
CASE STUDY: Leadership & An Expedition to Mount Everest

Moderator & Author

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Background

The following is a representation of a true business situation and experience that arose over a 7-year period from 2001 to 2008 and continues today. The names are real, the expedition is real and the details are real.

The story is told in stages over the 7 year period. Your task before we meet is to review the information provided and answer the questions at the end of the case. In order to create an applied learning environment to maximize the value of this exercise, please prepare as follows:

1. Each team member read and analyze the case prior to the work session (as per the questions before Annex A and B, page 8).
2. Bring to the session your individual analysis for group discussion of deliverables.
3. Each team bring the following items for personalities:
 - i) Sean – toque
 - ii) Elia – bandana
 - iii) Harold – pairs of sun-glasses
 - iv) Norm – head-lamp
 - v) Peter – baseball cap (ideally New York Yankees)
4. Within each team, identify who will take on the personality of each of the Everest team members. Study the bios and become familiar with your “character”. You may be interviewed in order for us to understand better your motivations as a leader. You may be called on to role play/act your part!

See Annex A (end of this document) for more information on the five key personalities described in the case

Executive Summary

This Case Study is an applied, active-learning experience that takes participants through a leadership journey. Created under the theme of “Great Leaders”, the case illustrates the importance of the ‘leader’ in leadership and, in this case, describes 5 individuals who act as leaders, with 2 in particular who stand out. A variety of key aspects of leadership, including emotional intelligence and deliberate practice, are important in the case.

The case is a situation in which a certain individual was inspired by a leader with a vision and, then, himself took on that vision for his own with passion and drive: ‘a new leader for an old leader’. A cast of supporting characters – many leaders in their own right – is also presented and plays an important role in this story.

The Vision, The Dream

On September 1st, 2001, Dr. Sean Egan sat quietly in his office at the University of Ottawa. Although himself a renowned proponent of a positive outlook on life, he was having trouble smiling today. You see, his dream of summing the world’s highest peak – Mount Everest – seemed in doubt. This doubt didn’t stem from his fitness, his drive or his motivation but from his inability to acquire the resources necessary to fund such an endeavour.

As a life-long professor and practitioner of health, Sean had rarely thought of things from a business strategy point of view and he was struggling. In 1998 and 2000 – his two previous trips to Everest – he’d gone as a researcher and been able to use funds from related grants and projects to cover his costs. Of course, those trips had cost approximately \$10,000 each and this one was looking to be over \$100,000. Summing the world’s highest peak, as you see, is not cheap!

He wanted to summit in the spring of 2004. That was his goal. His dream would see him become the 2nd oldest and oldest Canadian ever to climb Everest. However, most importantly, his vision was to send his messages of active living to the world. He felt that Everest could provide him with the reach to pass on his messages learned through a long and successful career as a professor of health and fitness.

Over the summer, Sean had talked to all the key groups at his University (Deans, VP of Development, Research Directors, etc.) about funding. All had the same answer: small grants for research projects were possible but a large grant to support such an endeavour was not possible without external partners or achieving the support of a major granting agency. Both of these solutions were challenging endeavours to say the least with the achievement of a major research grant bordering on impossible given that summing was Sean’s primary goal. Coupled with the fact that making it to the peak of Everest was no longer ‘new’ or ‘newsworthy’, finding resources was not going to be an easy task.

One positive among the many negative responses was the pledge of University Advancement to support the search for resources as part of their overall fundraising for the University. At first that was a positive prospect but following a few meetings with the assigned officer, Sean was skeptical if anything would come of that. Like Sean, his colleagues quickly learned how difficult this task would be. The bottom line was clear and simple: he was on his own and knew he had to look for support. To complicate matters further, Sean had just turned 60 years of age and with his final sabbatical slotted for 2004 or 2005, time was also not on his side. Was funding possible? What could he do? His dream was on the line. The reach needed to achieve his vision was in doubt.

The Team: “The Right People at the Right Time”

It is now September 1st, 2003 and Dr. Egan is again sitting quietly in his office.

Over the past 2 years, he has continued to work towards his dream with a few key items achieved. First, he asked a former Teaching Assistant of his, Norm O'Reilly, a sport business guy, to get involved and help with business planning and the achievement of resources. Second, with some success and many failures, he'd approached others to become involved with his team (local event planners, other researchers, suppliers, Canadian climbers, international climbers, etc.). Third, his own physical training and preparation was improving significantly with many hours spent working on his technical climbing skills and continued work on his endurance including major bike trips, stair climbing sessions, weight training and long walks. This included walks of up to 80km, a bike trip from Oregon to Ottawa, 5-hour stair climbs with 50 pounds on his back and a daily regime of nutrition and fitness.

With respect to the business side of the proposed trek, Sean has been working with Norm for over 18 months with some energy but limited success. Now it is crunch time and he is excited about his trip next week to Toronto to meet with Norm and Norm's friend Harold Mah from the City of Toronto. Harold is an experienced and savvy event manager and marketer who is highly connected in the event industry and is highly recommended by Norm. If they are to go in the spring of 2005, they need to find some financial support very soon. Otherwise, the dream may have to be put off further or terminated. Given the huge investment of time and energy by both Sean and Norm, this is not an appealing option.

Generally, things have been happening and interest is growing, however funding remains elusive. They'd also recovered from a major set-back. They discovered that the expedition manager and the additional researcher who were added in 2003 were working behind their backs and planning to undermine the expedition. These relationships were terminated in the spring of 2003. The positives involved the interest of some researchers and climbers in joining the group, although none had confirmed. Sean had also finalized arrangements with a few special interest groups where they would fund a trekker on the expedition.

Sean's focus on his physical training remains paramount and he has plans to bike across Canada in the summer of 2004 and to climb the highest mountain in South America – Aconcagua (Argentina) in January 2005 in preparation for his summit bid.

Despite the success of his training, the generation of resources to support the climb is an on-going challenge. Specifically, sponsorship remains a frustration as many pitches were made (over 200) with very little success. Communications were improving with a functional website and decent media coverage in the Ottawa area.

“The Plan and THE TEAM”

Just a few weeks later – mid-September 2003 - Sean, Norm and Harold are at their 3-day planning retreat in Toronto. Following some terrific team-bonding, a review of progress to date and a forecast of the potential for success, the group of 3 decided unanimously and strongly to forge ahead to make the trek a reality. All were acting as volunteers and committed to put in the necessary hours.

Following the commitment, a detailed plan of how to generate sponsorship interest and resources was outlined. A strategy and implementation plan was put together. Implementation was to begin immediately as all know that another delay and the expedition would be unlikely to ever occur.

Some of the key aspects of the plan include:

1. A clearly defined product: “A Research Expedition to Mount Everest” with the theme “Fitness and Ageing”. The group reviewed many options and felt strongly that Sean and what he stood for – healthy living at an advanced age and high quality research – were the key differentiating factors to success. Everest has been done before; the expedition had to be novel and different in some respect.
2. The brand that would be promoted was based clearly on #1 above. Sean, then research.
3. A recruitment plan to build a team of climbers, researchers, trekkers and supporters was developed to create a team that would be of value to sponsors and media.
4. A communications plan to build awareness of the team in #3 once built.

The team left with a positive feeling and confidence that only an achievable plan could provide.

In the weeks that followed a key sleep researcher from the University of Ottawa, researchers from throughout Europe, climbers from all around and various interest groups all expressed interest in joining the expedition. Also, significant support came from Norm's home school - Ryerson University's School of Business Management, including the addition of Norm's boss, Peter Luk, Director of the Business School, researcher and novice climber. A sedentary, former heavy smoker who was 20-pounds over-weight, Peter represented an ideal complement to Sean's message. Five other

professors from Ryerson also expressed interest in partaking in the expedition. Although in the end many did not join, the energy was there and the 'buzz' began that led to a well-sponsored team of 20 heading to Everest in the late winter of 2005.

The expedition ended up as the "Kanatek Expedition to Mount Everest 2005" with Kanatek Technologies, an Ottawa-based Systems Integrator, ending up as title sponsor after originally turning down the opportunity in 2002. Interestingly, they supported the expedition as a business decision to promote their organization and achieve very specific objectives. Other sponsors ended up including HP, Energizer and Urban Voyageur.

"The Inspiration"

In March, 2005, a group of 20 left from Canada (Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal), Australia and the United States to embark on an adventure of a lifetime. The 20 included the expedition leader planning to summit (Sean), the base camp manager (Harold), 10 researchers, and 8 trekkers. Included in the trekkers category, were two documentary filmmakers including Elia Saikaly. One additional researcher accompanied the team to Kathmandu but did not go up the mountain.

The 10-day trek to base camp was a resounding success. All 20 members made it without major issue or health problems. The training had been worthwhile and, even better, the team bonded exceptionally well. Friends were made on the trail, fun was had and an experience to last a lifetime unfolded. In addition to the ongoing research activities, a number of media activities took place including nightly connection, via satellite, to the internet and the sending of blog messages and photos to an internet site that had nearly 100,000 readers by the completion of the trek. Special calls to elementary schools by Sean took place in the wee hours of the morning and the back-up of research (PDA to lap-top to Ottawa via satellite) was vital to the success of the researchers.

Arrival at base camp was a celebration that was followed by a week of camaraderie, continued research and climbing preparations. The 'world's highest hockey game' took place on day 3 and research wrapped up on day 5, however it was little consolation for the difficult life at base camp. Ice, snow, desolation and boredom hit many of the team and they were happy to be out of there after the week. Only Sean, Harold and a couple of researchers remained after the week.

A few days later, once acclimatized, Sean, Harold and their Sherpas began preparations and training to build towards Sean's summit attempt. They scaled to camp 1 and back down. Then Sean and a couple of the Sherpas got sick, some kind of bug that they couldn't shake. During his run to camp 2, Sean was forced to turn back. He visited a doctor at base camp who said he had a cold. He knew better, that something was wrong and began to head down for a second opinion. Only a few hours walk from the closest hospital, he was forced to stop. He called a helicopter but died awaiting its arrival. Subsequent reports cited a combination of many factors contributed to Sean's demise, including a lung infection.

“Sustaining the Vision”

Many of the team had difficulty with Sean’s passing, both personally and professionally. Many mourned and made life changes. Almost all sponsorship and promotional plans post-climb were cancelled. A few of the research projects were completed and published although many never came to fruition. Sean’s planned outputs (a book and a few articles) were never realized.

Team members channeled their grief by rallying around a fund-raising effort – the Ad Astra campaign - to build a school at a Nepalese orphanage in Sean’s honour. A number of initiatives (golf tournament, fundraising banquets, Nepal-theme dinners, etc.) raised \$150,000 to build the school. It took the group approximately 2 years to raise this amount.

“The Phoenix Emerges from the Ashes”

In the year following Sean’s death, it was widely assumed that his vision would be lost. However, quietly and devotedly, Elia Saikaly – one of the documentary filmmakers on the expedition – had other plans. During 2005, he had spent countless hours with Sean late at night in his tent filming Sean’s deepest thoughts and visions. Just chatting and sharing. Like hundreds of students before him, Elia was captured by Sean and, upon Sean’s death, took it up on himself to take up the torch, change his life and carry on with the vision. This was exemplified by his “Finding Life” (www.findinglife.ca) vision which was how he encapsulated how Sean viewed the world.

The bio in Annex A outlines Elia’s accomplishments. From a leadership point of view he truly took passion, vision and motivation from Sean and emerged as a new leader. He dedicated himself to his task, altered his life and lined his priorities with his new vision.

About Finding Life

Finding Life is about Elia’s journey to follow in the footsteps of the late Sean Egan whose goal had been to be the oldest Canadian to stand on top of the world. His mission was to help others rediscover meaning in their lives. Elia coined the term ‘Finding Life’ to chronicle his adventure, which encompasses his own search for meaning, an infamous mountain, a Buddhist perspective, an emotional memorial set at 14,000 ft and the quest of a man who died following his dreams. In discovering that ‘through death, life can be found’, Elia returned to Everest in both 2006 (Camp II) and 2007 (Summit attempt which saw him come within a few hundred meters of the top but bad weather forced him to turn back).

The key driver for Elia to develop Finding Life remains Sean Egan. Had Sean been able to have accomplished his goal in 2005 of being the oldest Canadian to summit Everest, he would have had a platform to help inspire people of all ages to get fit, get active and re-discover meaning in their lives. For Elia and many, Finding Life has become an



alternate way to accomplish Sean's dream. This involves coming full circle with Elia returning to Everest to stand on the top of the mountain and completing his film.

Finding Life also involves Elia's spiritual journey into the heritage of the Tibetan tradition, as he traced Sean's steps and began to understand what Sean helped him discover in 2005. The Buddhist monks' view of Sean's death allowed Elia to question his own life, alter it and learn how much control we really have over how we live.

Finally, Finding Life is also about Elia's passion and career – cinematography – where he tells his story with his camera, his creativity and music. His hope is to be able to share the experience and messages as broadly as Sean would have liked. It is a very intimate and exposed look at one man's struggle to relive the past in order to make way for the future.

About Emerging Leaders

Elia is an example of an emerging leader. Inspired by a powerful, intimate and life-changing experience in 2005 with Sean, his view of the world, life in general and himself changed and – in web-time – he became an open-minded leader. Different than Sean. A leader in his own right. Without any previous climbing experience or background in related activities, he had decided to take what was a 'job' (i.e. filming Sean's climb) and make it his passion. Over the past two+ years, he has dedicated himself to the practice of mountaineering to gain the skills required. He has the same dedicated, unwavering pursuit of his goal as did Sean. In fact, Elia was once heard saying, "I felt that by following in his footsteps up the mountain that I might be able to begin to understand what it was that drove him and where the passion came from". Sean's energy and passion continues to fuel Elia. By continuing the pursuit of Sean's dream, Elia has also engaged others from the expedition. Harold returned with Elia in 2006. Others plan to join Elia on future adventures or have supported him in many ways (sponsorship, fundraising, equipment, morale support, etc.).

“The New Leader Takes Action”

Up to April 2008, Elia has made considerable progress on achieving his vision. His charisma, devotion and passion have allowed him to make his mark in many circles and he expects to release his first full-length film – on Everest and Finding Life – in the coming months. He also has plans for multiple future expeditions (Everest again, Kilimanjaro, Antarctica, Aconcagua) and other films.

Annex B is a press release following Elia's 2007 summit attempt.

Pre-Work/Deliverables (individual assignment)

- Based on the bios in the appendix (Annex A) and the story, estimate each individual team member's strengths (Sean, Norm, Harold, Elia, Peter) in relation to thinking preferences, learning styles, and leadership style (a la Goleman typology).
- Assess the team's performance strengths and risks based on your estimation of the interaction of the members (Sean, Norm, Harold, Elia, Peter).
- From a "leadership" perspective, what did Sean do at critical junctures to help achieve his "vision"? Specifically, provide an example of:
 - >Moving through the political quagmire
 - >Attracting attention to his vision
 - >Working through conflict/regulating and taking the heat (both with external players and in establishing the team)
 - >Dealing with the emotional part of the expedition
 - >"Getting on the balcony" to check out what's happening, figure out what to do
- As hindsight is always "20:20", what did Sean do right, what did he do wrong and what could he have been done differently to realize a better outcome on Mount Everest?
- Elia has taken a 180 degree turn in his life in order to continue the pursuit of Sean's vision.
 - >In your opinion, what motivates him? How does your perspective tie into the journey of becoming a leader?
 - >Would you hire Elia? Please provide a rationale for the answer?
- What have you learned from this case about leadership?

ANNEX A: THE PLAYERS

Sean Egan

Sean Egan was a unique individual. In addition to being a recognized expert in health, he was an accomplished athlete, fundraiser and a proponent of a healthy lifestyle. In the past, he had led many groups on similar (but smaller) expeditions including fundraising marathon walks and charity events. He had been a champion boxer, top marathon runner and accomplished ultra-marathon walker (e.g. walk from Toronto to Los Angeles) and cyclist (he had crisscrossed North America numerous times).

As a leader, Sean was a natural leader. But, organizing and detail were not his strengths. Charisma and vision were. He was the kind of guy who could walk into a room of strangers and engage everyone. By the end of the night, all would be gathered around him listening to his stories. People followed his teachings and changed their lifestyles because of him. His books were widely read and his following worldwide.

His official bio (as of September 2003) describes an energetic, mission-driven leader:

*Ireland born Sean Egan is a passionate health enthusiast. He is a diverse sportsman with skills in everything from soccer to boxing and beyond. Gravitating towards endurance driven athletic events, Egan has completed a number of charity walks that included a 640-mile walk from Eugene, Oregon to San Francisco, California for cancer research and a march for children's rights that took him from Toronto, Ontario to the step of the University of Ottawa. Egan is an accomplished mountain climber, having reached base camp level of Mt. Everest in 1998 (at an elevation of approximately 18,000 feet). He returned to the mountain in 2000 to conduct research and plans another return in the near future to continue to collect information for those works. Egan's educational and professional background solidifies his commitment to health. After completing a degree in Literature at Dublin University, he tightened his focus with study in psychology at l'Université de Paris and earned Ph.D. in Sports Psychology from the University of Oregon at Eugene. Egan spent 24 years on the faculty of the University of Ottawa's School of Human Kinetics specializing in health education. He is a published author of seven books including *The Psychology of Health* (2001), *Psychologie de la santé à la recherche du Bien Etre* (2002) and *Fitness and Health – A Holistic Approach* (1984).*

Elia Saikaly

Elia is the emerging leader who takes on Sean's quest following his death in 2005. His story is an incredible one and he has changed significantly from 2003 as a result. He has become a leader. He has traveled the world, he has

incredible goals, he has produced films, and he is pursuing Sean's vision. This is outlined in his official bio (as of September 2007, www.findinglife.ca):

Elia Saikaly started making movies at the age of 15. He has had the opportunity to experience being a musician, an actor, a model and a filmmaker. Music videos, commercials and short films were what initially got him into this business. At the age of 20, Elia was selected amongst thousands across the country for the MuchMusic VJ search held in 2000. He was a finalist thanks to his creative video submission where he received national attention. During that period, Elia worked as a CHUM correspondent for Much Music while filing stories as a journalist from Ottawa 's now A-Channel.

Elia is familiar with both sides of the lens. He was cast to play the lead role in 2 successful series on MTV. He has also had the opportunity to travel as a fitness model doing ad campaigns and commercials in Europe.

In 2002, Elia founded REEL CONCEPTS. A video production company based in Ottawa, Canada. The company specializes in creative and innovative video and film production. He brings something unique and innovative to every production. His eye for "LIFE" and his unique style is easily identified within his works.

In the last 2 years he has been carving a niche for himself as an adventure filmmaker producing/directing and shooting films all around the world. The Sahara desert in Africa, the Great White North and Mt Everest in Nepal have been the backdrop for his latest productions. He just returned from Mt. Everest for the 3rd time and completed production on his feature length production FINDINGLIFE.

On a personal note, Elia has always been into fitness and bodybuilding. At the age of 17, Elia set a world record for the dead-lift hoisting 525lbs. He has made fitness and health a part of his lifestyle.

Elia also spends some of his time helping charities, he was recently a part of an initiative to build a school for orphans in Nepal.

Harold Mah

Harold was with Sean after the main expedition left. He went as high as Camp 2 with Sean and was the first to learn of his death. He had the trying task of sharing the news with others and Sean's family.

Harold is known widely as a savvy and connected events 'guy' in Toronto. He knows how things work and how to get things done. At 41, he is an experienced athlete (triathlete and runner) and an amateur climber. He knew Norm for

previous events and got involved due to his desire to go to Everest. He has many such opportunities and chose this over those.

Harold is an operational leader. He knows how to plan effectively. He sees the key steps required in implementing a strategy and has done so successfully on many times.

His official bio (as of September 2003) reinforced his planning acumen:

Harold Mah has collected varied expertise in special event logistics, community programming, budget construction and staffing through his 14 years of work experience. A recent highlight to his resume is his involvement in the Molson Canadian Rocks for Toronto Rolling Stones Concert where he held the position of City of Toronto Lead. In this role Mah tackled the creation of a clear communication stream between the various organizing bodies consisting of various levels of government, private producers and organizations and various City of Toronto departments. He provided direct leadership by liaising with the host venue and stakeholders, orchestrating the event through weekly partners meetings and dealing with daily issue management. Mah put together the event which drew 400,000 plus spectators in 55 days. Mah was also the City of Toronto Senior Project Manager for World Youth Day 2003 and the Papal Visit. Mah was the City Producer for the Way of the Cross Event which drew in excess of 250,000 spectators. The successful World Youth Week drew over 700,000 pilgrims to Toronto. Other projects Mah has been involved in are the Celebrate Toronto Street Festival, City of Toronto Millennium New Year's Eve celebrations and the NHL All-star Game. He currently is the Event Support Manager for the City of Toronto and chair of the City of Toronto Events Support Team. Mah's educational background, which includes a Bachelor of Recreation and Leisure Studies from Brock University and a Recreation Leadership Diploma from Humber College, shines through in his dedication to cultural, outdoor and sporting events. He has worked as a consultant for over 500 events such as jazz and art festivals, Eco Challenge Canada, Urban Adventure Races, the ITU Toronto World Cup Triathlon, numerous running races and Race Director for the Kids Can Too Triathlon (9 years). On a personal level, Mah has completed numerous marathons and is a three time Ironman Finisher. Harold Mah is a highly sought expert and currently sits on a number of volunteer boards and committees.

Norm O'Reilly

Norm went to base camp as a researcher and left prior to Sean's death. As Sean's closest friend on the team, he was hardest hit.

Norm was Sean's RA/TA in the mid-1990's and they became great friends afterwards. He became involved in the expedition to help Sean achieve his goal. At first, he just did some business planning but slowly become more interested

and decided to go to the mountain. He is a very accomplished athlete who had competed internationally (swimmer, skier, triathlete) but a very novice climber.

As a leader, Norm is strategic and enabling. Quiet but engaging and intelligent yet modest, he has successfully led many times (teams, projects, companies, etc.).

His official bio (as of September 2003) illustrated his athletic, academic and business strengths:

Norm is a consummate athlete-educator who is actively involved in sports, most recently as a member of the mission support team for Canada's Olympic team in Athens, where he worked in the Athlete's Village. He is a triathlete, Ironman and marathon runner who takes every opportunity to compete in various national and world events to work on his mastery.

Norm is as keen about learning as he is about sports. He has channeled his enormous talent and energy into building a deep understanding of how top athletes guide their success in a highly competitive business. Norm is educated in Kinesiology, Sports Administration, and Business Management and applies his skills on a daily basis.

Norm's appeal as an experienced athlete and educator has led to academic positions at Toronto's Ryerson University, Laurentian University in Sudbury and a variety of speaking engagements at industry conferences nationwide. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Ryerson University.

On top of his extensive academic experience, O'Reilly has held a number of prestigious professional positions including Event Manager for the Toronto 2008 Olympic Bid, Senior Policy Officer at Sport Canada and Founder and Managing Partner of OTM Knowledge Services Incorporated. His expertise is sought for seats on the boards of major sporting organizations including the Canadian Olympic Committee and Triathlon Canada.

O'Reilly has published theses and presented articles on topics including sports sponsorship, the profitability of sport franchises, the development of modern sports and the economic impact of amateur sports. One of O'Reilly's most recent research endeavors is a study entitled "The 'Other Harsh Reality' of an Everest Climb: the Business Side," which is expected to be completed in 2005 following a research expedition to Mount Everest.

Peter Luk

Dr. Peter Luk was a researcher and 'debutant climber' on the 2005 expedition.

Peter's official bio (September 2003) showed hints of bigger things to come:
Peter Luk has been a professor at Ryerson University for 24 years, following a decade of sales and management experience in



industry. His passion for the school is obvious and his dedication and service on its behalf considerable. Currently, Peter is the Director of Ryerson's School of Business Management, the largest of the 4 Schools in the Faculty of Business. He is also a former Director of the School of Hospitality and Tourism Management.

Well-travelled, Peter obtained his Bachelor of Business Administration from the University of PEI, his MBA from the University of Saskatchewan and his PhD from the University of Calgary. His research is largely in the area of tourism and service quality, including 2 major projects around the Everest Expedition. Peter has made a number of lifestyle changes to prepare for his climb to Base Camp, including a daily fitness regime and a recent climb of the CN Tower for charity.

ANNEX B: POST CLIMB PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, March 1, 2007

FINDINGLIFE ON MOUNT EVEREST

28 yr. old Ottawa film maker gets set to summit Everest, finish film and pay tribute to a fallen climber Dr. Sean Egan.

OTTAWA, ON -- Elia Saikaly is a 28 year old Ottawa-based film-maker and fitness enthusiast.

On March 22, 2007, Saikaly will set out to complete his film FindingLife by summiting Mount Everest and continuing the work of a mentor and fallen climber, Dr. Sean Egan.

This is Saikaly's first attempt at the summit, but his third visit to the mountain. FindingLife is a culmination of 3 years of events and experiences that greatly impacted Saikaly's life and his philosophies. Mt. Everest plays a pivotal role in Saikaly's film and it is why he must return to bring the narrative to a conclusion.

There are three key players in the film FindingLife – the man, the mountain and the mentor.

The film reveals the struggle of the man, Saikaly, who unknowingly began this journey in 2005 when he agreed to join a Canadian expedition team to support the summit attempt of University of Ottawa professor, Dr. Sean Egan. Egan's bid was in effort to promote fitness and well-being by reaching the summit as the oldest Canadian. The 2005 expedition was sponsored by Ottawa-based Kanatek. Saikaly's role on this expedition was to document the journey and interview Egan.

On April 29th, 2005, Mt Everest proved to be more powerful, and Egan passed away at the age of 63. Only Egan's spirit reached the summit that spring when his ashes were left there by Canadian climber Gabriel Filippi when he successfully reached the summit on May 30, 2005.

"I am looking for the highest platform to get my messages across."
– S. Egan, 2005.

Egan's untimely passing hit Saikaly hard. While reviewing footage and reliving his 2005 adventure, Saikaly was both haunted and inspired by Egan's powerful words and passion for life. In 2006, Elia packed up his camera and gear and returned to Everest to retrace Sean's final footsteps. The FindingLife project was born.

The mountain, Mount Everest, is revealed as another key character in FindingLife. It is celebrated and feared as both a celebrated challenge and an overpowering enemy. For Saikaly, Mt. Everest is friend and foe. Not only does FindingLife reveal the

overwhelming struggle of tackling the mountain, but we are introduced to the Nepalese and Tibetan people who find life amongst its foothills and economic prosperity in its tourism and climbing industries. Saikaly's quest brought him to the breathtaking places that inspired Egan; to the many individuals who taught Egan so much about spirituality and life; to the children of Nepal that could still smile and appreciate life amidst the hardships they had to face in their lives.

Dr. Egan brings man and mountain together as the mentor and inspiration behind FindingLife. Egan spent his life helping others to rediscover life and Saikaly aims to continue those efforts through FindingLife – a film that will inspire others to tackle the mountains that lie before them – whatever they may be.

Currently there is a project underway by a Canadian group to raise funds to build a school in Egan's memory for orphaned children in Katmandu, Nepal. For more information visit www.adastra-aimhigh.com or www.childhaven.ca

2007 marks the 25th anniversary of the first Canadian summit of Mount Everest.

Saikaly's climbing and support team includes Gabriel Filippi and Gary Hartlin.

Sponsorship opportunities are available for corporations or individuals interested in supporting Saikaly's bid. Contact info@findinglife.ca

For more information on FindingLife and to access the film's trailer visit www.findinglife.ca

To learn more about the 2005 Expedition, Sean Egan's journey and the journey of the of the team, read the blogs <http://www.kanatek.com/everest/index.htm>

FOR PRESS INQUIRIES/INTERVIEWS PLEASE CONTACT:
info@findinglife.ca

