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EXPLORING WOMEN AND THEIR MOTIVATIONS

By Christine Dennison

Throughout my career, I have found myself in various regions of the world that are considered hostile environments — and they capture my imagination and my soul. I share this love of adventure and exploration with many women around the world and I am fascinated by why we feel alive and continue to return to these places. I've often wondered what makes the adventurous women I've worked with throughout my career in expeditions downright fearless.

What I have learned about these exploring women is that they are inspirational in part because they are generous and kind in spirit and attitude. They share their knowledge and experiences with others and welcome the next generation of women to be better than they are.

I accept that every person has their own idea of what makes an individual inspirational and a role model, but I believe there are common traits that are shared by women in the fields of adventure and exploration.

This is not a scientific study by any means, but it does carry the weight of personal experience and observation from working with exceptional women throughout the years. The most interesting aspect of many of these traits is how they all work together and in some cases you can't have one without the other. There is a flow of one into the other that creates very visceral experiences shared by many exploring women.

My short list includes: Motivation, Determination, Curiosity, Positive Attitude, Generosity, Stamina, and Fearlessness.

Motivate

This is perhaps the most personal of all traits as it is different for everyone and may not be easily understood by others. Motivation can come from within or be external, but it must be present to accomplish goals. I have found that there is always a reason, belief, or object of affection that is a motivating factor for women in the field. It helps maintain focus and discipline – and it's marvelous to see unfold.

Determination

It is not easy to keep going at times – this is true in day-to-day life as well as on expeditions – but determination is crucial to achievement. It can be a difficult mental and/or physical challenge to dig deep within one's soul and finish what you set out to do.



This is a very complex and emotional trait to observe in women. It bubbles up from deep within their soul and keeps them going in the most adverse conditions.

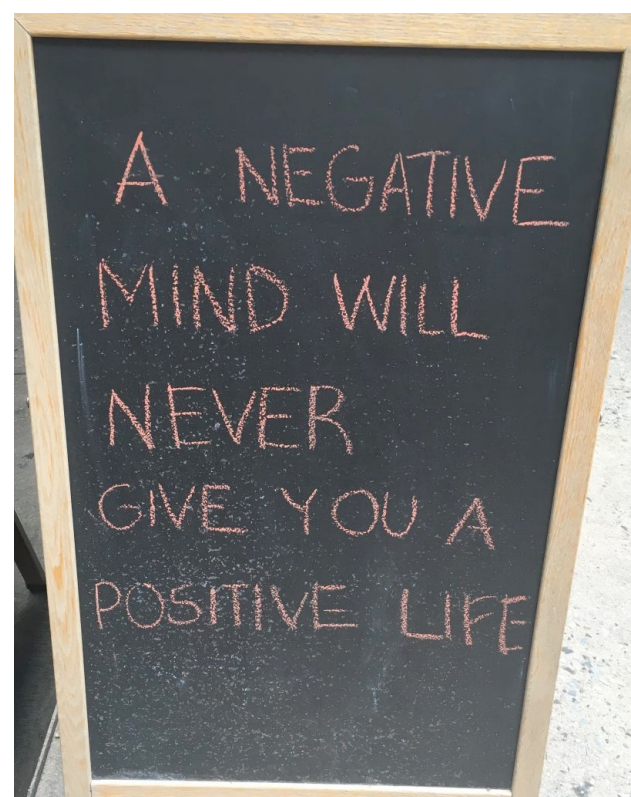
Curiosity



Curiosity keeps our minds agile and young and it's vital in helping to maintain a positive attitude. The ability to seek and enjoy knowledge enhances every aspect of life but one must keep their eyes and heart open to experiences and asking questions. I am amazed by people who travel the world and yet never really see anything outside of their hotel. They have little interest in what lies around the corner and are content with what they see before them with few questions asked. Curious women seek adventure and new experiences to learn from in almost all aspects of their lives.

Positive Attitude

My admiration for those who maintain a positive attitude during life's bleakest moments has no limits! I am in awe of women who have the strength and resilience to smile and "get on with it" when confronted with a storm. Women juggle more than men in everyday situations and do not think twice about it. In the field this is a tremendous advantage as one often needs to alter and change course at a moments notice should the situation arise. When we are out in the elements and tired, cold, hot, hungry, and exhausted it is important to look beyond the discomfort at hand and focus on the positive. It is a very individual experience.



Generosity

Contrary to popular belief, this is not a common trait. Generosity of spirit is seen on expeditions where people look out for each other and not just themselves. I have been on a women's expedition where it was unfortunately every woman for herself. The true test of generosity is how much another person will share when they may not be in a position to afford it. Sharing knowledge, time, and energy does not come easily for some, and can be observed when in the field far removed from places and creature comforts. If you place someone outside of their comfort zone, you may see a different personality from who you know them to be. They may not be comfortable sharing or helping another person if they feel threatened or vulnerable. It becomes very primal and no amount of training will alter a person's character in these situations.



Fearlessness

Fear is a normal emotion when venturing into unknown territory but its all in how it is handled. Fear can be channeled into a positive stimulant for some which gets the senses racing and the mind soaring into a different realm. It need not be a crippling effect. Honest women will share their fears, face them and learn from them. This is fearlessness and its at the heart of exploring women. They understand there are no guarantees in life, they don't have to live with a weekly paycheck to feel secure and they are always in search of challenge.

Stamina

Mental and physical strength are achieved through training and concentration. These exercises help with overall well being and work in keeping you motivated. When you find yourself working in extreme conditions that involve heat or cold the body and mind are taxed to their limit. Stamina is integral to life and death and yet needs to feed off of many other traits that enhance it. There is a full circle effect combining

attitude, determination, motivation and more to keep going and dig deep within to achieve what may seem insurmountable at any given time.



credit: Barbara Hillary

I know a wonderful and remarkable woman by the name of Barbara Hillary who is 85-years-young and an explorer with all of the aforementioned traits. She is a native New Yorker, retired nurse, public speaker and advocate for women and racial equality.

Barbara was the first African-American woman to reach the North Pole at age 76 and the South Pole at

age 79.... she is also a lung cancer survivor with tremendous spirit and the curiosity of a precocious 6 year old child.

My favorite story is her quest to reach the North Pole at 75-years-old. She wanted to ski to the pole but had never skied. Her determination, motivation and fearlessness took her to Quebec for a 3 day lesson on cross country skiing.

Needless to say, Barbara made it to the North Pole and she skied as she had set out to do. She and I had lunch to discuss her next foray into the jungles of the Amazon which I determined was not a great idea at present. She calmly listened as I outlined my information and concerns and agreed to “wait and see.”

Her curiosity remains steadfast as does her patience for the right time and opportunity, she is not content with just traveling the world, she wants to experience it



heart, mind, body and soul. She is a treasure and I look forward to an expedition with her anywhere in the world. Bravo, Barbara, and all the women who set the bar high and aim to reach it.

Personal challenges are a stepping stone on the path to growth and women of all ages and demographics are rising up to meet them every day. We are fortunate to live in a time and world where women can look for and find support from other women. It is a wonderful era to feel empowered and take advantage of opportunities. When we work as a collective we can achieve and strive for more than we had yesterday but we must keep looking ahead.

credit: Alex Buisse