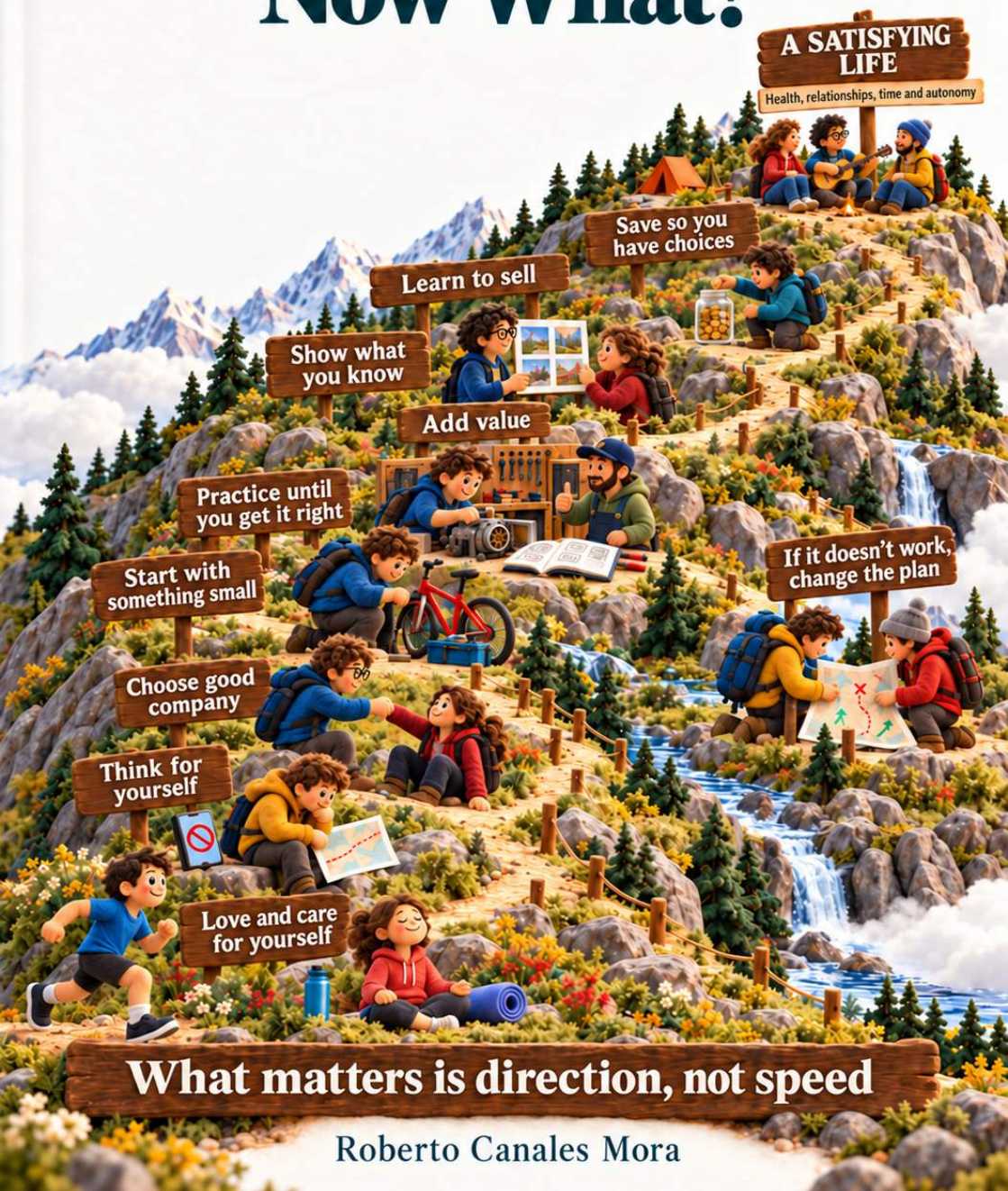
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I've Finished My Studies. Now What?



Roberto Canales Mora

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0. Introduction

0.1. Hello, welcome

[100] Hello, and welcome to this new book.

[110] My name is Roberto Canales, and from time to time high schools and universities invite me to speak to young people who are finishing their studies, to offer them an alternative to the usual view of how to steer their careers.

[120] In this book I have brought together what I usually say in those talks, in case it helps you think about what you want to do with your life.

[130] When I was first invited to give this talk, I had just read 12 Rules for Life by Jordan B. Peterson. I stopped to think about what my own twelve rules would be. That became the structure of the talk and of this book. That is why the introduction is chapter 0: each of the twelve rules then matches its chapter number.

[140] At the end of the book you will find my story: from student to business owner with most of my life sorted out. I tell it so you have some context for why I am writing to you and why I see things this way. There you can read about what I struggled with, what I did along the way, and how I ended up doing what I enjoyed.

[150] Before we start, I would like to offer one caution: I am someone who tries to build useful, simplified models.

[160] So what you are about to read is a very personal view of what has worked for me, or what I think might work. It will not necessarily apply to everyone or to every situation.



Figure 1. If it has helped you, it may help someone you care about.

[170] All I hope is that you use it as one more source of inspiration for creating your own models.

[180] I would be happy to discuss any of this with you. I am easy to find on my website, https://robertocanales.com/, or on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/rcanales/.





[190] If, when you finish the book, you have enjoyed it and think it could help you change your life, you can go to Amazon, buy a physical copy, and give it to someone you care about who you think might find it useful.

0.2. I've Finished My Studies. Now What?

[200] Giving a talk to young people is complicated and risky, because you never quite know how they will interpret what you say. There is a significant difference between what you think, what you express, what they hear, what they interpret, and what they end up internalizing.

[210] You have to be aware that some people in the audience may have psychological problems and take what I say too much to heart. If that applies to you, please keep things in perspective and talk to your specialist about any concerns or thoughts the reading brings up.

[220] Even so, it would be cowardly to stop doing it because of the possible risks. I only hope someone benefits from what I want to share with care, which is what I believe I would have needed to hear at that age.

[230] When I begin a talk, I ask people: ¨Do any of you want to be a millionaire?¨

[240] People are usually shy about saying so, about admitting it. Very few hands go up. I ask them to be ambitious, at least in their dreams.

[250] We will see later where reality takes us and what we manage to achieve.

[260] Then I ask another question: ¨How many of you would rather be a civil servant than a millionaire?¨ Plenty of hands go up then. I take that to mean they prefer security to uncertainty.

[270] If you have no particular ambition to get ahead at work or to excel at something, you may prefer limited responsibility, a secure job whatever happens, and a more enjoyable life. Everyone has to decide what they are looking for. Fortunately, people are not all the same, and they do not all want the same things.

[280] These days people talk about the generation of pleasure seekers. Working time is measured down to the minute, and leisure is valued more than ever. What someone wants may be to finish their working day and have the rest of it for their own things.

[290] If you are a pleasure seeker who wants to do little and get a lot, I invite you to stop reading.

[300] This book is for people who believe that preparation, strategy, discipline, work, and self-knowledge are worthwhile and can bear fruit. They do not guarantee success, but the opposite buys you plenty of tickets in the failure lottery.

[310] I say this quite cynically: ¨I would rather most people focused on enjoying themselves, because then I have less competition in achieving my goals.¨

[320] What you need to be clear about is that you cannot want the lack of sacrifice and commitment of some people along with the potential rewards of those who sacrifice the most and take the biggest risks.

[330] If you want to leave on time, forget about work, and take on no more responsibility, you will have to factor that in when you compare your path

with someone who devotes a large part of their life to developing their skills, taking the initiative to contribute to other people's businesses, or getting their own business off the ground.

[340] Another warning: I usually sound tremendously categorical, but that is not how I think. You need to take my ideas as one more source of knowledge, not as absolute truth.

[350] So I suggest that, as you read, you think about what is useful to you and what is not. You will hear me say this in other books too: more than having you learn what I say, I want you to grasp it; to make it your own and see what might be useful in your circumstances and your life.

[360] Once we get into the talk itself, I usually start with a line: ¨The fundamental cause of the trouble is that in the modern world the stupid are cocksure while the intelligent are full of doubt¨ (Bertrand Russell).

[370] With that quote in mind, I invite you to ask yourself a question: if you start arguing very heatedly and are absolutely certain you are right, who might you be? Asking yourself that may help you lower your voice a little and listen to what people are saying. Remember: idiots are absolutely certain.

[380] I always say that teaching has more to do with lighting a fire than filling a glass. Plutarch put it this way: ¨The mind does not require filling like a vessel, but rather, like wood, it requires kindling¨ (Plutarch).

[390] That fire has to be your curiosity to learn more. That is why, in this book, we will discuss books that can help you explore concepts that interest you in more depth.



Figure 2. What you do with your time counts too.

[400] Some of these readings help you review how you study; others help you understand what you are looking for in a job or why you end up arguing with someone.



Figure 3. Hearing an idea does not oblige you to accept all of it.

[410] I will tell you what each book proposes, and then we will put its ideas into a situation you can recognize. That way you can test whether they help you, instead of ending up with a list of lines to underline.



Books that have accompanied these ideas.

0.3. Thinking about the consequences

[420] I invite you to think strategically. Think about the consequences of your actions. ¨Long-range planning does not deal with future decisions. It

deals with the future consequences of present decisions¨ (Peter F. Drucker).

[430] You might consider yourself to be doing reasonably well if you manage to build a satisfying life. A good job, a good partner, free time, enough money, friends, hobbies, and physical fitness can help you have one. Everyone has to choose what they need and how much importance to give it.

[440] If your actions are not bringing you closer to that way of life you can try to shape, it seems reasonable that you need to make changes.

[450] Changes may not always work out as you expect. But what will not work is continuing without changing your strategy when you can see that the one you are using is not bringing you closer to what you want.

[460] That calculation in which 80 % of people place themselves in the smartest 10 % is funny and absurd. I would say it does not matter what beliefs or evidence you have about how smart you are. You cannot be that resourceful if life is not going as well as you expect. You will have to develop your judgment.

[470] And everyone can define a life that feels worthwhile however they choose. What you want to achieve may be different from what someone else wants.

[480] There is a topic that is fashionable and that I studied two years ago at UNIR: a seminar on complex problem solving, or CPS. What better setting for complex problem solving than being able to shape a life you want to live?

[490] Each of us has been dealt a hand to play: a body, looks, intelligence. That affects your possibilities. But possibilities are all we are talking about.



Figure 4. Choose what you need to live a satisfying life.

[500] You may have an extraordinary memory or great spatial awareness and make no use of them. The potential was good; what you have done with it is another matter.

[510] Howard Gardner proposed the theory of multiple intelligences to describe different abilities. His proposal discusses linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligence.

[520] It can help you look at which activities you handle best, without reducing everything to a grade in class.

[530] Linguistic intelligence shows up when you explain an idea clearly; logical-mathematical intelligence, when you reason with quantities or spot a pattern; spatial intelligence, when you visualize how the parts of a layout fit together; musical intelligence, when you recognize and produce rhythms or melodies.

[540] Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence involves using and coordinating your body to carry out a task.

[550] Interpersonal intelligence refers to understanding other people, and intrapersonal intelligence to recognizing what is happening within you, your motives, or your limits. Naturalistic intelligence involves distinguishing and classifying elements of nature, such as the species you come across in the countryside.

[560] To make use of it, you can look at real tasks: what comes easily to you, what you struggle with, and what improves when you practice.

[570] Obviously, if you were dealt a high level of one of these intelligences, or more than one, you already have a good card to play. But that is not enough.

[580] Imagine you are a child soccer prodigy, but as you grow up you turn to alcohol, lack discipline, or give up the sport. Or you simply get injured. A good starting hand does not guarantee success.

[590] Besides, comparing yourself with others is not helpful, because your talents may lie in different areas. You never know whose life will turn out better just because they performed exceptionally well as a child.

[600] Think of an examiner who brings together a squirrel, a rhinoceros, and a fish and tells them he is going to find out who is best at climbing a tree. You can guess who that test favors. What you are measuring is a specific

ability, and the result does not tell you everything each one might do in another environment.



Figure 5. Eight abilities proposed by Howard Gardner.

[610] You may also meet someone who does not stand out as much at first, but learns to read their surroundings. They set themselves a goal, look at what they have to work with, and use their qualities to move toward it.

[620] That is what I mean when I talk about being resourceful: knowing how to play the hand you have.

[630] So whatever hand you were dealt, I encourage you to sharpen up. You need to start thinking early about who you are and what you want to get out of life, so you can begin moving in that direction.

[640] When you are young, you may not yet have found what you are passionate about, what you want to do, or what you are really good at. Maybe you do not feel passionate about anything. That does not matter all that much: what you can do is change your attitude and tell yourself you need to find out.



Figure 6. The same test favors different abilities.

[650] To do that, you have to get moving. You have to open your eyes to what the world needs and, if you are not sure what you enjoy, at least try to acquire skills the market needs. With a little luck, you will soon find a fit between what you do and what you like doing.

[660] In my case, I wanted to expose my children to different things from an early age: sports, music, technology, vehicles… To see whether they found something they were passionate about or particularly good at.



Figure 7. Your starting ability and what you make of it are different things.

[670] Also, remember something I will keep coming back to: the brain tends to avoid effort it does not see rewarded. It is normal to feel reluctant to start an activity you do not know yet. You have to learn to do things without feeling particularly motivated.

[680] When you start an internship or join a company, you may not initially like the work you are assigned. But you can decide to be someone who gets things done competently, whatever task you are given. That alone will set you apart from other people.

[690] There is little point in boasting about an ability if you never put it to work.

[700] I will give you a clue if you still do not know what you want to do or what you like: try learning new things. New things are new to everyone, and you compete with fewer people who already know how to do them.

[710] Imagine an architect fresh out of university. There are established architects in the area who have spent years working with builders who bring them projects. They have built a reputation, earned their clients' trust, and have contacts, access to financing, repeat clients, and completed buildings to show. How do you get ahead in an environment like that when you have only just arrived?

[720] Now imagine you specialize in new types of prefabricated buildings, in using mirrors to make the most of natural light, in integrated home automation systems, or in different materials. Those who already have work may not get into these things until a client asks them to, or they see the market starting to affect them.

[730] You can spend that time learning the specialty and building a demonstration you can show people. For example, a proposal for a prefabricated home that incorporates lighting, sensors, and their controls right from the design stage.

[740] When you speak to a potential client or a builder, you will have something concrete to explain. You can find your niche by meeting a need that others are not yet addressing.

[750] If you ask where I would look today, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and robotics seem to me almost sure bets for spending time learning.



Figure 8. A new specialty can open up a niche for you.

[760] AI is changing tasks in many white-collar jobs, those knowledge-based office professions. You can learn to use it in an activity you know and check what it solves and where it fails.



Figure 9. Look for new needs in different fields.

[770] In cybersecurity, you can start by understanding how to protect an organization's accounts, data, and systems.

[780] In robotics, you might take an interest in how a machine senses its surroundings, moves, and performs a task. There is also work in installing it, maintaining it, and checking that it does what its user needs.

[790] I think that in Europe, with how far behind and heavily regulated we are in so many things, many changes will happen slowly.

[800] In the meantime, I am interested in learning to interpret results and validate what an AI proposes.

[810] There are surely many more things that might interest you, in many other disciplines too. Electric cars and motorcycles will need mechanics who know how to work with their systems. There are activities for drone pilots, reviewers of AI-generated articles or books, and songwriters or filmmakers who learn to use new tools.

[820] An increasingly aging population will need specialists in caring for older people. People are also paying more attention to their bodies: nutrition, rehabilitation, and personal training are other areas where you can look at what needs exist and what qualifications they require.

[830] What I mean is that there is always a world of opportunity for people who keep their eyes open. We do not all have to end up doing the same thing.

[840] Simply looking at what is becoming popular in China can give you clues. It no longer makes sense to dismiss it as the giant that copies everything badly. Look at what is happening with electric vehicles or robotics, and ask which trends may eventually arrive, what problems they create, and who will know how to solve them.

0.4. Do something where you do not count the hours

[850] If you want life to go reasonably well, it seems sensible to find something to do that you enjoy so much you do not measure the hours you spend on it. I do not mean working extra hours without pay, but being passionate about learning more about it.

[860] In Japan, the word ikigai is used to talk about what makes life worth living. You might find it in learning a trade, caring for someone, making music, or sharing an activity with your friends.

[870] You would not be the first or the last person to study something because of family pressure, because they did not know what to do and it was an easy option, or because they thought they would enjoy it and, once fully involved, discovered it did not fulfill them.

[880] It seems reasonable to think that a satisfying life will be difficult if you stay there without considering anything else. I would recommend two things that may seem contradictory.

[890] First, whatever you do, try to take an interest and do it well. That helps you keep your job and keep earning an income. At the same time, try to find something more fulfilling and prepare the transition.

[900] It still surprises me when someone leaves a job or drops out of their studies because they do not like them, but has no plan B. Does that seem reasonable? It is one thing if the situation is wearing you down. Apart from those extreme cases, I suppose you have to develop some mental toughness so that not everything affects you so much.

[910] Are you becoming part of a soft generation in which every problem becomes a mountain? If you have discovered you do not want to do that for a living, you need to look at what you want to do next, what you need to learn, and how you are going to support yourself while you make the change.

[920] Finding work is not always easy, but with imagination and determination you can improve your chances.

[930] I often hear people complain that they have no experience and cannot get a job, and that without a job they cannot gain experience either. A vicious circle. They describe it as an impossible problem to solve.

[940] Nowadays, especially in knowledge-based professions, though it applies to many others too, generosity can help you gain your first experience. You can approach someone with a real need and offer to solve something within your capabilities.

[950] Imagine you have finished a vocational IT program and are preparing your first website with the help of an AI. You can spend the afternoon changing colors without knowing when you are done.



Figure 10. Working well while preparing for a transition.

[960] You can approach your neighborhood music school and offer to build them a website. Ask what they need: publishing schedules, sharing sheet music, booking rooms, or announcing concerts. If you sit down with the person who will use it, you will soon discover things you had not considered, and you will have a specific reason to learn how to solve them.



Figure 11. A need close to home can become your first project.

[970] Before you know it, that first client, even if you do the work for free, is helping you gain real experience. There is now someone who needs to use what you create and can tell you whether it works for them.



Figure 12. A project, a person, or something you still have to do.

[980] What is more, they will force you to reorganize your priorities. If you have agreed to test the site on Thursday, you will need to have a usable version ready. The deadline and another person's needs start competing with what you used to do simply whenever you felt like it.

[990] Remember too that you do not always have to work at the same intensity. There is a saying: ¨Build a reputation, then go to sleep.¨ As you establish your position, it becomes easier to alternate effort with periods of rest. Life will normally alternate between periods of greater activity and quieter periods when you focus on other things. But remember: you do not get a second chance to make a first impression. At the beginning, always try to put in more effort rather than less.

[1000] Tastes also change over time, so you need to review periodically what gives you a reason to get up, and align your life with those reasons.

[1010] That is why I think it is important to find meaning in our lives. In Man's Search for Meaning, Viktor Frankl describes how, in the Nazi concentration camps, thinking about someone they wanted to see again or something they still had to do helped prisoners keep going. In his case, he

thought about his wife and about reconstructing the work that had been taken from him.

0.5. Breaking big problems into small ones

[1020] One of the first things you will have to do in life is find a job. In Problem Solving Estratégico (Strategic Problem Solving), Giorgio Nardone offers some interesting advice on solving problems.



Figure 13. Small steps to prepare for an interview.

[1030] First, define the problem clearly and look at it from different perspectives. For example, you can ask yourself: who might employ me? What companies are in the area? Who do my parents know? Where do my friends work? What knowledge do I need to work there?

[1040] He also suggests evaluating the solutions already attempted. You can ask your friends what they have done and consult your teachers. Look at what worked for them and what you could try yourself.

[1050] You can also analyze why an interviewer might reject you. It could be because you are not punctual, because of how you dress or express yourself, because your language skills are lacking, because you have not looked at the website before going, or because you have not prepared for typical questions such as your greatest strengths and weaknesses, and similar things.

[1060] You can even try to surprise the company. As well as preparing your answers, bring a contribution they will find useful.

[1070] For example, you could prepare a document comparing the company with its competitors, or analyze how the sector might evolve and where you see opportunities for growth.

[1080] You do not have to do all of this at once. You can prepare it in small steps, day by day.

[1090] In fact, if you are reading this before finishing your studies, you could have a lot of these things well under way by the time you finish.

[1100] One of the images that has stayed with me most is the climber's technique. Nardone suggests starting with the goal and working backward: what would I need to have achieved just before that? And before that? This brings you to a first step you can take now.

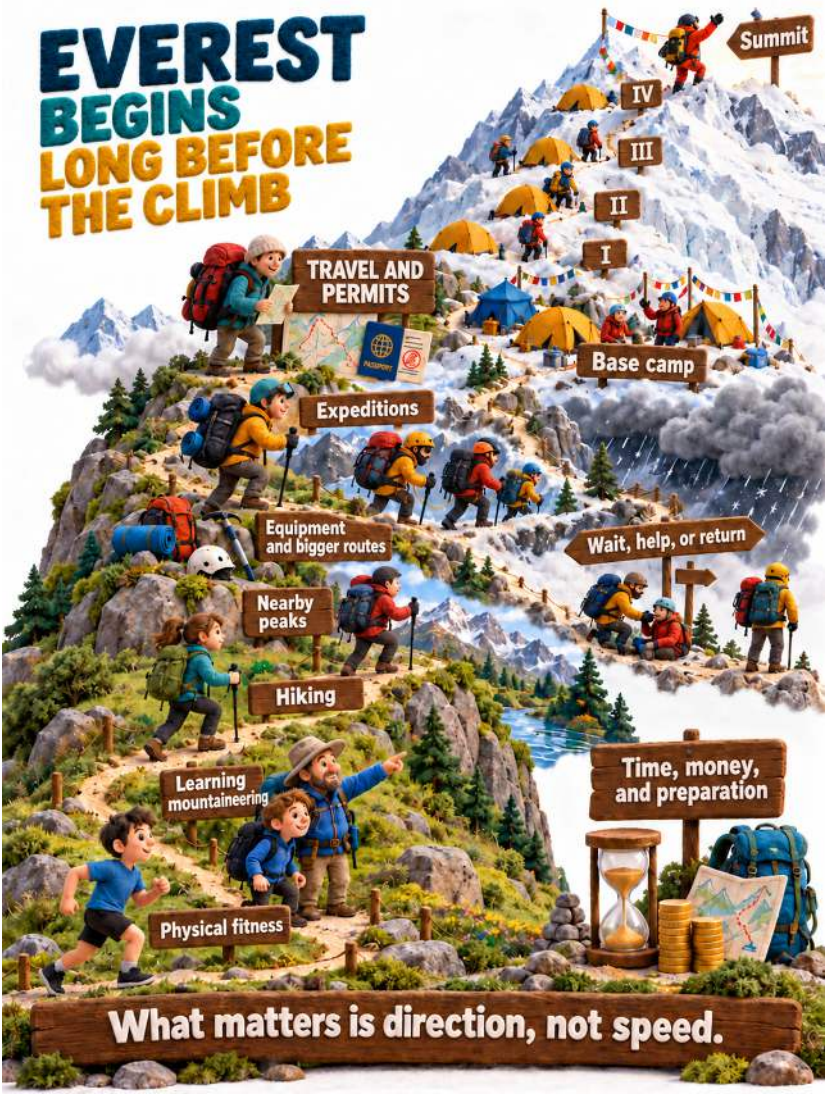


Figure 14. A big goal is prepared for step by step.

[1110] Imagine you want to climb Everest. Before you turn up there, you will have to get in shape, learn about climbing and mountaineering, and go hiking regularly. Then you can start climbing nearby peaks.

[1120] Little by little, you will have to invest more time and money in demanding climbs. You will test your skills, knowledge, physical ability, and even your courage. Then you can set out on more ambitious expeditions. There is a lot of preparation before buying a plane ticket.

[1130] Once you have that preparation and the money, you still have to travel, reach base camp, and work your way through the high-altitude camps. On Everest's southern route, you climb from base camp to camps I, II, III, and IV before attempting the summit. Gaining altitude also requires acclimatizing, resting, and sometimes going back down.

[1140] And even there, following the plan is not enough. The weather can get worse, a problem with the porters can arise, or a permit can be revoked. If someone has an accident and needs rescuing, all the plans change. Or you may be the one with the problem. You will have to decide whether to wait, change your route, or go home.

[1150] As you can see, it is not as simple as saying: ¨I want to climb Everest.¨ There may be years of effort and preparation behind it. When you think about everything it takes, you start understanding what you can do today to move closer.

[1160] Anyone who knows me will have heard me repeat this line: ¨What matters is direction, not speed.¨ Decide where you want to go and move closer, step by step.