

Article

December 2005

**Marking the Route**

One of my passions is solo distance hiking in mountains. A favorite is the Swiss Alpine Pass route—from Liechtenstein to Montreaux—325 kilometers and 18,000 meters of height gain, done in 15 stages. One day I was walking from Lauterbrunnen over the Sefinenfurke Pass to the hamlet of Griesalp. The pass was really a minor break in the mountain wall—a 10 foot ledge in fact. Upon reaching it, I could clearly see the route of the previous day past the famous summits of the Eiger & the Monch.

But menacingly, in my face looking forward, was a bank of fog. I could see backward with 20-20 hindsight, but looking forward only a few yards through mist. Nevertheless I scrambled down some metal chains and ladders until it opened up a bit. Red markings on boulders helped find the way, but due to the lack of visibility I was often forced to retreat to the previous marker before losing sight of any directions. You don't make a lot of progress when you keep going back from where you started.

Many hours later—and after sundown, I got below the fog and strolled into the village and life was grand! Looking back on that experience and a few to match it, I can't help seeing parallels in organizational life. When organizations lack clarity of direction there is a "fog of purpose". This often engenders uncertainty. It creates discomfort with employees—maybe not as stressful as feeling lost in the mountains, but the discomfort is real. This can result in a lack of confidence in the organization and in ourselves. It can affect individual and collective performance.

Let's resolve in 2006, to be sure that all of our employees know the common destination, and that there are clear route markers for all to see. Happy New Year.