Outward Bound

I fought through sweat and toil, blood and tears, nausea and vertigo. I withstood an eight-day Outward Bound hiking course in Hong Kong that unfortunately coincided with a painful stomach flu that struck hard on the first day. With an almost malicious coincidence, the first night was the start of our midnight climb of Nam She Tsim, literally “sharp peak”, the steepest summit in the region and the toughest leg of our entire journey.

We started under a dark sky to avoid the scorching heat of day, panting as the weight of our forty-pound bags bore down on our legs. At three in the morning, things were not looking good. It became apparent that our team lacked much outdoor experience. Our instructor cynically doubted our ability to climb. We were fatigued, demotivated, and on the verge of turning around.

On one particularly rocky hill, I vomited repeatedly and each step made my head spin. The extra water I carried dug into my shoulders and breathing became a privilege, not a right. Still, I was determined not to be the first to give up. I climbed on all four limbs in a grueling battle against the terrain and led the team of city kids up the mountain inch by inch, rock by rock.

To this day, I do not believe we would have summited without such perseverance. My teammates were inspired by my courage and determination even under such grim conditions. The complaining whittled down bit by bit until it ceased all together. Those who formerly trudged with their eyes sunken to the ground now hiked with renewed vigor.

With mutual encouragement and a fighting spirit, my team of nine unforgettable boys and girls made it to the peak to watch a stunning sunrise, a feat that astounded our instructor. We had bonded together immensely during the hike and each one of my teammates accredited part of their success to my inspiring grit and resilience. This difficult but rewarding episode of my life taught me an invaluable lesson in motivation.

To aspire and achieve to an extent that others are compelled to do the same is the essence of leadership, the most powerful of influential tools at a man’s disposal. In the classroom, this means solving the problem no one else can understand and heartily explaining how. In the swimming pool, it is springing from the wall without hesitation, ignoring the ache of flesh and bone to protect the morale of a team.

In all aspects of life, I am motivated by two desires – the first, to enhance my being and achieve purpose, the second, to inspire others to do the same.