



Extreme Teamwork

Christian Maurer and Thomas Theurillat
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Rating

8 9 Applicability
7 Innovation
7 Style

Focus

Leadership & Management

Strategy
Sales & Marketing
Finance
Human Resources
IT, Production & Logistics
Career & Self-Development
Small Business
Economics & Politics
Industries
Global Business
Concepts & Trends

Take-Aways

- Understanding your limitations is crucial to improving your odds of success.
- Constant communication is a vital part of teamwork. Make sure all team members share their knowledge with one another.
- Teams that focus on painstaking preparations are less likely to make mistakes.
- When confronted with setbacks, switch your mind-set from complaining about problems to searching for solutions.
- In highly stressful situations, focus on the factors you can control.

Review

Christian Maurer and Thomas Theurillat are the reigning champions and four-time winners of the Red Bull X-Alps, a grueling contest whereby competitors race from Salzburg, Austria, to Monaco – a distance of 1,600 kilometers [1,000 miles] – covering the entire distance only on foot or by paraglider. While Maurer embraces the physical challenge, Theurillat follows by car, providing support, food, water and instructions. *getAbstract* believes teams across all disciplines can draw important lessons about collaboration and endurance from tales of their exploits.

Summary

“You have to be prepared for everything, because in adventure [racing], you never know.”

“Good teamwork needs a lot of communication.”

“Problem talk creates problems. Solution talk creates solutions.”

Christian Maurer and Thomas Theurillat have won a number of adventure races through the harsh terrain of Europe’s Alps and Pyrenees. The duo’s exhausting, death-defying sport combines paragliding and mountaineering in competitions that can last a week or longer. The team’s various escapades teach several important lessons about teamwork and success:

- **Welcome confusion** – At one point during an X-Alps race, Maurer took a route that no other racer followed. Maurer and Theurillat weren’t certain if they had erred, but they embraced their confusion. Doubt prompts good questions and smart decision making.
- **Know your limits** – Before each race, a physician tests Maurer’s lung capacity and other metrics to make him aware of his body’s physical limitations. In one race, Maurer knew his peak heart rate was 172 beats per minute, so he wore a heart rate monitor to ensure he didn’t push his pulse beyond that point.
- **Look for a “magic move”** – During one event, a wrong turn meant Maurer had to spend the night in an unfamiliar location. But the mistake was a blessing in disguise. Maurer launched his paraglider from that spot and managed to cover a quarter of the entire distance in one day. “It was really a magic move.”
- **Prepare** – An X-Alps team can excel for a few days on motivation and passion. But competitors sleep only a few hours a night, and once exhaustion sets in, mistakes become more likely. That’s when rigorous preparation makes all the difference.
- **Embrace creativity** – Be resourceful under pressure. During one race, Maurer and Theurillat became stuck atop an Alpine glacier, with no way to launch Maurer into the air. Lacking other options, Theurillat used a rope to fly Maurer and his paraglider like a kite. In another example, Theurillat’s car got mired in mud in the Pyrenees. Applying his ingenuity, he escaped by using hundreds of stones to build a path out of the muck.
- **Communicate continually** – Maurer and Theurillat ran up an €1,800 [\$1,920] phone bill during one tournament. Constant communication was crucial. It meant the pair experienced no major mistakes or hiccups during the contest.
- **Under duress, reframe your mind-set** – If you’re stressed, focus on the factors you can control. Check your commitment to the challenge at hand. Though a situation can be highly stressful, try to see the positive side.

About the Speakers

Christian Maurer is an extreme athlete who has won the Red Bull X-Alps race, an adventure and paragliding competition, four times. **Thomas Theurillat** is a sports psychologist and mountain guide.