

Don't Step on the Rope! Reflections on Leadership, Relationships, and Teamwork
by Walt Wright

Paternoster Press, 2005, 154 pages.

Reviewed by David W. Gill www.ethixbiz.com

Walt Wright's book has been on my "must read" stack for a year or so. It was first published in 2005. It is not on the shelves at my local bookstore. But, believe me, this is a great little book I would recommend to all my business friends and EthixBizine readers. Often the most learning and best insight come from common sense, life experience, and the angles of vision provided by metaphor and cross-disciplinary thinking. Wright's book is a great case in point: he probes his decades of hiking and mountain-climbing for lessons on leadership and teams. As a lifelong city boy reading this book I alternated between envy of Wright and his climbing buddies --- and shivering at the thought of all the cold, wet, and misery (I'd generally prefer to sweat and learn in my Gold's Gym and local jazz clubs). But even a city kid like me found this book a real page turner filled with insight.

Climbers rope themselves together to make their most dangerous and challenging climbs. That way if someone starts to fall they are saved by the team to whom they are roped. Lesson: take care of what links you together, the rope; don't step on it, forget it, or think you can operate without it. The rope symbolizes what binds the team together: shared purpose, shared values. Diversity of gifts and abilities is great but it must not come at the expense of the critical shared purpose and values, the rope that unites the team. Leadership is in service of the team and its shared vision and values. Teams don't serve leaders so much as leaders serve teams.

Drawing on a gold mine of anecdotes and stories, mostly from Wright and company's own climbing experiences but with a few famous climbing stories about successes and disasters at Mt. Everest and elsewhere, *Don't Step on the Rope* comments and advises on unity and diversity, on responsibility, accountability, and trust. Safety, humor, memory, food and family receive great discussions. Wright concludes with a magnificent discussion of how we should measure success . . . in mountain climbing --- and in organizational/team life.

Ten chapters each end with a dozen or so provocative reflection/discussion questions. The sources cited in the text are, in my judgment, the best in the leadership/culture/team field today. I know a little more about hiking and mountain climbing now and I am appropriately impressed by those who pursue it. But I really got fired up about leadership and team building by *Don't Step on the Rope*. It is hard to imagine a better little book to use as the basis for a leadership retreat -- or for your own personal growth.