

# IN PROPER

## Negotiating Kilimanjaro

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It's midnight, and I'm at Kibo Hut, 15,500 feet above sea level on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's tallest peak and the tallest free-standing mountain in the world. We're about to set out on a seven-hour, two-and-a-half-mile trek ascending 3,800 vertical feet to the summit, without oxygen assistance, through the deep darkness of this

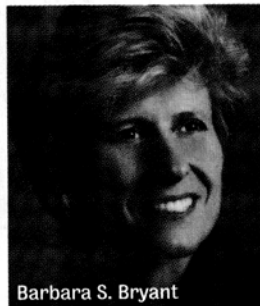
glacial zone. Having worked for 10 years as a mediator and 17 years as a litigator, I understood the principles underlying a successful negotiation. But in the 15 months that I planned and prepared for this moment—negotiating with myself, my body, my partner, my work schedule, and now with the mountain itself—I discovered how truly vital those principles are to achieving one's goals.

Climbing Mount Kilimanjaro had captured my imagination for decades. Now in my 50s, I determined to meet that challenge and signed up for the trip with my partner.

For the next year we planned, trained, and shopped. When our departure date arrived, we flew 24 hours from Oakland to Kilimanjaro International Airport near Arusha in Tanzania. En route to Tanzania, however, we both acquired an acute upper respiratory infection. A local doctor told us not to hike. We ignored this advice and set off with the group: eight hikers, 14 porters, a cook, and three guides. But after a day and a half on the mountain, at an altitude of 11,000 feet, our chests were burning, and it was hard to breathe, so we turned back.

I was stunned by this defeat. How could we be derailed by something as mundane as a chest cold? I tried to let

go of my disappointment, but I wasn't ready to give up and hatched a plan to return. I trained hard, hiking in the high altitude around Lake Tahoe, lifting weights, and clearing my mind of stress. Three months later my partner, who decided one attempt on Kilimanjaro was enough for her, lovingly sent me off for the second round.



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The renewed training paid off. After four days of hiking I was feeling strong. We hiked to Kibo, ate a light dinner, slept for three hours, and then woke for a late-night breakfast. Then, bundled in four layers of high-altitude clothing and with headlamps illuminating the trail, we set out into the freezing night.

Our head guide was in the lead, finding the path and setting the pace. We hiked mostly in silence, each watching the feet of the person ahead and taking quick glances at our surroundings. Around and below was total darkness. Above was a vast black sky with thousands of sparkling stars. The added luminescence of a half-moon enabled us to turn off our headlamps and hike by moonlight. I felt like a small speck in the universe and shared my sense of awe in hushed tones with my fellow hikers. The only other sounds were the steady

crunch of our boots and the rhythm of our breathing.

As we hiked higher, the weather got colder—between 0 and 10 degrees Fahrenheit. But the sky was clear, the wind remained tolerable, and it never snowed, so, for the most part, the exertion of the climb kept us warm. About 6:00 A.M., I looked off to the eastern horizon and saw a sliver of light; within minutes, a red glow appeared. It was a high point of the trip, signaling that the sun and the air temperature would soon rise, that we had done the bulk of the climb, and that we would indeed make it to the top.

By 6:30 A.M. we reached Gilman's Point, at 18,640 feet, the beginning of the summit ridge and end of the steepest ascent. We were tired but ecstatic. It took another hour to climb the last 700 feet to Uhuru Peak, the summit. To the west, as the sun rose, we saw the lower mountains and plains of Tanzania. Awed by our success, we stayed at the summit 30 minutes, taking pictures and marveling at the views.

By then, we were feeling some effects of low oxygen. I had developed a headache, and several of the others vomited as we started down. Back at Kibo Hut, we ate lunch and then descended to 12,200 feet, where we slept one more night in richer oxygen before hiking out the remaining eleven and a half miles (and 6,500 vertical feet) the final day.

The experience taught me that in life, just as in mediation, success depends on proper preparation, focus on one's priorities, treating defeats as motivation for future successes, and just going for it, whatever "it" may be. **CL**

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