

Screening the Whole Applicant

The importance of motivational
interviews in the admissions process



COLORADO
OUTWARD BOUND SCHOOL

Our Conversation

- Applicant cycle
- Screening spectrum
- One approach to improving course quality and safety through screening
- Challenges and benefits of an interview based approach
- Tips for success in the interview process
 - goal setting
 - asking good questions and listening
 - considerations for discussing delicate issues
- What to do with the information
- Student example
- When incidents occur
- Party time!

Applicant Cycle

- Public information about the program
- Declaration of interest
- Pre-Screening
- Physical or Digital Application
- Screening
- Admission or Recommendation
- Attendance

Screening Spectrum

- Basic information and waiver
- Detailed application and waiver
- Detailed application, waiver and medical clearance
- Detailed application, waiver and as-needed follow up
- Detailed application, waiver and routine follow up
- More?

COBS Screening Philosophy

- To have the right person, on the right course, at the right time.
- First step in the safety process
- Not about keeping people out but setting people up

An Ideal COBS Student

- Informed
- Interested
- Physically fit
- Open about medical & emotional challenges



Acknowledge what your program doesn't do well

Why Interview?

- It's time consuming
- It's expensive
- It's awkward
- It's training intensive
- It doesn't guarantee truth
- School hours are office hours
- Students can get prepared another way

The best way for us to filter and support



Oversaturated with Information

- Application – 8 PAGES
- Waiver – 2 PAGES
- Supplemental forms – 23, ranging from 1-4 PAGES
- Admissions and Cancellation Policies – 4 PAGES
- FAQ: Attending Outward Bound – 5 PAGES
- Required Clothing – 7 PAGES
- Course Description & Travel Info – 6 PAGES
- Boot description – 4 PAGES

= TOO MANY PAGES

We talk to every person who heads out into the field with us

- Decreased motivational and behavioral early departures.
- Increased student success rate.
- **Built trust** with parents. *Apprehensive parents were more comfortable working with our program.*
- **Built trust** with participants. *Increased confidence going in.*
- **Built trust** with field staff. *Increased student buy-in students allowed staff to develop a more cohesive group.*

Setting the tone for course & for the interview

- **Who** are you talking to? *Have you tailored your approach to match their age and experience?*
- **Why** are you talking with them? *Do your questions serve a purpose?*
- **How** are you talking with them? *Is your goal to build confidence or set boundaries?*
- **What** are you going to do with it? *How are you communicating information to field staff?*

Asking Good Questions



- Who are you talking to?
- Develop goals for your call. What do you want to learn and what do you want to provide?
- Frame the conversation
- **Avoid** repeating the application unless you have concerns about the answers or who completed it – this style works best when it is a unique touch point
- Ask open ended questions and steer the conversation
- Slip in program based or incident specific info

Learning How to Listen

- Ask open ended questions and guide
- Leave ample time for them to answer and talk
- Positive reinforcement (using their language, affirming their answers)
- Be willing to offer examples or appropriate personal stories
- Try not asking your questions outright but steering them toward the concept

Getting them to the point: Motivation

Discuss low motivation in a familiar context - sports, clubs, homework, chores, video games.

Learn:

- How they recognize it
- What they usually do
- What they want to do
- Plan for course





The Tough Stuff

- Be honest about what you do not know
- Come in with curiosity
- Never convey shock
- Use their language to ask clarifying questions
- Have they ever explained it to a friend?
- Follow up with a parent
- Follow up with someone outside the home
- Be open to calling back another time

A black dog is lying on a dirt path in a natural setting with green foliage in the background. The dog is looking towards the camera.

Goals when there are “no questions”

- Check to see if they have the basics:
 - where they are going
 - what they are doing
 - why they want to be there
- Allow for questions from participants and parents
 - is there anything in particular that would be helpful for our staff to know when working with _____
 - what are you hoping they come away with?
- Check on gear and prep
- Add any program / population / incident based questions
- Share the excitement

Incident Based Questions

What do you think you are getting into?

Incident trend: students arriving with no concepts of course

Incident trend: oppositional students on course due to family drama

Wow you're super tall. Have you grown a bunch recently?

Incident trend: Osgood-Schlatters

Have you ever been to high altitude or experienced extreme heat?

Incident trend: Acute Mountain Sickness or heatstroke, often with a history

Incident trend: serious hangovers in 21+ population

Now what?

How do you synthesize and share what you have?

Think carefully about how you share information

- Knowing everything about someone before you meet them can lead to prejudgment
- Once you write it down it is admissible in court



Some staff want it all
Others don't want any

Medical/motivational overview
Optional Detail



30 Day Mountaineering Student

- 23 year old male
- 6' 245lbs
- 3rd course selection
- Counseling for depression
- Current Probation

When things went wrong

- Debriefs with parents were easier due to the pre-established relationship
- There was extensive documentation to reference
- We knew that we had talked with everyone
- Field staff had increased confidence in administration



Outcomes of an Interview Approach

- Fewer motivational and behavioral early departures
- Lower rates of undisclosed issues
- More students arriving with appropriate gear
- More students arriving with high buy-in
- Strengthened relationships with field staff
- Improved platform for incident response
- Improved platform for connecting with alumni

For COBS, these outcomes have been worth the investment

We're done YAY!

