

## ***“This Girlfriend is Useless!”***

I have recently been on a short climbing trip to the South of France. It was a long weekend with a friend climbing in the spectacular Verdon Gorge in Provence. The trip was fantastic: glorious sunshine combined with great company, excellent food and of course the climbing itself.

Climbing in the Verdon is quite unique. The routes tend to be hard for their grade and very committing. The sheer limestone walls of the gorge plunge 1000’ from the road along the rim towards the river below. It is usual to start at the top, abseil over the edge for the requisite distance – usually several rope-lengths, until you reach the start of your chosen route – usually just a couple of expansion bolts drilled into the vertical wall. At this point, with the ropes pulled down, you climb back towards the rim. If you were to find that you could not actually climb the route you have selected then you could be in a bit of a pickle! You cannot get up and often you cannot retreat all the way down to the bottom. Hence the comment that it is quite a committing venue. To add to that, the style of climbing is very specific often requiring the use of tiny pockets or dimples in the, otherwise smooth rock for fingers and toes.

It takes a great deal of getting used to and many climbers never do really get to grips with either the climbing or the huge exposure, with many hundreds of feet of fresh air beneath you.

During our visit I came across a number of parties including an American couple – a fairly well experienced climber and his girlfriend who was relatively new to climbing. Clearly this girl was well out of her depth in this environment. She had a look in her eyes that said *“I don’t want to go down there again!”* When she was climbing she would grip far too tightly and as a result her arms were giving out quickly. As for the complex rope-work required with the multiple abseils, she was entirely dependent on her more experienced partner. She clearly was not enjoying what should have been the trip of a lifetime.

Sadly the boyfriend was not at all sympathetic. He had clearly been planning this trip for some time and had an ambitious list of routes he hoped to achieve. He was losing his patience with his partner until it all came to a head one evening in the campsite when he exclaimed to the assembled throng: *“This girlfriend is useless!”*

How often does a similar situation arise at work? An employee is given a task or a role for which they have not been adequately prepared and for which they do not really have the enthusiasm. When they fail to match up to the expectations of their ambitious manager they are regarded as having failed, yet they were set up to fail from the outset through lack of training, information and engagement to try and understand their needs and expectations.

As for the climbing pair, sure I could understand the frustration of the ambitious boyfriend but my sympathies lay with the over-stretched girlfriend. What the climber and managers who find themselves in a similar situation should ask is: *“What part have I had to play in this situation?”* and *“What can I do to resolve it?”*