



# The Crux Move

## The Monster Within

My fingers are jammed into a tiny crack as I press the edge of my climbing shoe against a sliver of rock. This route is at the upper end of my skill range; success here will take me to the next level in my ability. I have been climbing strong today, but now I'm approaching the most important and difficult part of the climb. Navigate this overhang, and I'll make it to the top. Misjudge it, and the best I can hope for is to escape unscathed and call it a day. I'm at the pivotal point of any climb, known as the *crux move*.

I feel my right foot slipping. I shift my weight to rebalance. What was I thinking, picking a route this difficult? It's pointless to ask the mountain to be easier; I must become a better climber. Still, this space between comfort and challenge is hard.

I stop, take some deep breaths, and assess my situation. I'm two hundred feet above the ground with the full weight of my body supported by a quarter-inch of granite. The muscles in my calves are starting to quiver. Elvis is alive, and his moves are in my legs. I'm under an overhang that juts out seemingly into eternity. My heart races when I realize the tremendous amount of faith I've placed in my own abilities.

Time stands still as I try to cut a deal with this rock. Adrenaline races through my body; my lips and mouth are dry. Strategy is as critical as execution. Quickly I determine the next few moves that will get me through the crux. This is a chess game played on a granite board with a stopwatch ticking. I move into position under the roof.

I waver for an instant and for the first time wonder if I'm in over my head. In that moment of self-doubt, I hear a haunting whisper from the monster that hides in the recesses of my mind: *This is beyond you. You're not good enough—if you move, you'll fall.* Now that I've allowed myself to hear the monster taunting me, I can't stop listening. The voice grows louder: *You don't have what it takes. You'd better quit.* I tell myself that this voice of the monster within is only my own self-induced sabotage.

I know from experience that although these next few moves are risky, taking the time to indulge my doubts poses an even greater risk, an invisible risk. I need all the energy I have, and the clock is running. Every second I waste listening to that voice, I burn up precious strength. Hesitating and “holding on” virtually sentences me to a fall. My arms are screaming. I am balanced on a pencil-width of rock. Now I realize I can’t see above the rock to find a handhold. How much more difficult can this get? I must make a blind move, or the climb ends here. Somehow I’ve got to find the courage to leave this very slim margin of safety.

If I move, I may fall. But if I don’t move, I will certainly fall. The choice is mine alone. If I wait too long, my lack of strength will make the choice for me. It’s true: weakness makes cowards of us all.

I choose to climb. Cautiously I remove my left hand from the crack to put some chalk on it so I can get a better grip when I make my attempt. I get that hold back and chalk up my right. Then I swing that arm as far as I can over the ledge, searching for a crack, a minor indentation, a bump. Nothing. Nowhere.

I will myself to stretch farther, to become longer. Finding another centimeter, I search the rock again. There it is! I’ve got a hold! I move my

legs as far up under the overhang as they can go. I release my left hand and arch it blindly over the rock to find another hold. My feet swing out. I squeeze and pull with all my strength. An abyss of nothingness lies below. There is nothing but air under me now.

Although I've made that move, I'm still not safe. I make a transition in my technique from sheer strength to delicate placement. I slow my breathing to a more controlled level. To keep the monster within at bay, I maintain a calm mind and stay focused. From my tenuous position, I balance and move my left leg up and over the edge, and then I place my toe into a splinter of rock. It's not much, but it's enough to pull myself from gravity's clutches. I reach safety, pausing for a moment to savor the victory: I have overcome the monster within and made the crux move.

## **Crux Moves in Life**

You must let go to be safe.

On every climb, there is a crux move, the single most difficult move on the climb. It's the point of no return. You either make the move or not—very

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much like the risks you have to take in life to reach your goals. The premise and the irony are the same: you have to let go of where you are at to make your move. You must take risks to be safe.

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**Consider:**

What crux moves have I faced in my life?

Am I facing any crux moves right now?

Do I listen too much to the monster within?

How do I keep my monster at bay?

