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From cubicle to mountain crest

By Dana Greenlee, Technology Columnist

It's a fact: working in the technology business, you can expect a fast-paced, demanding life with long hours and stress. Some enterprising tech workers schedule organized retreats to regroup the team, which can have a better outcome than a stack of memos or a ton of meetings.

Last September, I talked with Barry Duplantis, Director of Government Programs at Red Hat Linux in Raleigh, NC, who seems to have identified a somewhat unique way to do this. It involves Mt. Rainier and an expedition he calls "Red Hat over Redmond."

DANA **GREENLEE**: You work n Raleigh, NC where Red Hat is located. Right now, you're in Seattle, WA. What in the world brings you into Microsoft territory?

BARRY DUPLANTIS: Well, we have a little event every year that Red Hat sponsors. It's a climb of Mount Rainier. It's called Red Hat over Redmond.

DANA GREENLEE

GREENLEE: That's a really good name since Rainier looks down on Redmond – Redmond being the campus for Microsoft. Did you dub that name?

DUPLANTIS: Yes, I did. With a group of folks a few years ago, we decided to do something a bit challenging and get us out of the grind of development work. We decided, "Let's go climb a mountain."

GREENLEE: Why Rainier?

DUPLANTIS: For those folks who are novice climbers, who have never climbed before, Rainier is achievable. With the proper training, a good guide-service, and well-organized group, you can actually have a good experience and have quite a few of the folks summit.

GREENLEE: In an abstract sense, when you think about doing this annual adventure with members from Red Hat, what do you hope to gain besides sore muscles and a little bit of sunburn?

DUPLANTIS: I think there are a few things we try to accomplish with this. It's taking folks out of their environment and giving them a unique challenge, and really pushing them to their limits. We talk about goals and goal-setting for this. With us, it's a journey of self-discovery. You learn a lot about yourself when you're pushing your own limits. It also has a lot to do with individual goal-setting. We allow members to join declines. We give them what the training standards are and what they need in order to be ready both mentally and physically. They have to train to those standards. It's about setting goal achievement. At the end of the day, it's not really about summiting. It's the journey getting there.

GREENLEE: And the journey actually starts back in North Carolina. Do you have mental and physical benchmarks that you do together? Or is that up to the individual?

DUPLANTIS: We have the ability in Raleigh and some of the other locations to get folks together and actually climb Mount Mitchell. It's actually in North Carolina, and it's the highest mountain east of the Mississippi. It's in our backyard, so we get to train a bit there. This is open to our global Red Hat employees. We have folks from Germany and England participating in the climb this year, and good folks from Ireland and Austria participating last year.

GREENLEE: What exactly do you mean by mental preparation?

DUPLANTIS: You know when you're physically exhausted and you can see it in someone's face, but mentally – that's something you're driving in yourself. You may not be physically exhausted but you can tell yourself, "Look. I'm done. I'm finished and I can't go any further." You have to think about taking just one more step. I look at Mount Rainier as a succession of very small steps for a very long time.

GREENLEE: What a great metaphor for business and technology. Have you heard anything out of Redmond about this?

DUPLANTIS: I have friends that work at Microsoft and they think it's pretty funny. They always want the T-shirt so they can walk around the Redmond campus with it. Sort of stir the pot a bit. I fully believe normal retreats are good, but this is something extreme but safe -- and it's achievable. The idea that Red Hat is helping to sponsor this with their associates is really inspiring -- to work for a company that supports this type of activity.

GREENLEE: They kick in some funding?

DUPLANTIS: Red Hat does provide funding for associates to do this climb.

GREENLEE: Red Hat is the prime enterprise choice. How did it get into desktop solutions?

DUPLANTIS: We launched the desktop last year and we have it deployed right now. We're just getting into that. Of course, the servers are where our main competency is right now.

GREENLEE: Give us some idea of your new responsibilities at Red Hat.

DUPLANTIS: I've gone from supporting all our customer base globally to pushing into a new market in the government space. I'm really focusing on looking at establishing policies around Linux in the government so that it makes it easier for those folks who do want Linux in the government to be able to buy it. I'm also working with a lot of the government agencies on their Linux strategies and how to migrate and deployed Linux in their environments.

GREENLEE: Is there such a thing as a government-mandated operating system?

DUPLANTIS: There are, and it does have mandated operating systems that we're trying to get Red Hat as the third authorized operating system, which would be the only Linux operating system. We have to comply with the common criteria and the regulations set forth by the government, so I'm working with our folks to be able to do that. We're also working on some exciting stuff on the security side with regards to what we're doing with our security enhancements on the Enterprise Linux 4.

You can listen to the expanded 15-minute audio conversation by visiting the WebTalk Radio online archives for Sept. 10 (WebTalkRadio.com) or by opening the following mp3 in your favorite computer media player -- http://www.webtalkguys.com/mp3/webtalk-2005-09-10.mp3 .