

# Climb To The Summit!

Significance lives in relationships

By Joan O. Wright, MSW, MCC

**W**e spend our entire lives in relationships. They are what fuel us, frustrate us, foil us and also facilitate our ascent to Significance. True significance is handcrafted from relationships. The Summit Advance™ Model is a mountain analogy with three levels, and two sides. It is an upward trek, moving from the lower level of Survival into Success, and finally Significance. The “great separator” between the two sides of each level is self, or ego. The model is climbed by transitioning from self-focus to others-focus – the essence of thriving relationships.

Relationships at various levels and sides of this model are very different, beginning with entirely self-focused “Victims” who can, by choice, traverse to others-focused “Victors” at the Survival Level. Similar self-focused values are found on the left side of Success in “Limelighters” and those who have achieved some level of Significance as “Top Guns.” Once the self gives way to others, however, the Success and Significance levels are conquerable territory to those who stay on the right side as “Masters” and eventu-



ally “Sherpas.” The complete model contains detailed descriptions of the behaviors, attitudes, motivators and values of those who work and live at various places on the model, but the platform for all of them is how they co-exist in relationship.

Relationships reveal the real person. It is where the core is exposed, and where that person either keeps climbing, or gets caught in one of the many storms of life – sometimes quite alone. The model helps us recognize personal and professional relationship patterns that may either hold us back, or become the launching pad for Success and even Significance. Relationships at the various levels are quickly summarized below. Where are you and your clients climbing right now?

## **SURVIVAL**

### **The “Victim”**

Victims are self-focused, closed to others, skeptical, distrustful attention hogs. They are loners, impatient and intolerant. Contact with Victims is wearying, as they tend to “suck the life out” of others. Relationships with Victims are difficult, at best. Organizationally, these can be the most problematic performers as they are immune to feedback, and often act as “closed systems.” Their sense of reality is usually skewed.

### **The “Victor”**

Victors have traversed to an others-focus, are open and generally trusting, attentive listeners, patient and tolerant. Victors display positive attitudes and edifying actions that en-

rich, rather than deplete, relationships. They always seem to find the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, even while battling the storm that caused it. Victors at any level are desirable company – and highly valued in your company.

**SUCCESS**

**Fame: The “Limelighter”**

Limelighters must be on the top of the pile, recognized and applauded. They often seek “groupies” to feed their very hungry egos. Fame is the ultimate goal, not relationships. They can also get stuck in needing the approval of others. Relationships are surface-deep, tolerated only as long as Limelighters feel it serves their purpose. Everything is disposable, and negotiable. Within organizations, the Limelighter may start a lot of fires, but will rarely see them through to the end.

**Mastery: The “Master”**

No one reaches Mastery alone. Leaders working in Mastery know that relationships are key to creating followership. Although they may pour themselves into singular pursuits, they also intentionally pursue multi-dimensional fullness and interaction with others. The pursuit of Masters requires thousands of hours of practice. They tend to choose the best teachers and assignments to advance their goals, and as leaders organizationally, will make sure they are instructing people in the best possible way.

**SIGNIFICANCE**

**Best In The World: The “Top Gun”**

Top Guns have achieved Significance, generally due to self-promotion and the ability and resources to impact others. Although their significance to others is genuine, their true motives are not. Acts of “significance” are designed to gain attention. It is still about feeding the ego, and relationships are just as troubled here as for other levels on the left side of the model. Top Guns will use and lose relationships in order to be viewed as Best In the World. Self is still too important here. Relationships tend to be based in “hero-worship” both for those relating to the Top Gun, and for those this person considers mentors. The “Mokita”<sup>1</sup> phenomenon applies here, as often very real issues, such as the Top Gun’s real motives, are simply not discussed.

**Best For The World: The “Sherpa”**

As the name implies, Sherpas are self-less leaders dedicated to being Best FOR the world, not just Best IN the world. They are achievers who have also attained Significance, but their genuine concern is always for others. Sherpas are fully aware



of the people around them, and know that they are not just of Significance to the world at large, but to those who comprise their most inner world as well. Quantity of relationships is not as important as the quality of those most important to them. In organizational life, Sherpas are not just interested in their own teams winning, but all teams winning together. They are always developing the Sherpas of tomorrow.

**Relationships = Engagement**

Executive coaches know that a leader’s success hinges on employee engagement, which is now at all time critical lows. In all the suggested “fixes” for this alarming trend, there is scarcely a word about the obvious fact that strong relationships between leaders and employees can dramatically reverse these figures. Moving through the diagnostic and prognostic levels of the Summit Advance Model provides powerful tools to insure the leader is promoting solid, highly functioning workplace relationships – and every other kind of relationship. Growing these thriving relationships means moving from a focus of self to a focus on others. Like true mountain Sherpas, the leader goes first, then inspires and enables others to follow.

“Do not depend on the hope of results ... In the end, it is the reality of personal relationship that saves everything.” Whether at work or at home, for all ages, Thomas Merton was right. Significance lives in relationships. ●

<sup>1</sup> “Mokita” is a word in the Kavila language of Papua New Guinea, which in essence refers to “the truth we all know but agree not to talk about.”