



## My wellbeing tonic...Climbing?

When I share with people that I like to climb rocks in my spare time I regularly encounter faces of dismay and questions... Why? Reflecting back on what I have learnt about wellbeing over the years, I note that my recreational pursuit ticks many of the foundations I explore in my corporate wellbeing programs. Here is why I find climbing so rewarding, physically, mentally and emotionally.



### **Movement matters**

The most obvious is the physical nature of the activity. Climbing encapsulates most of the fundamental components of fitness: strength, power, endurance, balance and flexibility. We know that if exercise was a pill, all doctors would be prescribing it. So far reaching are the health benefits of regular activity to mind and body.

### **Connection**

When I climb I do so with others. My wife is very thankful that I am not a free soloist, someone who climbs without a rope or partner! For me, a climbing weekend is a great way to catch up with friends and be social in an active way. Humans are social creatures and there is an abundance of research into the benefits of remaining connected and the

health risks associated with social isolation.

Climbing outdoors is also a way that I get a regular green fix. Connecting with nature is good for the soul and there is an increasing amount of study going into the health benefits associated with regular “nature bathing.”

### **Flow**

When I climb there is no time to be caught up with rumination or extraneous thoughts. I am acutely aware of my environment and being engaged in the present moment. On a good day this is experienced as being in the “zone” or experiencing a state of “flow”.





## Stress and building resilience

The fear of falling is one of the earliest anxiety patterns developed by an infant. For most of us the fear of height and the potential for falling and injury are hard wired. Climbing is an exquisite dance in regulating the fight & flight response. With exposure one becomes better at managing the stress response to big wall climbing.

Through climbing I have learnt how to remain focused in the present moment while still visualizing future moves that move me closer to my climbing goal. It's not that one does not experience fear at times, but having faith in the process and taking action in the face of fear. Key to

this is managing risk, assessing fall consequence and committing when necessary. Learning breathing techniques to better regulate ones nervous response to stress is critical in performance in climbing and any stressful situation.

From my studies in neuroscience climbing helps to create new connections, assisting the prefrontal cortex in taking charge over the amygdala and limbic system. Rewiring mind and body to be more resilient when faced with stress or a challenging situation.



## Purpose

Climbing involves living some of my core values of: courage, acceptance, personal growth, self-care and enjoying nature. Living my values gives me purpose and a sense that I am creating a life that is meaningful.

This also gives a sense of wellbeing. The feeling is vital!

Now, I'm not suggesting that we all take to rock climbing for better wellbeing, however understanding some of the foundations that underpin your wellbeing and implementing them is key. Here is my top 6...

## My pillars of wellbeing

- **Move** regularly.
- **Nourish** your body with whole (unprocessed) foods mainly plant based.
- **Connect** with people, nature and your purpose.
- **Sleep**. Schedule time for rest and recovery.
- **Slow Down**. Practice your version of mindfulness & disengage from technology. This could be as simple as a hobby that creates “flow”
- **Breath**. Develop strategies to manage stress and increase resilience in the face of challenge

Finally, a quote that resonates with my climbing hobby:



*"Mountains are cathedrals grand and pure and not stadiums to satisfy my ambitions. On their alters, I strive to perfect myself physically and spiritually. In their presence, I see myself and understand this life. From their summits, I view my past, dream of the future, and with unusual acuteness, I experience the present moment. In the mountains, I celebrate creation. On each journey, I am reborn."*

**Anatoli Boukreev (abridged) 1958-1997**

*What is your mountain?*

*What are your fundamental for wellbeing?*

*I would love to hear from you J :)*

