

2. What are the meanings of the words *absolutist* and *relativistic* in paragraphs 3 and 9? What dictionary meanings do these words not have in the essay?

Suggestions for Writing

1. Contrast values of your own with those of a friend, perhaps referring to some of the values identified by Campa. Then discuss the possible causes of these differences—upbringing, ethnic background, friends, school. Refer to ideas of Campa if these help explain the differences.
2. Campa states: "Even when trying to be individualistic, the Anglo-American achieves it by what he does." Discuss the extent to which this statement describes your way of being an individual. Compare or contrast your individualism with that of one or more friends. Use your analysis to verify or challenge Campa's analysis of American values.
3. Contrast the meaning you give particular words relating to money or success with the meaning given them by friends, parents, or teachers. Try to explain these different uses, referring to ideas of Campa if you find them useful.

Sydney J. Harris

CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN OF SUCCESS

Sydney J. Harris (p. 77) here explores a popular idea by looking closely at its supporting analogy. As in his essay on the words *liberal*, *conservative*, and *radical*, Harris writes with the extreme concision and clarity required of a newspaper column, yet without a sacrifice of depth.

It has long struck me that the familiar metaphor of "climbing the ladder" for describing the ascent to success or fulfillment in any field is inappropriate and misleading. There are no ladders that lead to success, although there may be some escalators for those lucky enough to follow in a family's fortunes.

A ladder proceeds vertically, rung by rung, with each rung evenly spaced, and with the whole apparatus leaning against a relatively flat and even surface. A child can climb a ladder as easily as an adult, and perhaps with a surer footing.

Making the ascent in one's vocation or profession is far less like ladder climbing than mountain climbing, and here the analogy is a very real one. Going up a mountain requires a variety of skills, and includes a diversity of dangers, that are in no way involved in mounting a ladder.

Young people starting out should be told this, both to dampen their expectations and to allay their disappointments. A mountain is rough and precipitous, with uncertain footing and a predictable number of falls and scrapes, and sometimes one has to take the long way around to reach the shortest distance.

One needs different tools and the knowledge and skill to use them most effectively—as well as knowing when not to employ them. Most of all, a peculiar combination of daring and prudence is called for, which not all persons possess.

The art of rappelling is important, because sometimes one has to go down a little in order to go up. And the higher one gets, the greater the risk and the greater the fall; there is much exhilaration—but little security and less oxygen—in altitude. As many stars and standouts and company presidents have found to their regret, it is often harder to stay there than to get there.

Then, too, one must learn that there is no necessary relationship between public success and private satisfaction. The top of the ladder is shaky unless the base is firmly implanted and the whole structure is well defended against the winds of envy and greed and duplicity and the demands of one's own ego. The peak of the mountain is even more exposed to a chilling wind, as well as to a pervasive sense of loneliness. Many may have admired the ascent, but many more, eager to make the same endeavor, are waiting at the foot of the slope to witness an ignominious fall. It is easier to extend good will to those who do not threaten our own sense of worth.

People who are not prepared for failure are not prepared for success; if not for failure, at least for setbacks and slides and frustrations, and the acceptance of the deficits that so often accompany the assets. Ambition untempered by realism will never see the missing rung it falls through on that mythical ladder.

Comment

A special kind of comparison—analogy—is an important method of exposition and, as Harris points out, a difficult method because of the precision required of the analogy. The writer who uses analogy must be careful that the differences between the two things being compared are unimportant and do not weaken the point being made through significant similarities. Harris begins his essay by criticizing a weak analogy—climbing the ladder of success. He then develops an analogy of his own—with mountain climbing—developing each point of similarity and, at the end of the essay, comparing the weak analogy with which he began to his own.

Questions for Study and Discussion

1. Why is the analogy of climbing the ladder and trying to succeed in one's vocation or profession a weak one? Why does mountain climbing provide a stronger analogy?
2. What similarities between mountain climbing and trying to succeed does Harris discuss? Are these similarities of equal importance, or does Harris stress some more than others?
3. What is the thesis of the essay and where does it appear?
4. Why does Harris return at the end of the essay to the weak analogy criticized at the beginning?
5. Are there other similarities between mountain climbing and trying to succeed that Harris might have discussed? Are there differences that he might have noted? Do these differences weaken the analogy and therefore the thesis of the essay, in your opinion, or are they insignificant?

Vocabulary Study

Define each of the following words, and explain how each differs in meaning from the word immediately following it:

1. *metaphor* (paragraph 1), *simile*
2. *precipitous* (paragraph 4), *steep*
3. *prudence* (paragraph 5), *caution*
4. *rappelling* (paragraph 6), *ascending*
5. *duplicity* (paragraph 7), *cunning*
6. *deficits* (paragraph 8), *hazards*

Suggestions for Writing

Develop a topic of your own by analogy, noting similarities as well as differences between the things being compared. In the course of your discussion, explain why these differences do not weaken the analogy. Here are a few possible topics:

1. making an enduring friendship
2. losing a friend
3. winning an argument fairly
4. winning an argument unfairly
5. asking for a raise in salary and getting it

John Garvey

THINKING IN PACKAGES

John Garvey, a columnist for *Commonweal* for many years, attended Notre Dame University, and after college taught high school and worked as an editor. Garvey writes about contemporary religious and social issues in his column. "There are true and false things," he has said, "and choices which align you with or against the universe." His essay discusses how we think about these things and the dangers of thinking too narrowly.

There is a grave problem which faces those of us who care about ideas. (Notice how I have gathered us all together in a noble little bunch.) It is something I have been