

Chief Execs Walk Over Coals and Gain Confidence

Execs walk on coals and emerge more confident

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FLOWER MOUND –

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Christian Daw crosses over hot coals during a fire-walking ritual at a retreat of the Dallas CEO Club in Flower Mound. The mind-over-matter exercise is designed to build confidence.

The path of coals glowed red before her feet, and Behjat McElroy was ... doubtful. Sunday evening, the 69-year-old homebuilder, along with other members of the Dallas CEO Club, participated in this "fire walk" as the closing event of a motivation-building seminar.



Buoyed by the crowd's cheering, Ms. McElroy banished her doubts and stepped forward. On the other side, she beamed.

Lately, Ms. McElroy had been having other doubts. How and when should she transfer management of her Colleyville construction company to her son? How long she should stay at the helm of the 10-year-old, \$2 million business? As an Iranian immigrant and former diplomat, she wanted to travel. Her trip over the coals left her confident she could face her decisions and make the right choices. "I feel great," Ms. McElroy said after crossing the hot coals. "I feel that if I could do this, it makes you feel that you can accomplish what you didn't think you could do."

The mind-over-matter exercise capped the entrepreneurial group's quarterly meeting at member Charles Horton's Hill Country-like home, which features a separate building used as a conference room. Mr. Horton, president and chief executive of payday lender FastBucks, hosted the fire walk as part of a session on how to create a positive corporate culture.

"It's really helped our growth," Mr. Horton said of the attitudes within his company. "We've been in the Inc. 500 three times. We're there because of low turnover. Our employees love their work." Attendee Mike Newhouse is not yet a member of the CEO Club, an invitation-only networking group open to entrepreneurs, with chapters across the globe. Only 20, he founded his Internet marketing company about a year ago. Mr. Newhouse said the gathering broadened his network and gave him new ideas.

"It gives me some guidance on where to take the company," he said. "You [usually] don't know where to start."

The fire walk, he added, reset his boundary on what is possible. "Hey, last night I walked on fire," he told himself the next morning. "Why am I not getting more accomplished today?"