

TRANSCRIPT

Gifts from the Mountain

Welcome to part of my world. Part of your world too. The world of work.

I'm Eileen MacDargh. For decades I've coached, lectured, consulted. From boardrooms to classrooms, from hospitals to hotels. And one thing is patently clear: our 24-7 world has become far more complicated and competitive.

There are so many demands upon our time. There are days in which I feel stretched so thin I'm transparent.

Then it's time out. Time to get away. To refresh. To renew. To recharge. And frankly, to rethink. What am I doing and how am I doing it? Years ago, get away would have found me poolside. Glass of lemonade.

Little paper umbrella at the top. Who would have thought that I would marry a man whose idea of get away: wilderness, backpacking? Meandering the great trails of the Sierra Nevadas. Up granite escarpments by wonderful rivers, wild flowers. The Cascades. The Rocky Mountains.

Even remote regions of the Western Himalayas. Who would have thought that by slowing down, I would know more by noticing more?

So here's what I know. We climb mountains every day. We forge streams filled with relationships. We tent beside team members.

We want more life in our years and more years in our life. And we want to get rid of the meaningless so we can focus on the meaningful. Come along with me. Let's take a hike. I'd like to show you some of the lessons that I'm learning. Simple truths for life's complexities.

When I come to the mountains, I have many viewing points. 360 degrees worth of viewing points. Like this. That. And this. But you know, in the world of work, it's sometimes easy to only have a view point, instead of viewing points. Let me give you an example. Some time ago, my husband and I bought our first and only fixer-upper house. Southern California.

Do you remember what it was like when you bought your house? You were excited, terrified at the same time. Rotted floor, hole in the wall, garden overgrown. I walked out on the day of closing thinking: what have I done? And the neighbor came up, and said, "Hi Eileen, welcome to the neighborhood. By the way, I hope you don't get rid of those palm trees. They're landmarks for us." Palm trees? What are you talking about?

Those.

They were 60 foot palm trees. How do you miss 60 foot palm trees? It's because I had a view point. I was looking at everything that was wrong instead of what were possibilities. And don't we do that a lot? Instead of inviting in other people's opinions, tell me what you see? We become myopic.

Whose opinions do you need to seek? Better still, whose opinions do you not want? And the truth of the matter is you really need to hear them. It takes courage. It takes humility. I think successful people do that. In fact, the more that's at stake, the more courage it takes. Particularly some of those people you might not want to listen to.

Seek viewing points, not just a view point.

Wow, early snowfall. You don't get far up this trail if the pack is too heavy. But I've seen folks bring in everything from cast iron skillets to deck chairs. They don't get very far. A seasoned hiker knows every ounce counts. Even what you bring to eat. I've got pita, jerky, piece of string cheese, even dried fruit. And it's enough. At home, you put it in front of me and I eat everything.

Here's what it makes me think. What am I holding on to that doesn't serve me anymore? Physical things. Books, papers, clothes. How about actions that don't serve anymore? Or emotional baggage? Remembering the person that I didn't care for, the past offense, the job promotion I lost, or beating myself up for something I cannot redo.

What are you holding on to? Because the truth of the matter is, it's not just on the trail that every ounce counts.

Wow. Listen to that. It's a creek. I don't like creeks. Creeks don't like me. They're cold, it's slippery and slimy. I could fall. I could break my leg. I could break my arm. Nope, I don't like creeks.

Oh wow, wow, look at that. This isn't quite as bad as I thought. Look what I just did. Look what I just did! I just crossed the creek before I came to it. It's not near as bad as I was awfulizing back there. And how many times do we do that? We invent scenarios of things we are afraid will happen until we actually get there. I think I might do it in my work. Maybe you do too. That was a lot of emotional energy I just expended. You know, Mark Twain had a wonderful saying: I've had 103 catastrophes in my life, only two of which actually occurred.

Where are you inventing scenarios what aren't going to happen? Remember, don't cross the creek until you come to it.

Hey, would you look at this? Looks like wild onions. Pretty late in the season for them. It is! You know what, most people would miss this. I could dig this up. Put it in soup tonight, surprise my buddies, give a little zest to the meal.

That makes me wonder, what could we do to add zest in our life? What's the wild onion that most people would miss? That would be spontaneous, fun. That would lighten up the life of the other people around us.

I remember this one guy that got so tired of sending internal emails that he wrote things out on paper, folded it into a paper airplane, and shot it over the cubicle. Now that's a wild onion. Or another time I was doing a team building and I asked them to come prepared to talk about themselves in a way that showcased a talent.

This guy brought in his guitar, wrote this wild and funky, crazy song. Everybody laughed. The spontaneity and the joy of that moment made it the best session ever.

What could you do that's even small that no one would expect they'd miss it? But you'd do it, because you were willing to look for your wild onion.

Oh. Whoa. I wasn't paying attention. Trail looks so darn easy. Maybe that's my lesson. When I climb, when it's hard, I really pay attention. I know where I'm going. And you've done the same thing too. When you're growing your company, when times are tough, you monitor, you track progress, you know your goals. And then when we think it's smooth sailing, that's a time we all can fall.

Haven't we known companies, organizations, associations, individuals who have it made? Who become complacent? Who take their eye off of the customer, the client, the patient, the student? You name it. Watch out. The competition hasn't. Maybe that's a lesson for all of us. Where have we become complacent? Where is it so easy that perhaps we've lost our edge and we need to focus? Because the truth of the matter is, the easy trail is often the most dangerous.

Wow. Look how far I've come. That's incredible. What a breathtaking view. You know, standing up here, you can't see the creek that I crossed, the trail that I stumbled down. I need to stop, celebrate first off how far I've come. I forget to do that. But I think we also need to talk about what it took to get up here. To reflect, to remember. What went well? What didn't work? What would I do different next time? Because the truth of the matter is, there will be a next time. There's always going to be more lessons on the trail.

I've reached the end of this trail. Time to go back. Back to put into practice what I'm learning. Thanks for walking with me. I hope these lessons, these simple truths, will help you transform the life of your work, and the work of your life.

Seek viewing points, not just a view point. There's much to discover when we look and listen 360 degrees.

Every ounce counts. Only carry that which serves you. Get rid of the stuff that weighs you down, the work that doesn't add value, the emotions that are heavy.

Don't cross the creek until you come to it. It might not be as bad as you imagine.

And watch for wild onions. Those delightful surprises. Those actions that add zest to our life.

And remember, the easy way, could very well be the most dangerous. Complacency can trip us up.

And celebrate how far you've come. Remember what it took to get here and who helped you.

And one final thought, talk to each other. Share what ideas you have, what insights, what you'd like to change. And share the load. Make it a joyful journey.

¶ The end ¶