

Claw Your Way to the Top

When Tommy Caldwell, 37, free-climbed El Capitan's 3,000-foot Dawn Wall in January, the world followed via Instagram and Facebook. He and fellow climber Kevin Jorgeson completed their ascent using ropes for safety only—not assistance. Follow Caldwell's advice on grit and drive, and scale your own heights.

FIND YOUR WALL

"For me, climbing is like food—I have to have it," Caldwell says. Once you find that hunger, you've found your calling. "The stuff that motivates you, you just keep going back," he says.

BUILD A MENTAL MAP

Over seven years, Caldwell mastered the Dawn Wall in sections, holding off on the full climb—which took 19 days!—until he could visualize each move. "I memorized every body position and how each finger fit into each hold," he says. "I can still run the whole climb in my head." Think about that before a big product launch or sales pitch. Once you can see a detailed mental picture of your success, you're ready.

HARNES YOUR BUTTERFLIES

Don't fear stress, says Caldwell. It's your body's way of signaling that you're on the cusp of a breakthrough. "That crazy feeling in my stomach tells me I'm pursuing something that's worth pursuing," he says. Welcome the nerves you feel before a presentation or job interview.

IGNORE THE NEGATIVITY

In 2001, Caldwell lost half of his left index finger in a table saw accident. "The doctor told me, 'You won't be a professional climber anymore,'" says Caldwell. "That lit a fire in me. I came out determined to prove him wrong." The lesson: Don't blame your circumstances for your shortcomings. (But try not to cut off a finger, okay?)

ANTICIPATE YOUR FALL

"Truly challenging yourself means failure is a real possibility," says Caldwell. "In climbing, we spend our days failing over and over." But each failure is a chance for growth; keep that in mind the next time a big project unravels. —CLINT CARTER

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