Stuck Rappel Rope by Jeff Deutsch

Stack the odds in your favor:

- Barrel knots in both ends of rope
- Ropes joined by two EDK knots – perfectly dressed, 12” tails
- Never throw the rope ends – lower or take them down with you
- Make sure you have nothing that can get caught in rappel device
- Carry sufficient gear to ascend – 1st climber down should have most of the rack
- Use an Autoblock
- Know which end to pull
- Weight the rappel system before unclipping from the anchor
- Be sure to clip the new anchor before going off rappel
- First climber down does a test pull – make sure the rope moves
- Watch for rope eating cracks – last climber responsible for routing the rope
- Take the barrel knots out of the ends of the rope before pulling
- Pull the rope, never let someone above feed it or drop it
- Give a big flip outward just as rope comes down
- Move away from the wall and/or side to side to improve angle of pull
- If the rope hangs up... it isn't stuck yet! Flip loops of rope and give firm tugs, continue changing the angle from which you pull as much as possible.

If the rope still gets stuck

Are you on the ground?

- Yes → Consider going home. Don’t risk your life to retrieve a rope
- No → Can you reach both ends of the rope?

Can you reach both ends of the rope?

- Yes → Is the rope still through the anchor
- No → Can you lead climb the route free or aid?

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- Yes → Can you get the rope unstuck by pulling the other end of the rope?
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Can you get the rope unstuck by pulling the other end of the rope?

- Yes → Good
- No → Tie prussiks around both ropes and ascend. Tie backup knots periodically to your harness. When you reach the rappel anchor, fix the stuck ropes and rappel. If this is a double rope rappel and you have partially pulled the ropes, be prepared to pass the knot while ascending.

Can you lead climb the route free or aid?

- No → Using a second rope and/or cutting the stuck rope, do you have enough rope to reach the ground?
- Yes → Tie in to the tail of the rope you pulled. Lead on this (belayed by your partner) until you reach the other end of the rope, or until you can fix the stuck ropes and rappel or downclimb to the lower anchor.

Using a second rope and/or cutting the stuck rope, do you have enough rope to reach the ground?

- Yes → Good
- No → Pull the rope really really hard. Note this increases the risk of damaging the rope and dislodging rocks above. If two climbers' body weight doesn't dislodge the rope, you will have to ascend the stuck rope. Ascend using two prussiks, belayed by your partner on the tail of the rope you pulled. Place protection as often as possible. Ascend until you reach the other end of the rope.