

PREMIUM CONTENT

login | logout » subscribe my account | email | search | sitemap

ireland.com
THE IRISH TIMESTuesday,
May 17, 2005

TODAY

CLASSIFIEDS

SERVICES

THE IRISH TIMES

Take me to...

GO

THE IRISH TIMES BREAKING NEWS NEWS IN FOCUS SPORT BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY WEATHER

Breaking News



THE IRISH TIMES

In the Newspaper
Daily

- Front Page
- Ireland
- World
- Finance**
- Features
- Sport
- Opinion
- Letters
- Crossword
- Article Index

Weekly Index

- MONDAY
 - Health
- TUESDAY
 - Education and Living
- WEDNESDAY
 - Motors
 - An Teanga Bheo
- THURSDAY
 - Science Today
- SATURDAY
 - Weekend
 - News Features
 - Obituaries

Search

Search the newspaper
archive...

Finance

Caught between a rock and a very hard place in Alaska

Should employees be expected to climb real mountains for the sake of team spirit?

By NIALL MCKAY

When Dubliner John Hurley turned up for his first day on the job at a Silicon Valley dot.com he got quite a shock. The former marketing manager for Star Wars was told to pack some warm cloths and to report to San Francisco International Airport.

Quite reasonably, Mr Hurley assumed that he was going skiing for a few days.

"So I packed my brand new black ski gear," said Mr Hurley, a 34-year-old Lucan man who had taken a job as vice-president of corporate marketing at a business services Web startup Demandline.com.

"Our chief executive officer (CEO), Patrick Burns, took one look at it and says that I might have looked great in Tahoe (ski resort) but that I wouldn't be needing any of that where we were going."

But nobody, apart from Mr Burns, knew where they were going.

Mr Hurley and six of the top management team boarded a flight for Anchorage, Alaska, were met by Colby Coombs, a guide book author and mountaineering expert, given five-stone backpacks and driven to the 4,500-foot Matanuska Peak in the Alaska mountains.

For the next four days, they climbed a glacier, camped out in sub-zero conditions and waded in snow up to their

Fri, Sep 22, 00

waists.

Some first day at work, said Mr Hurley. "I would have killed for a cup of tea."

The trip was Mr Burns's idea of a team-building exercise and is an example of the sort of management nonsense that is becoming commonplace in Silicon Valley. While Europe's management teams head to Dublin or Reykjavik for a weekend of binge drinking, Silicon Valley management teams head to the great outdoors for a spot of extreme danger.

Indeed, there is an ethos here among the young, fit and rich dotcommers that those who work hard for 80 hours a week should spend whatever is left of their precious time playing hard.

On a Sunday afternoon, many prefer mountain biking, skiing or windsurfing to getting quietly trashed on a yacht in San Francisco Bay.

Mr Burns, an avid mountaineer, believed that climbing a glacier in deadly conditions would help the management team relate better and work together.

Either that or, as the only expert mountaineer, he wanted to show the team who was boss.

At first the trip seemed quite pleasant; it's sunny, you put your shades on and start climbing, said Mr Hurley. "But by the time we reached the summit on day three, you hate it, you think 'big deal, now can we please bloody go'."

For four days, they climbed six hours a day, each carrying a five-stone backpack. They pitched camp at sundown and cooked.

"The only good thing that I could say about it was that you start to figure out what your mental and physical limits are," said Mr Hurley.

"But I was lucky, I am reasonably fit and strong but there was one guy who's only about seven stone and he had difficulty."

The team had to pull together and help him, since there was no way he could carry a back pack nearly his own weight for six hours a day, said Mr Hurley.

"I just kept asking myself, what the hell am I doing here. I am sharing a three-man tent with the chief technical officer and CEO and this is only my first day on the job," he said.

Mr Hurley had gone from having a nice office at Lucas Films' Skywalker ranch in hills north of San Francisco to the ice-packed slopes in Alaska.

So would he do it again?

No way, said Mr Hurley. "Pat (the CEO) is working on his next trip but I am not going. In fact, there is no way that I would have gone on the first one if I was given a choice.

"However, it is was a very unique experience," he said. "But I try not to get too spiritual about this management bonding stuff. People are people and you do your best, ask for help when you need it and help others when and where you can."

www.niall.org

© The Irish Times

 print  e-mail a friend  e-mail the author [back to top ...](#)

© 2005 ireland.com

[About Us](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Media Kit](#) | [Terms & Conditions](#)