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# Everyman's Climb

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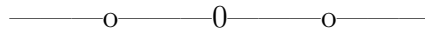
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## Synopsis

Hal and Verity represent two different philosophies of learning, one used by most of us. In today's world, authentic teaching is indeed a heroic act, but may not be the most popular. This piece draws distinctions between these choices, each time we teach a course, each day we walk into the classroom, and even when working with an individual student; these choices are ever present.

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Hal and Verity are two professional mountain guides. Hal will be training Promise to climb a mountain. Verity will be teaching Everyman to be a mountain climber.

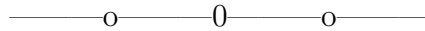


Hal has much experience with mountain climbing. He knows the mistakes that inexperienced mountain climbers make, especially, how they can jeopardize other climbers in their party. He is an accredited Mountain Guide and has a good reputation among his peers. He has the training of mountain climbers down to a fine science, but does not believe in giving Promise or any other client the independence to choose their own way up the mountain, for after all, he should know better than a novice. Thus, he selects a mountain that is not hard to climb, and, in fact, it is a mountain he has used over and over with all his clients. He does not want to run the risk of serious injury, physical or emotional.

Hal drills Promise with almost every technique he knows. He presents Promise with mock-up situations, close, Hal feels, to actual situations on the mountain. Hal does not miss a detail; he believes he should allow no leeway for the sake of safety. As they approach various parts of the mountain, Hal reviews what he has told Promise before, and in fact, helps Promise in locating handholds,

tying knots, belaying, repelling, and so on. He almost carries Promise at times. And, he apprises Promise of the difficulty involved in each situation before attempting it. Promise is assured of success and is not disappointed.

At their destination, Promise states that the climb was enjoyable. Everyone must climb a mountain at least once and do it with Hal because Hal makes learning mountain climbing seem easy.



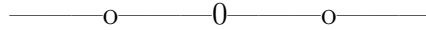
Verity has great dedication and conviction with insight into people. She loves people, and thoroughly enjoys everything connected with mountain climbing. Although a contrarian, she has an excellent track record teaching mountain climbers, many becoming experts in their own right.

Everyman comes to Verity by way of a recommendation from a friend, a former client of hers. Because Verity loves mountains, she has carefully chosen a particularly beautiful one with a range of degrees of difficulty. Verity tells Everyman only the minimal essentials to get started and to be safe. She has selected a spot on the mountain that is challenging in places; however, she believes Everyman should be able to find his own way to the summit with minimal guidance. She knows that at each stage of the climb Everyman will grow in strength and knowledge.

Verity is ready to adapt her training to Everyman's strengths, weaknesses, and the situation. Her philosophy is to guide Everyman as little as possible and Everyman still make the summit in an appropriate amount of time.

Everyman fails many times, becomes frustrated, discouraged, and momentarily considers stopping. He has fallen a number of times. He has gotten a little bloody on some of the more challenging parts of the mountain. Verity guards against Everyman seriously injuring himself or others. She knows a few scrapes and scuffs is good. It shows he has perseverance. However, he does learn to handle the low moments. The more challenging the circumstances the harder he tries. He knows that every failure contains a particle of success. Eventually, there are even times when Everyman succeeds and does not need Verity's help at all. Because of this, Everyman gains in strength, ability, and confidence. And, many times, Everyman has been beside himself with excitement, long before reaching the summit. Something inside Everyman tells him that he is really accomplishing something. He is being allowed to excel on his own, to see what he actually can do on his own. Even if he were to never reach the destination, the summit, Everyman knows that he will climb again and again.

He has become imbued with the spirit of mountain climbing. However, he does make it to the summit; Everyman is overcome with the joy and grandeur of it all. He sees, really sees, the what and the why of mountain climbing. Mountain climbing has gained a proselytizer of its virtues.



Both Promise and Everyman have gained something. Promise has mastered more mountain climbing techniques, has fewer cuts and bruises and also has less enthusiasm for mountain climbing than Everyman. In a sense, Everyman has the greater bedrock understanding, certainly, a greater sense of mountain climbing, and even greater enthusiasm than Promise. In fact, Everyman is more apt to be able to pull his own weight on a mountain climb. He developed a rugged individualism that will not fail him in anything he does even when away from mountain climbing.

The difference between our two mountain climbers is dramatic. One is a nominal participant, at best, not unlike a spectator at a sporting event. The other has undergone a transformative experience; he has acquired the soul of a mountain climber.

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**Postscript.** The names, Hal and Verity, came to me in my writing but did not have potential referents until later. After the fact, I realized that Hal, is the name of the computer in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, but I had other mental references as well, mathematics teachers, in fact, male and female. I hope the reader was reminded of their own Hals. I liked the name Verity, as a female name. It connotes of truth, which is what I think teachers are about. As it turns out, Verity is the name of an admirable character from the PBS series, *Poldark*. Also, I had at least one very good, female mathematics teacher, a colleague, in mind although that memory came after I had written the allegory. It is very interesting how people and ideas seem to seep into our subconscious but inform our writing.

I did think long and hard about gender and how my choices could be perceived. Promise could be male or female, but I was driven by the idea that all students, whether male or female, show promise. If asked, I would have said that she was female but, in my mind, the name Promise is neutral and represents all students. The use of the name Everyman refers back to a morality play of the 1500s. Everyman is in the canon of good English literature. At that time and until recent times, Everyman referred to men and women alike. Thus, the use of Everyman in the title not only refers to everyone, but has a historical ring to it as well.

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