

Ed Viesturs

Biography: Washington resident Ed Viesturs is widely regarded as this country's foremost high-altitude mountaineer. He is familiar to many from the 1996 IMAX Everest Expedition documentary and in 2002, he was awarded the historic Lowell Thomas Award by the Explorer's Club for outstanding achievement in the field of mountaineering. In winning the award, he joined an elite group of climbers including Sir Edmund Hillary. In 1992 he was awarded the American Alpine Club Sowles Awards for his participation in two rescues on K-2.



Viesturs is a professional mountaineer and works as a design consultant for several prominent outdoor equipment manufacturers such as Mountain Hardwear, Timberland, and Grandoe Gloves. He also represents companies such as Rolex and Cisco Systems. He does corporate motivational speeches as well, touching on subjects such as Team Work, Overcoming Major Obstacles, and Planning and Preparation.

Viesturs has successfully reached the summits of all of the world's fourteen 8000-meter peaks without supplemental oxygen, an 18 year project he christened Endeavor 8000. His goal was completed on May 12, 2005 with his ascent of Annapurna one of the world's most treacherous peaks. He is one of only a handful of climbers in history (and the only American) to accomplish this. During this 18 year span he went on 29 Himalayan expeditions and reached the summit on 20 of these occasions. He climbs without benefit of an oxygen tank, which can be burdensome and potentially troublesome. Only a superior conditioned athlete can scale heights of 25,000 feet without artificial oxygen – a fact Viesturs has turned into an important metaphor for his audiences (i.e., that the key to the journey is in the time and energy invested in the preparation).

Viesturs motto has always been that climbing has to be a round trip. All of his planning and focus during his climbs maintains this ethic and he is not shy about turning back from a climb if conditions are too severe. In spite of his conservative attitude Viesturs has been one of the most successful Himalayan climbers in American history. His story is about risk management as well as being patient enough for conditions to allow an ascent. Ultimately, in his words, "The mountain decides whether you climb or not. The art of mountaineering is knowing when to go, when to stay, and when to retreat."

At the start of their 2005 season the Seattle Seahawks football team brought in Viesturs to speak to them about teamwork. According to Viesturs, regardless of the industry, teamwork is the same: "It is an implicit trust in, and recognition that the person next to you is No. 1," he explains. "If we're climbing a mountain together and you slip and fall, I'm there to save your life" – which is the ultimate definition of teamwork. Another lesson Viesturs espouses is the importance of perseverance, or going step by step and not getting discouraged when working toward your goal. Viesturs recalls once being just 300 feet away from the top of Mount Everest when he had to turn back.

Viesturs was born in 1959 and now lives on Bainbridge Island, Washington with his wife of 10 years, Paula, and their three children Gil, 8, Ella, 6 and Anabel, 2.