

Taking the Path for the Greater Good

The Global Leadership Foundation uses fundraising and leadership challenges to provide meaningful and productive development opportunities for leaders, businesses and communities.

By Gayle Hardie and Malcolm Lazenby



their companies or by drawing on the wider community. In return for meeting their fundraising goal, the leaders then gain the opportunity to take part in a facilitated leadership challenge which occurs while trekking at some of the world's most inspiring locations. Finally, the leaders return to their respective organisations with a renewed and broader perspective on their role and capability, and with a stronger commitment to those they engage and work with in the business.

A recent challenge is a good example of the approach. After raising a suggested \$2,000 (participants nominate their own fundraising target) for a local cancer research organisation, eight leaders from four different companies, along with the two of us in the role of facilitators, travelled to Central Australia to experience one of the world's finest treks, the Larapinta Trail.

This world-renowned walk covers 80 kilometres over six days, taking in the grandeur of the Central Australian desert, the West MacDonnell Ranges and numerous breathtaking gorges. The challenge was organised by the 3BL Group, with the trek itself coordinated by World Expeditions, which provided support (including guides, catering and camping facilities) during the walk.

Our job on the trek was to challenge participants to use the time and space of the walk – along with input from other participants – as a journey of self-realisation. This started on the first evening, when after an eight-kilometre walk to our first campsite, each person was asked to identify a challenge or opportunity they face in their role as a leader. The sharing set up a process for exploration over the following days.

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been around for about 40 years now, but it's fair to say that for many corporations it remains problematic. While we may have moved past the stage where CSR initiatives were largely symbolic, it can still be a challenge to properly integrate these initiatives with the overall business direction.

A unique partnership between three Australian organisations is creating a new way for businesses to incorporate their social responsibility activities with powerful leadership development opportunities.

The approach has three aspects. Initially, funds for a charitable donation are raised by leaders either from within



A journey of self-realisation – the Larapinta Trail in Central Australia covers 80 kilometres over six days

The range of topics put forward was very broad, and by the end of the week we would all be amazed at how much each of us could learn from not just our own topic but also those of everyone else.

What also became clear quite early in the trek was the learning we could gain from understanding our own physical capabilities, and the relevance of those lessons to leadership. There was a significant range of physical fitness amongst the group, the word "challenge" evoking different emotions in each person as we were briefed ahead of each day's walk: what it would entail, the number of kilometres we would cover and the terrain we would travel over.

Perhaps the most important day for this connection was the fifth day, with a 16-kilometre ascent and descent of Mt. Sonder, with its peak at an altitude of 1,350 metres.

We arrived at the base of the climb at 3 a.m., having had "breakfast" at 1:30 a.m. before travelling to the start of the walk. By this point we had already naturally divided into smaller groups based on our ability to climb and descend the trails.

We set out not knowing what lay ahead. We could see only the feet of the person in front of us, lit up by head torch. Moving through the dark, up steep rock steps and ridges, it was strange to find that we settled into a rhythm that we hadn't experienced during the day. Without being able to see the surroundings, or anticipate what was ahead – how steep it looked, how many ridges there were before the top – we were somehow

protected from considering all the difficulties that might, during the day, have made this challenge feel insurmountable.

All along the way our guides (leading by example) ensured that we were both challenged and supported to maintain the target times they had set to complete each part of the walk.

We all made it to the summit before the sun rose and were able to appreciate the most spectacular views. Then we looked around to see where we had come from (in the dark) and were astounded at what we had accomplished.

The nature of this sort of journey is that it needs to be flexible. As facilitators, we draw on various leadership theories and models relevant to particular situations as





they arise. Very little is preconceived, allowing the experience to develop with the needs of the participants and the group.

The challenge is not just about getting to the end: it is about learning from each other and the surrounding environment. Whenever possible, we linked the experience of the walk, including its challenges and rewards, with the practice of leadership.

Leaders often find it difficult to let go of the need to be in control and to always be "doing". Treks like the Larapinta challenge encourage a different perspective, with a move toward appreciating and exploring possibilities and understanding one's reactions and responses in the moment – that is, "being" with the experience rather than just "doing" the walk.

Another big part of these expeditions is the broadening of horizons, literally and personally. The richness and breadth of the physical landscape is awe inspiring. Participants said this gave them the added opportunity to gain perspective on their issues and challenges. They found themselves looking outwards with greater clarity rather than focusing in on just their problem or issue. Working with others was seen in a new, more productive light.

So is working for the greater good – which is where we come full circle, back to CSR. Greater balance between these three points of view – self, others and the greater good – signals a development of the leader's "emotional health".

The Larapinta Trek will be offered again this year, along with new challenges in the Kakadu (also in the Northern Territory) and Cradle Mountain and the Walls of Jerusalem in Tasmania. Further challenges are planned for the Great Wall of China, Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, and the Inca Trail in Peru. Each challenge will provide benefits to its participants, to their organisations and, through fundraising, to the broader community.

Companies are using these challenges in imaginative ways, other than as straight leadership development opportunities. They can assist with talent management by providing targeted rewards for strong performers, or even as incentives for those showing potential. And because of their authentic social responsibility component, even those who do not take the trek can get involved in the challenge by contributing to fundraising efforts.

Gayle Hardie and Malcolm Lazenby are co-founders of Global Leadership Foundation. They work with boards and senior management teams in some of Australia's leading organisations on strategic planning and development; emotional intelligence in leadership; transformational change in individuals and organisations; strengthening collaboration; transformational leadership; and board and executive mentoring and coaching. For further information on the leadership challenges mentioned in this article, and other leadership development opportunities, visit www.globalleadershipfoundation.com