I started this day intrigued and a little bit nervous. Outside of the Everest Challenge the bigger obstacle was the need to make a quick connection with four strangers before starting a task where we would need to work as a team. I actually believe this was the biggest challenge of the day, for if I had been working with my classmates in a similar role, I would have different information to utilize in the actual simulation. From reading the articles, I had a sense that the task would require asymmetrical information to be revealed. However, how to make that information surface and where that information would be embedded alluded me throughout the task. To be honest, even being fully armed with this awareness, I fully admit that I lost focus on the search for information I knew I needed, instead getting caught up in the apparent problems of the moment.

Once the simulation began, I was slow to enter the chat. This, I realize was my first mistake. The other four had already began discussing details, and I missed some of this interaction as I skim read through it. I had barely entered the chat, when the countdown for a decision had begun. During the post reflection, I realized that Marathoner had given some important details in the early parts of the chat, and as the leader I had not acknowledge them as important or even thanked her. In real life, I know I would have listened to her give these details and would have thanked her. Unfortunately, because I never acknowledged the data she gave me early on as important and valued, she stopped sharing some relevant information later. In retrospect, as soon as I saw the chatting had started, as leader I should have taken time to properly ‘listen’ and respond. We did all ascend to Camp 1. However, I had already personally broken one of the norms we had set – share all information. It was unintentional, but I realized later on it may have been a critical error. For in breaking these rules as leader, I made it easier for others to choose not to disclose information as well.

From the start, health seemed the most central focus for me as the team leader. Everyone could not make it to the summit or their personal goals if they did not maintain their health and had to be rescued. When we reached Camp 1 then, my first questions was how everyone’s health was looking, this was my continued trend after each decision, check on health and rescue status. At camp 1 the Environmentalist reported that her health was weak. In the interaction between her the Physician, the Photographer, and myself about her health left one of some of our questions unanswered. I asked for the Environmentalist’s symptoms and there was no response. The conversation then diverted, with no real response being established.

At Camp 1 I appreciated that the Marathoner gave weather update immediately, as I knew that was her job. What I did not notice was that she gave less information than before. It should have been a clue to me that either: a. She didn’t have all the information and needed more or b. Due to the fact I hadn’t said anything earlier, she was choosing to share less. Either way, when I review the transcripts, I definitely see this difference in the weather information at this point.

Camp 1 was also the first time the Photographer threw me off my game, I became distracted by his declaration that he was staying at Camp 1 to take pictures. At this point, he chose to stay at Camp 1 while the rest of us moved to Camp 2. I made a major mistake by not at least stating that I needed him to take photos of me at the summit for an endorsement deal. I’m not sure if that would have changed his mind. In reviewing the chat, I realized that he did state that he didn’t want to let the team down. However, I didn’t want to be forceful when the other three players were demonstrating support for his decision. I did try to sway with the pictures from the top being even better. I was impressed by his counterarguments and decided that him staying at one camp would still allow him to join us later. Due to the fact that I really didn’t know the team members well, I chose to allow him to make a decision for himself. At that point, though, I knew that at least two of my personal goals were unattainable, for we would all not stay together through to Camp 4 or the summit. In the real world, I know there are times that leaders have to ‘read the room’ and decided whether pushing your agenda in the moment is worth it. It reminds me of the day-to-day in a classroom, where we need to often ‘pick our battles.’

When the first health challenge arose for the Environmentalist, she asked for a Gamow bag and the Physician almost immediately gave it. I had once again asked about her symptoms, to ensure that the right medication was administered. However, it was too late, since the physician had already administered the bag. This moment reminded me that in groups, you need to clearly establish beforehand that we may need to consult before acting, even if we believe that we are the specialist. We could not even share the asymmetrical information we were provided with, because the ask and the solution were done so quickly. I later learned that it may not have matter, because the Environmentalist had made the choice to not disclose that she had asthma and had no intentions of disclosing. This was interesting insight as well, for we had had a discussion prior to the simulation about full disclosure and not purposely hiding information. However, the ‘rules’ in her role told her not to show weakness, this leads to the idea that we will often act in our best interests, even if we know the information may help others.

As we proceeded through the simulation, it seemed that we were all back on an upward move. By the time we took a break, though, it was apparent that I had to worry less about my goals and more about what the goals of the individuals in the group were. The dynamic was clearly that there were a lot of ‘independent’ thinkers, including myself at this point. I knew that only a few of my own goals were attainable, so I shifted my focus after the break to how to help several of the others reach their goals. As a result, most of our offline discussion was about disclosing what these goals were. In retrospect, I should have asked more questions about other details I may have been missing as well, but at least the full disclosure of personal goals allowed for there to be some discussion around these.

Therefore, after the break, my goals were to get the Marathoner and the Physician to the top and allow the Environmentalist to stay at camp 4 to clean up garbage – a goal she had been stating throughout the simulation. I knew the Photographer was most likely going to drop back down to Camp 2 to fulfill his personal goals, but I did make one last ditch effort to get him to join us at the top. A critical error again, though, online was not letting him know I needed him. I did, though, disclose this during our conversations. I realized that the lack of team building and time before the simulation may have played into the fact that I was not going to sway him. Also, his personal agenda may have never been put aside for my agenda. This is so often true in schools. Teachers have a way that they do things, and even when everyone else is helping and supporting and suggesting change, they are true to their convictions and will go back to their room and still do it their way. I know this happens a lot in organizations, where the personal gain trumps the collective. This is an area where I know I need to work on myself and not take these peoples choices as personal, instead continue to show them the value in change and hope one day they will find a way to fit it into their personal goals. This type of relationship takes time, though, and a twenty-minute conversation before a simulation does not create that kind of trust.

When the next challenge arose to divide up oxygen tanks, it was interesting that several of us shared the asymmetrical information, but none of us, including me put the pieces together. Upon reviewing the chat, I saw that 3 of us shared our individual information, but I think we all shared it assuming it was shared information. As such, I don’t think we actually placed together how the information was connected. As a result, a guess around the information we had was made by each of us. Here I experienced a small glitch, for I know I selected oxygen, but for some reason it did not work. Therefore, when I made the attempt for the summit, I had no oxygen and was rescued. Because we had not properly shared and pieced the information together, the Physician had not chosen enough. Luckily, because the Marathoner had chosen the right amount and making her bid for the summit successful.

After the simulation I was frustrated with myself for several reasons. The biggest one being that I knew there would be asymmetrical information that needed to be revealed, but I lost focus on that in pursuit of my personal goals. I also lost focus based on the choices that the team members made. I was further frustrated that I had lost that focus, for I think the simulation is also about allowing there to be a balance between all of our goals, and I could have done a better job from the start finding out each of our goals and finding out which ones we would be willing to sacrifice to help each other meet the majority of them. Finally, I was frustrated that I didn’t process what some of my team members were needing from me and each other in critical moments. I realized that when working in a team, there are so many dynamics going on that it can easily get overwhelming and that I can lose focus if I get stuck on the wrong details.

When the survey results were revealed, I was happy about the results of how my team felt in such a short time. The idea that they felt psychologically safe according to the survey was comforting and reassuring. In the process, I suppose by allowing most of them to reach a lot of their goals, at the sacrifice of my own, I had built a small amount of trust in the moment.

Overall, the exercise has left me with a greater awareness of the dynamics of groups, particularly in high stress situations. It was a good reminder the most of us, including me, have an individualized agenda that may conflict with the others in the group. This then makes it difficult to make decisions that benefit the group, for you may not have all the information. It also means, that as a leader, you need to ensure that your agenda is not getting in the way of the greater good as well. It was a great exercise, and even though I wasn’t successful in some ways, I believe it helped me grow and reflect in others.