

Explorers Face Challenges

Ann Bancroft and Liv Arnesen, polar explorers, have experienced success as well as failure on their expeditions. Like everyone, they are fearful when they attempt something difficult and challenging. Sometimes they are successful, and sometimes they fail. When asked how they handled failure, they said that reporting their feelings with honesty gave them greater self-respect. Liv added, “Sometimes it is tempting to blame others for your own mistakes and make up reasons that you failed, but when you are honest with yourself, you can learn from failure.” The explorers think it is very important to express their feelings of disappointment and failure with others. Sometimes they cry and they feel that it’s okay to express their emotions. They also keep a journal where they write down their thoughts and feelings of success and failure.

Perhaps the most important lesson they can teach us is that for every failure they have experienced, they have learned something new. Liv gives an example of her feelings about an expedition undertaken a few years ago. Along with a team from Norway, she attempted to climb to the summit of Mt. Everest, the highest mountain in the world, and almost succeeded, but had to give up just a couple of thousand feet from the top. She was the last person on her Norwegian team to attempt the summit and she was terribly disappointed that because of altitude sickness, she had climbed too slowly to reach the top with her teammates. They had made it to the top and were on their way back down the mountain when an unexpected blizzard prevented her from finishing the climb. She was forced to descend to safety with her teammates to the base camp. She saw this as a failure.

When she reached the safety of the Rongbuk Monastery near the base camp in Nepal, she was asked to take on a role that was totally unexpected. The world news media needed Liv Arnesen to be the “press contact” on the mountain to report the blizzard and the situation of several severely injured and stranded climbers from all over the world. Her feelings of failure were immediately diminished when she took the responsibility to convey the news to reporters. Although this was not anticipated, she learned a lot in the process, and did something important for her team.

She said to herself: “Liv, here you are in Nepal, one of your favorite countries, so enjoy it!” Finally, she contacted her husband at home in Norway and told him that she had to “give up” her attempt to reach the summit. “I could hear how relieved he was that I was safe, and that made me happy.”