your gratitude (even if they resist or respond with “now don’t get your hopes up....”) it builds momentum and rapport so fast, I’ve never had someone not help me get the outcome I wanted, or a workable alternative. Try it; you’ll be stunned at how well it works if you are sincere. It is especially effective in the travel environment. Using this technique can give you a real advantage when most people are verbally attacking the gate agents. I could share a dozen other stories, but just trust me on this one.

While he came through on the ticket, he warned me. “Manley, I’m going to get you there with help from our friends over at American Airlines, but it is going to be very difficult for us to get your luggage on that plane with you. We will be working nonstop

on making sure it meets you in Kyrgyzstan, though. What you need to do now is literally *run*, grab a taxi to the other terminal, and then *run* to the gate for your flight.”

I don't know if you've ever been to JFK airport in New York, but let's just say it's a mess. Each terminal is like a separate airport, often requiring taxis or other ground transportation to move between, and more resilience than the average airport saga.

I thanked all three of my good-Samaritan gate agents, then took off running out the door. I hailed a cab to the next terminal and ran as fast as I could. As I approached the American Airlines gate, there was a mad, chaotic mob wrapped around the ticket counter. The gate agent was yelling at the crowd, “Go sit down if you want to get out of here tonight!”

Apparently the flight had been oversold and there were forty people standing at the gate still waiting to get on the flight. They pushed everyone back and made us all take our seats. “We said we will call you one at a time!”

At this point I presented my handwritten ticket and started into my sad little story, but the agent interrupted me: “Just sit down, sir! We will call you one at a time.”

I was convinced there was no possible way I would make it on this flight, as I didn't even have an actual ticket. The people surrounding me all had real printed tickets, purchased weeks and months in advance. I began to spiral again into a slump of disappointment, exhausted and in disbelief that my trip could end right there in a JFK terminal.

They called one name after another. After about twenty-five people had been called up to the counter, they finally called my name. I ran up to the counter, grateful, thanking the gentleman. I

got on the plane and searched and searched as I walked down the aisles for an open seat and my seat number. The plane was packed full, and I could not find *any* open seats, nor my seat number. Then two more amazing strokes of good fortune befell me.

Number one, I had the very last seat on the plane.

Number two, this very last seat was at a major exit point, and there was a massive open area in front of me. Leg rooms for miles. Oh yeah.

I was able to completely stretch out for the long flight from JFK to London.

We left after midnight, more than an hour behind schedule, putting me in London the next day well behind the clock and again in danger of missing a critical connection.

My pace through the London airport was slowed by additional security measures, and by the time I made it to my Turkish Air gate, the doors were sealed on the jetway and the plane was pushing off. I was almost in tears as two young Turkish Air attendants approached me and said, “We are sorry sir, the plane has left.”

I told them, “I have to get to Istanbul or I will miss my flight into Kyrgyzstan. You only have two flights into Kyrgyzstan per week, so it is critical that I get into Istanbul by this evening. Please, help me. Please!”

They said, “We are sorry, sir. The plane is gone.”

Now I had given up all hope and was finally able to focus on practical matters like how badly I needed to pee. I told the young Turkish Air agent, “I’ve got to go to the restroom. I’ll be right back.”

The next thing I know, I am in the restroom and I hear, “Sir, sir, sir, your flight—we have flight.”

“What?” I ran out of the restroom. The Turkish Air attendants had convinced the flight, which by then had been pushed 100 yards off from the gate, to pull the plane back into the gate and unseal the door. They put me on that plane. *Seriously*. It happened.

Anything Is Possible

That entire series of events taught me an important lesson. Airlines, like all organizations, are run by people. When you get to people’s hearts, people can trump policy.

What I’ve learned after decades of crazy travel around the world is that people can do nearly anything if they really want to. There are secret codes, a double-secret handshake, or some other mystical protocol that airlines can leverage to get you out on flights. Doors can be reopened. You name it. So the next time you find yourself in an epic scenario where you need people to help you and they resist, don’t give up. Lead with gratitude, speak heart to heart, and know that anything is possible.

On a side note, when I have shared this miraculous chain of events with people, many have said, “Yeah, well, that doesn’t happen post-9/11.” Well, I’m here to tell you again that it *does*. In 2013, I again had a handwritten ticket bump me onto another airline, and have heard similar stories from fellow road warriors.

That long flight to Istanbul was a turning point. Not only did they bring the plane back to the gate for me, but I got an entire row all to myself to lie down and get some much-needed rest. I made it to Istanbul with plenty of time to catch the final flight into Central Asia.

During my layover in Istanbul, I engaged Turkish Air to help locate my baggage. The conclusion that I quickly came to was that it was definitely not in Istanbul, perhaps not even out of the United States yet.

Whoa.

I remember that sinking feeling as I stood at the Turkish Air desk. All my baggage was now officially lost. One small positive sliver of hope was the fact that Turkish Air stepped up and were accountable to me, their passenger. Remarkable, since they could have easily pointed the finger at my original carrier, TWA, or my transatlantic American Airlines flight. But no, they said, “We take responsibility for your baggage Mr. Feinberg. We are your airline for this trip, in partnership with these other carriers, and we will see that your baggage gets to you in Kyrgyzstan.”

“When?” I asked.

“When? Oh, sir, you know this will be very difficult. We cannot say when. Perhaps soon, but not now, nor tomorrow. Maybe next week.”

This was a *critical* setback. Here’s how this works: No baggage, no climbing. Trip over.

So what would you do at his point? I poured on the gratitude and carried on, extremely anxious, but holding on to hope with naive optimism.

Late that evening, I flew out of Istanbul on a six-hour flight into the heart of central Asia, Bishkek, the capital city of Kyrgyzstan. Finally, after three days of nonstop travel and one last long flight, I woke up as we made our final approach.