

Trip Leadership Scenario Discussion Exercise #1

Instructions:

- Name a note-taker who will also report out for the group.
- Have someone in your group read your scenario out loud.
- Discuss the following questions:

You round a corner and the first person in line slips and falls a considerable distance down a steep talus slope. The person is able to respond to questions, but is shaken up and you don't know their condition. Immediately, someone starts rushing down the slope to help and another person begins to take off to see if they can find a cell signal. You're 6 difficult miles from the trailhead, it's mid-afternoon and there are just 4 of you including the injured person. (7)

- What are your most critical responsibilities as a leader in this situation?
- What are some of the unique challenges you face because of the circumstances? (group size, time of day and distance from TH)
- What are some of the options available to you, and their pros and cons?
- What do you think that the leader should do?

Facilitator Notes: Scenario Discussion Exercise #1

- Stage 1: Immediately after incident
 - Stay calm and don't make the situation worse
 - Immediate first aid assessment
 - Confirm group all accounted for
- Stage 2: Immediate risk under control
 - Assess the Situation
 - Plan
 - Implement
- Stage 3: Ongoing until resolution
 - Reassess – repeat stage 2 as required

Key Ideas:

- Even before attending to the injured person, the leader must first ensure that no one else will get injured! Gather the group, assess the hazards, make a plan. Recognize the natural inclination to 'leap to action'.
- Discuss the implications of the distance to the trailhead and the time of day in the appropriate course of action. Note how long it typically takes to get a rescue in the best of circumstances (6-8 hours) – are you prepared to spend the night? to walk out after dark?
 - NOTE: we err on the side of walking the person out if at all possible! However, to do that you need enough people to carry the person if they can't walk (and this is exhausting work!)
- Discuss how to deploy the 3 uninjured people left in the group. Should you ever let them split up? When and why?
- Connect to the need for the 10 essentials in a situation like this.
- Stress the importance of thinking through an emergency plan for every trip – communication device, emergency contact numbers, first-aid leader.

Trip Leadership Scenario Discussion Exercise #2

Instructions:

- Name a note-taker who will also report out for the group.
- Have someone in your group read your scenario out loud.
- Discuss the following question:

A new trip leader is leading a trip on a well-established trail that was posted as a moderate hike. Midway along the route three gung-ho participants want to try a more challenging off-trail route (with some exposure and bouldering). One, an older very experienced man with two buddies in the group, says “piece of cake, I’m going to do it” and prepares to take off. Two other participants without scrambling experience seem worried but don’t speak up. (4)

- Why is this a problem? What could go wrong/ what are the possible negative consequences if handled incorrectly?
- What are your options as a leader in this situation? What is your most critical responsibility as the leader?
- What do you conclude that the leader should do?

Facilitator Notes: Scenario Discussion Exercise #2

- Discuss why it is inappropriate to change a trip in mid-stream in a way that is more demanding and/or technically challenging than the trip that was posted.
- If people don't voice objections, does that mean it's ok to assume that they are OK with a decision? Discuss how peer pressure can lead some people to keep quiet even when they are seriously concerned. Importance of reading unspoken signals; knowing the skill level-capability of their participants; drawing out responses from everyone in the group.
- Is it appropriate to let the three gung-ho participants to go their own way and meet up later? Why might this not be a good idea?
- What could/should the leader have done to proactively minimize the probability of the incident?
 - Setting expectations at the trailhead, engaging on trail
 - How can age, gender and experience level play a role in leadership dynamics?
 - How can a younger and/or less-experienced leader overcome these dynamics?
- Prompt discussion on conflict management techniques that de-escalate and bring the group into focus on the original trip.
 - How might you manage the situation with the experienced older man so that you work together rather than at cross-purposes?
- What leadership styles are appropriate? How might the leader use different styles at different times? (Pacesetting, Authoritative, Coaching, Democratic)

Trip Leadership Scenario Discussion Exercise #3

Instructions:

- Name a note-taker who will also report out for the group.
- Have someone in your group read your scenario out loud.
- Discuss the following question:

Your group is out hiking on a very cold day. The trail abruptly drops off in a steep and icy bank to a stream crossing. You lead on down the bank and across the stream, and most of the group follows you, though the way down proves to be quite treacherous. After you've reached the other side you look back and see a hiker who is terrified to descend the icy slope and won't go any further. He yells across that he wants to go back to the trailhead. You go back over and cut some steps which allow him to come down safely and continue on with the group; after doing that, others tell you that they were just as terrified but didn't say anything and just went along.

- Why is this a problem? What could go wrong/ what are the possible negative consequences if handled incorrectly?
- What are some of your options as a leader in this situation, and their pros and cons based on your roles and responsibilities as a Mountaineers trip leader?
- What does your group conclude that the leader should do?

Facilitator Notes: Scenario Discussion Exercise #3

Key Ideas:

- Did this leader lead for success of the group or just power down the trail? Discuss what the leader might have done differently to reduce the group's exposure to risk.
 - Stop when you recognize any significant hazard, and talk about how you might reduce the hazard before launching the group into harm's way.
- How did 'group-think' or unwillingness to speak up affect the safety of the group?
 - What is the role of participants on a group trip, and how do you as a leader encourage it?
 - Discuss how a leader can pull out individual concerns and capability even when some individuals hesitate to admit to fear or weakness.
- Sometimes a leader might be very competent and confident to handle a hazard so that it seems easy to them, but this doesn't mean that it will be easy for all of your participants.
 - Whose perspective is most important here?
 - What can you do as a leader to step back and see the demands of a route through the eyes of your participants?

Trip Leadership Scenario Discussion Exercise #4

Instructions:

- Name a note-taker who will also report out for the group.
- Have someone in your group read your scenario out loud.
- Discuss the following question:

Your hiking group on a trip published with a fast pace turns out to have a mix of some very fast hikers and one person who is slower, falling further and further behind. Your faster people are impatient and cold and want you to let them go ahead (“after all, there are more of them, and you posted the trip with a fast pace!”).

- Why is this a problem? What could go wrong/ what are the possible negative consequences if handled incorrectly?
- What are your options as a leader in this situation? What are your responsibilities? Do some of them seem to conflict? What priorities should override the others?
- What does your group conclude that the leader should do?

Facilitator Notes: Scenario Discussion Exercise #4

- What does it mean to be a Mountaineers group? What are the goals of a Mountaineers trip?
 - Enjoyment and safety are paramount, completing the destination is secondary.
- Differences in pace in a group can have big impacts on morale – the fast people get resentful, the slow people get discouraged. What is the leader's responsibility here? Discuss how a leader might anticipate and head off these reactions, or to help to reduce them once they begin to occur.
- Help the group flesh out the choices they have. Under what conditions might it be safe enough to let the group split up?
- Under what circumstances might it be OK for you to let the fast group go? What are the risks you face when you do that, and how could you reduce the risks? (Risks of letting a fast group go ahead include them taking a wrong trail, not stopping when you wanted to stop for lunch or turnaround, them encountering a hazardous area and making a decision you would not want them to make, someone getting hurt in the faster or slower group without the whole group's resources.)
- What if the slow person announces that they don't want to hold everyone up, and they just want to go back to the trailhead alone? Under what circumstances would you send someone back, and how do you ensure that they make it back safely?
- The leader does have a responsibility to help both the faster and slower hikers to have a good time. However the leader's first and foremost responsibility is to get the whole group back to the trailhead safely. Every other decision must be based on the leader's judgment about how to accomplish this.
- How does the fact that it was posted as a fast-paced hike change the answer? If someone signs up who isn't capable of meeting the posted pace, is it their problem and they should just expect to be left behind?

Trip Leadership Scenario Discussion Exercise #5

Instructions:

1. Name a note-taker who will also report out for the group.
2. Have someone in your group read your scenario out loud.
3. Discuss the following question:

Your first backpack lead is a 3-day route with some challenging navigation, and you are anxious that your participants respect and follow you. You start by confidently leading from the front with compass and map, but wonder why so one seems to be offering input. At one point you were distracted and misread your map (navigation has never been your strongest suit) but your participants assumed that their confident and commanding leader was also the best navigator and followed you – five miles in an increasingly rugged and brushy direction and away from your desired camp spot. You ask advice from one of your group members who had their GPS out, and they said that they thought the route was wrong the entire time, but didn't want to insult or anger you by challenging your authority.

- As the trip leader, what might you have done from the beginning to bring everyone's skills and ideas into play?
- What could you do going forward on this trip to foster an environment where your group will speak up and participate in key roles and decisions?
- How can you share leadership and still maintain the authority to make tough command decisions when necessary?

Facilitator Notes: Scenario Discussion Exercise #5

- If the leader could go back to the trailhead and start over, what might they have done differently to foster a more collaborative atmosphere in participants and as a leader?
 - Emphasize the role of humility and self-awareness in a leader to address the anxiety they were feeling.
- Does leadership require you to be the expert on all aspects of the outdoor activity?
- Did the leader “read” the group? What does “reading” the group mean in practice?
 - Emphasize non-verbal cues AND direct engagement with members of the group (“touching base”). Would this have led to a different outcome?

Trip Leadership Scenario Discussion Exercise #6

Instructions:

1. Name a note-taker who will also report out for the group.
2. Have someone in your group read your scenario out loud.
3. Discuss the following question:

You're leading a backpack with great group, not very experienced but very eager to complete your circuit of a rugged mountain route. The goal is the top of a peak where you hope to camp and watch the sunset– an experience you know people will remember forever. However, from the first day it's been raining and a sense of misery and discouragement is developing. Tomorrow you could take an alternate route back out to town, forgoing the peak and sunset, or turn further away from civilization, ford a very cold stream, and take on a steep scree climb to the next camp. The group has appropriate gear to be safe, people are staying dry (enough), and the weather is supposed to improve before your planned summit day, but multiple people are beginning to chatter about bailing out for a cheeseburger and hot shower.

- What can a leader do when a trip starts out under adversity, to help a group stay positive and push through misery to reach a goal?
- What are your priorities as the leader here to deal with the situation you now find yourself in?
- When might it be more important to listen to the immediate concerns and help people get out to comfort, or to build spirits and teach people to find the wherewithal to complete a goal under tough circumstances?

Facilitator Notes: Scenario Discussion Exercise #6

- What impact does the lack of experience in the group have given the adverse conditions?
- How might the leader turn the attitude back around to positive? (Return focus to the group goal and why it was so appealing, use humor, stop for a hot chocolate and a change into dry socks to build spirits back up)
- What leadership style would be most impactful? Does this change as this trip and the conditions develop?
 - Should the leader be “out in front leading” or “mixing with the group and checking in”?
 - When does leadership occur? Is it a series of specific events/decisions? Guide the conversation towards leadership as an ongoing and continuous activity that starts even before the trailhead and continues throughout the trip.
 - A coaching/mentoring approach with inexperienced participants can set the stage for a successful trip and address doubts/anxieties early on as the leader helps get the participants in the right mindset and focused on the goal despite the weather.
- Later, a democratic approach to the decision to leave the trail offers an opportunity both for group decision making. How can you help them learn from the experience?