**The Trail-Hiker's Guide to the Workplace By Wendy Magaha**

**Application**- use, fit

**Enhance**- Make better

**Assets**- useful or desirable quality

**Colleagues**- co-workers

**Alliances**- teams

**Mentoring**- giving advice to people just starting out

**Commune**- talk, meet

**Imperative**- very important

**Isolating**- separate/alone

**In the loop**- understanding what is going on

**Staying the course­-** continuing to do something, not changing

**Reassess**- reconsider, think again

**Waning**- going away

**Benchmarks**- targets, goals

**Projected**- expected

**Droppings**- poop

While weekend and vacation hikes are meant to provide a break from the world of work, a number of rules to keep in mind on the trail have equally valuable application in the workplace.

So here's a trail-hiker's guide to the career world:

**Hike with a buddy**. Whenever possible, you should travel with a companion; it can enhance the journey and, if something goes wrong, it just might save your life.

The same holds true at work, where some of our most important assets are our colleagues and the alliances and networks we build. Work teams, quality circles and formal and informal mentoring programs are all examples of powerful buddy systems at work.

**Stay connected**. Sometimes a hiker prefers to commune with nature alone, but it's imperative that someone always knows where you are and your plans.

There are also times at work when the creative among us need to be alone to run with an idea. But if you don’t want to end up isolating yourself or creating ill feelings, it’s imperative to let your colleagues, bosses, and support staff always know what you’re up to—and keep them in the loop. Don't shut out the rest of your team. That way, nobody gets left behind.

**Have a map**. You might never take it out of your pocket, but you need to know your starting point and where you want to go. You also need to have a career map for your own professional development and use it to track your progress.

At the same time, whether on the trail or in the office, there are lots of different routes to choose from. It's all right to change plans as you go along, as long as you stay focused on your final destination.

But don't be so fixed on staying the course that you forget to lift your head every so often and look around. Conditions both outdoors and indoors change, creating new opportunities or signaling a need to reassess where you're heading.

**Break a long hike into manageable chunks**. If you don't want to get overwhelmed, it's easier to reach for shorter-term goals and clearly measurable results to keep your enthusiasm from waning.

The same goes for your job. Set work goals and benchmarks for yourself and your team that are realistic and can be easily achieved -and be certain to celebrate every success. Setting benchmarks will also let you know when things aren't working out as you projected and help you change course before it's too late.

**It doesn't matter who made the mess - clean it up.** As you're walking along a trail, you may come across droppings left by an irresponsible dog owner who failed to clean up after the pet. That leaves you with two choices: pick them up or leave them for someone else to step in.

Similarly, in the office, you may also be faced with the "droppings" of someone else's mistakes, laziness or ineptitude. It doesn't matter the reason or whose fault it is. If you can clean up the mess, do it. Not only will you exemplify positive leadership to those around you, you'll also make your own life easier.

**Share the load.** When hiking with a group, it's important to plan the trip ahead of time, split up the work to be done and assign tasks that people enjoy. After all, the goal is for everyone to have a good time.

**Ineptitude**- stupidity, failing

**Exemplify**- be a perfect example of

**Roles-** jobs

**Recognition**- realizing

**Etiquette­-** Proper behavior, polite behavior

**Broker**- special banker

**Govern**- rule

**Reinforce­**- support,

**Explicit**- told very clearly

**Implicit-** implied, not told clearly

**Morale**- positive feelings, enthusiasm

**Priority-** goes first, most important

**Yields**- gives up

**Momentum­**- movement or energy going in one direction

**Obstacles**- things in the way

**Innovation**- invention, creative solutions or ideas

Same goes at work. Advance planning, effective communication around roles and responsibilities, and recognition of everyone's strengths help to ensure that tasks get done, and done well - and, just as importantly, that people have fun and feel good about the work they're doing.

**Practice etiquette**. On the trail, it's important to leave nothing but your footprints behind. To keep your voice down. To use your cellphone only in an emergency because nobody wants to hear you talking to your broker while they're trying to commune with nature.

That's the etiquette of hiking - and off the trail, all organizations have their own rules that reflect, govern and reinforce their culture and acceptable behavior.

Sometimes workplace etiquette is explicit—you can find it in mission and values statements or an employee manual. Other times, it is implicit and learned through experience, observation and asking questions. Learn the rules of the organization where you work and apply them. Practicing etiquette makes you a valued part of the workplace community.

**Take care of your feet.** They support you and can easily suffer when you're hiking. Painful blisters and injuries can keep you off the trail so you need to keep yourself in shape for the trail.

It's the same at work, where your ability to do your best depends on taking care of yourself. Keep your life and work in balance. Job-sharing, flexible hours, health breaks, and participating in health and wellness programs inside and outside of work all help to keep the stress down and the morale up.

**The person expending the most energy has priority.** When a hiker going uphill meets one heading down, it's usually the one going down who yields the right of way so the uphill climber can keep momentum and maintain aerobic level.

One of the best things you can do as a team leader and member is to recognize the hardest workers in your group and support them, sometimes by getting out of their way. Clear obstacles in their paths. Offer encouragement. Reward them and keep their momentum going, too.

**Sometimes basic is beautiful.** Your battered, brown hiking boots might be the only footwear in your closet without wing tips or a three inch heel. But there are times when absolutely nothing else will do.

In the workplace, solutions don't have to be complicated or experimental to be effective. Real innovation respects and builds on the things that are already working. What's most important is to gather the right people and the right tools for the job.

**Exercise leadership.** Just as your leg muscles will be stronger if you make a point of exercising them year-round, your teamwork and leadership skills will also become stronger and work more effectively with regular use.