

## Chapter Eight: Leadership

Finally. After all this planning, the time comes to run the trip. Every trip has its own personality, challenges, and rewards. As a leader, these steps can help you make your trip a success.

### Anticipate things will go right

Once the trip has begun, focus your attention on good leadership, using the skills you bring to the occasion. It is also important you take the opportunity to enjoy yourself. While being a leader carries responsibilities participants don't have, it carries with it rewards they will not experience. As a leader, it is important that you enjoy the process of leadership; if you do not, perhaps you should not lead. An unhappy, reluctant or resentful leader is a leader in name only.

### Section 1: The Beginning

Well, now you're at the start of the trip, what to do with these people with sheep eyes?

- Start by making introductions.
- Check Membership. Encourage non-members to become members.
- Have participants read and sign the liability release.
- Do a group orientation, including:
  - ✓ A description of the program, focusing on the difficulty level of the program
  - ✓ Your plan for the trip. Example: Today's ride is 10 miles out to the Dutch Kitchen. People who ride at a 10mph pace need to stick with Joe here (point to Joe), people who ride at 15mph need to stick with Doug and Sally (point to Doug & Sally), hammerheads need to stick with Lisa (point to Lisa). After breakfast we'll split into 2 or more groups. One group will be riding back here, others will be taking a longer route back to the cars.
  - ✓ Appropriate warnings (cross railroad tracks at 90 degrees? bear hang the food, etc.).
  - ✓ Identification of regrouping points and food/water availability.
  - ✓ Discussion of relevant laws, safety standards and activity protocol.
  - ✓ Check list for gear and supplies.
  - ✓ Instructions for reporting any injuries to persons or properties.
  - ✓ Appropriate maps/information .
  - ✓ Identification of a resource person who will be able to answer questions. Usually you, but sometimes the more experienced person you roped into helping you.

### Don't forget to carry with you

- **The liability release**
- **Emergency contacts for COP**
- **The Incident Report and Follow-up forms**
- **First Aid Kit**

There are two useful rules of thumb for whether to use directive or participative approaches using time as the key situational variable:

If time is of the essence, lean toward directive leadership.

If time is not of the essence, lean toward participative leadership

– Dr. Conflict, *The Non-Profit Quarterly*, September, 2010

### Section 2: Decision making:

#### Leadership Style

There are various styles of leadership. You will have to choose one that fits both you and the particular situation. If you are leading a trip just to get outside and without strong desire to go to a particular place or do a particular thing, consensus can be very rewarding. By finding a consensus among the group, everyone has ownership of the trip. They go home with the feeling that "we did this!" On the other hand, if you went to all the work of planning a trip, then after you arrive at the trailhead you have part of the group suggesting that the group look at all the possibilities for the day and reach a consensus on what to do, you may feel a little put out. You have a choice here of going along with the suggestion, or calmly stating that this is your trip; you did the work and this is what the group is doing today, or looking for a way to allow part of the group to do a different hike while you stick with your original plan.

Even if your personal preference is consensus, there are situations where dictatorship is more appropriate. Sometimes there is no consensus. Sometimes the group consensus is to participate in dangerous behavior. As the leader, when safety is the issue, the only decision you can make is to be safe. If time allows, it is good to take the time to explain the situation, why it's dangerous and why you are making the decision you are making. If time is short, give orders and explain later

#### Multi-day trip?

**At the meeting point** you must discuss the trip's level of difficulty before you leave the meeting point so people have the option of self-selecting out if they do not have the skills. Then, just give details for the next 12 hours, say, directions to get to the river, where to rendezvous for dinner, does every car have a map and someone who can read it? We expect to arrive at our destination about midnight. We'll be setting up camp and getting to sleep as soon as we can. RiseNShine is 8 a.m. You will need to be fed, dressed for the river and standing by your car at 9:30 a.m.

**Saturday a.m.** OK. Everyone listen up! We need to be out of here by 9:30 a.m. You will need your boat, paddle, PFD, helmet, lunch, water, sunscreen, extra clothes for on the river, change of clothes and shower stuff to leave in a car. We will not be coming back here until dinner time.

**Saturday 11a.m.** At the put-in, go over the paddling plan: Who's in charge, what to do if you fall in, who is sweep, who is lead, are you regrouping in an eddy before each rapid? Etc.

In other words, you are breaking the information up into smaller packages rather than expecting everyone to remember what you said 6 p.m. Friday.

## Resolving Conflicts

- ☑ Remember: You're in charge of how you respond, no matter what the provocations.
- ☑ Be aware of preformed judgments you may have of your opponents.
- ☑ Understand that the real issues driving any conflict are rarely the obvious ones. Any conflict is like an iceberg with 7/8ths of its mass below the water line.
- ☑ The key to success in dealing with conflict is to build trust between you and your opponent(s).
- ☑ If you sense there are difficult people along, go out of your way early to open dialogues and take actions that build trust.
  - Head toward trouble
  - Find non-threatening ways to start a dialogue
  - Remember that the key to building trust is caring
  - Take a trip into the iceberg. Look for appropriate ways to bring up sensitive issues as a way of defusing some of the emotions around them.
  - Do simple favors.
- ☑ If conflict starts, take advantage of whatever trust you've built to calmly and carefully look for easy fixes. But don't shove important issues under the rug to avoid a conflict.
- ☑ If easy fixes aren't possible, make sure both sides know what they're fighting about.
- ☑ Outline the differences as accurately as you can
- ☑ Acknowledge other's responses and seek any needed clarifications
- ☑ Don't moralize
- ☑ Get more information
- ☑ Begin exploring for common ground, then build on it.
  - Acknowledge those elements of the others' positions that you do agree with
  - Look for other common goals
  - Find a way to bring up any shared background or experiences
  - Ask the other(s) what they would do if they were in your shoes.
- ☑ Create a vision of success. Ask your opponents, and yourself, what the optimum outcome is. Create a strong picture of one result that all parties can accept.
- ☑ Develop a joint strategy for implementing the vision – and commit to it.
- ☑ And if this strategy doesn't work? Reaffirm that, as leader, you bear ultimate responsibility – and any final say- for decisions made on this trip.
- ☑ Play the odds. A strategy of building trust doesn't work every time. But it will consistently raise your odds of success in dealing with conflict of any kind.

*John Graham, Outdoor Leadership*

## Section 3: Know yourself and what you need to do to be able to handle a group

Some leaders can handle forty people milling about, asking questions with no problems. Some of us go nuts if five people are asking questions. What do you need to do in order to guide this group without losing your sanity? One of our leaders (of the go-nuts sort) gives everyone written information that includes the answers to the most likely questions including directions to the trail, hiking plan, camping plan, water sources, and what's for dinner. She also includes her basic expectations such as:

- \* I expect everyone on this trip will be aware of what's happening with the rest of the group. After we have agreed on a time to leave in the morning, please be ready to go.
- \* I expect each hiking group will watch out for each other and keep somewhat together.
- \* You are responsible for knowing where you are at all times. If you don't know how to read the map, please ask me for a quick lesson.
- \* We will be setting some rendezvous either by time ("wait in an hour") or by location ("wait at the hilltop"). It is important to the safety of the group that you wait until everyone is accounted for, or if you get bored, come back and look for us.
- \* If you blow this rule off, you can forget about hiking with me in the future!

### Taking care of the group

During the trip, you will be having fun yourself, but still keeping an eye out for your participants. Are they having fun? If not, is there some way you can help them to have fun? Are they a danger to themselves? If so, intervene and instruct.

It is very easy to spend the entire trip hanging out with your buddies. As leader, you are responsible for seeing that every participant has the opportunity to be included and to grow.

## Section 4: Strategies for dealing with "Problem" Participants

It's easy to back away from a person you perceive as being a problem. Better choices include:

- Get closer, take the time to get to know the person and build trust.
- Take a one down position "I really need your help, I don't know what to do here, do you have any ideas?"
- Give them more responsibilities – co-opt them.
- Your group can help absorb this person. Be sure no one participant bears the entire burden. Example: Instead of everyone riding in the same car the entire trip, mix the carloads at each break. However, you will want to be sure they are in the same vehicle as their sleeping bag for the last leg of the trip.
- Your group can provide moral support for you, and peer pressure on the person that is causing the problem.

**"Don't get so down on people that you never change your mind about them." -Gail Falkinburg, COP Member**

## Section 5: Removing someone from the experience

Up until now, we have been treating incidents as if they all involve injuries. Some incidents will involve personalities.

Not everyone on your trip, unfortunately, will do what you want them to do, when you want them to, and how you want them to. This is a challenge of leadership that provides real growth opportunities for the leader.

However, sometimes the participant presents problems to the trip that cannot be overcome or overlooked. A person who is a danger to themselves or the group should be removed from the trip if at all possible.

Some people will be more than happy to get out of there and quite willing to make a note on the release that they left the trip on their own volition. Others will be quite resistant to the idea and refuse to sign themselves off the trip and/or refuse to go home or remain in a safe location. In these cases, be sure to thoroughly document the situation. Enlist the help of your group.

**If you can get the person off the trip and headed home, that is best.**

You may need to leave them in a safe location and come back for them. Can you trust them to stay safe? Or do you need to leave someone to supervise them. (*Anyone under 18 must have a supervisor until they connect with their parent/guardian*).

***It would be irresponsible to abandon a person outside of a safe place and/or with no way to get home.***

You will need to be very careful as you expel this person from your group.

**You must:**

- Be sure they have a safe way home
- Be sure they are well and competent to get themselves home
- Be sure you have informed them as to why they must leave
- Give them guidance towards correcting the problem so they may participate in future trips.

This situation contains serious risk management implications. A participant expelled from a trip can become quite angry, and an angry participant should be a red flag to any leader. Again, document your actions, including witness statements. This can help you and COP defuse any lawsuits that may be contemplated. It is also important that you maintain self-discipline and supervisory control over the group in this situation.

**“A leader needs to be cocky and confident – and borderline paranoid – all at the same time.**

**You have to be an optimist to be courageous, to be able to deal with situations that are out of hand, or that could get out of hand. Your optimism is key, because leaders are role models, one way or the other. The leader’s attitude is crucial to your group. Leaders can’t come unglued.”**

*Peter Whittaker, climber/guide, Summits Adventure Travel*

## Never...

Never criticize people in front of the group, unless you’re in a life-threatening circumstance.

And never surprise people with bad news. If you’re leading a trip, for example, and somebody is beginning to fall behind, don’t just wait until the next break and then tell that person he or she has to go down.

- Talk to them as soon as you see they’re in trouble.
- Ask them how they’re feeling.
- Praise them for getting up that far.
- Offer them suggestions on breathing or pace that will help them go further.
- Give them a chance to do better.

**If things don’t get better,**

- ask them for their view on whether or not they should continue. Very often the person will then make his or her own decision to quit, and feel a lot better about it than if you ordered them to go down. Of course, if the person doesn’t see it that way, you may have to lay down the law, but at least you’ve tried.

No matter what happens, never write people off. They may not be great climbers, or whatever, but they’ve got other good attributes and you may well be working with them on something else.

*Lou Whittaker, President, Rainier Mountaineering Inc.*

## Section 6: Becoming a better Leader

While there may be such an animal as a “born” leader, most of us have to learn the skills. Like everything else in life, these skills get better with practice. Probably the most important leadership skill is judgment.

You’ve probably heard the old adage “Good Judgment is the product of Experience which is the product of Bad Judgment”. There is some truth to that, but it is possible to learn judgment by examining other people’s bad judgments and resulting experiences, and also by practicing. So, after you return from a trip, take time to reflect upon the experience. Discuss it with other people, both the participants and “outsiders”. Listen to the stories around you, read about other people’s experiences, take more classes related to leadership and first aid/rescue skills to gain practice making judgments and Lead More Trips!

## Suggested Reading

\*Outdoor Leadership - John Graham

\*Leadership the Outward Bound Way

\*The Guides Guide (Whitewater Rafting)

AWA River Safety Cards - American Whitewater Affiliation - Rick Curtis

River Rescue by Les Bechdel and Slim Ray,

The Best of the River Safety Task Force Newsletter, Charlie Walbridge

Whitewater River Rescue by Wayne Sundermacher and Charlie Walbridge,

River Rescue - The Video (VHS 55 minutes) - Anne Ford & Les Bechdel, Heads Up! - River Rescue for River Runners (VHS 30 minutes) - Russ Nichols,

\* available through the COP office. Many of the boating titles are available through the boating program