

Ambushed by myself: growing beyond several unexpected leadership pitfalls

Lester R. Zook

Horizons Consulting, and

WILD GUYde Adventures

Wilderness Risk Management Conference

Oct. 15, 2015

www.nols.edu/wrmc | (800) 710-6657 x3

WILDERNESS RISK MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

WRMRC



This document may not be reproduced
without the consent of the author 2015

Objectives for this session

- To more deeply sensitize ourselves to the broad area of human attitudes and their causative and contributory effects on outdoor accidents and incidents;

Objectives for this session

- To more deeply sensitize ourselves to the broad area of human attitudes and their causative and contributory effects on outdoor accidents and incidents;
- To reflect upon and identify potentially dangerous internal attitudes, tendencies, and predispositions that may emerge in our individual leadership practice;

Objectives for this session

- To more deeply sensitize ourselves to the broad area of human attitudes and their causative and contributory effects on outdoor accidents and incidents;
- To reflect upon and identify potentially dangerous internal attitudes, tendencies, and predispositions that may emerge in our individual leadership practice;
- To identify administrative and programmatic vulnerabilities to leadership error, and begin designing remediation and staff training strategies; and,

Objectives for this session

- To more deeply sensitize ourselves to the broad area of human attitudes and their causative and contributory effects on outdoor accidents and incidents;
- To reflect upon and identify potentially dangerous internal attitudes, tendencies, and predispositions that may emerge in our individual leadership practice;
- To identify administrative and programmatic vulnerabilities to leadership error, and begin designing remediation and staff training strategies; and,
- To foster humility, honesty and transparency as professional traits that will allow us both to learn from our past, and ultimately enable us to lead and provide safer experiences for clients and friends in the backcountry.



WRMRC



NATIONAL
OUTDOOR
LEADERSHIP
SCHOOL

WILDERNESS RISK MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

www.nols.edu/wrmrc | (800) 710-6657 x3

This document may not be reproduced
without the consent of the author 2015

It's a leadership issue

“I never met a man who gave me as much trouble as myself.” (Dwight L. Moody)

1. In your outdoor adventure past, have you experienced an injury, accident, incident, or near miss?
2. Can you identify any role that you might have had, intentional or not, in creating the conditions for the incident? Is there anything about that incident that you were or would be unwilling to share with a colleague or superior?
3. Why?
4. Are you lying to me as you answer these questions?

What's inside me, the leader, to contribute to a disaster?

1. Routine/mindlessness

“There are days when no one should rely unduly on his ‘competence.’ Strength lies in improvisation. All the decisive blows are struck left-handed.” (Walter Benjamin)

1. Routine/mindlessness

What's the common element?

- “*We both decided that the accident was caused by a lack of common sense, but more because of the lack of difficulty involved. Seeing no present danger, we overlooked the obvious...*” (ANAM, 1991, p. 45)

1. Routine/mindlessness

What's the common element?

- “*We both decided that the accident was caused by a lack of common sense, but more because of the lack of difficulty involved. Seeing no present danger, we overlooked the obvious...*” (ANAM, 1991, p. 45)
- “*I had done this climb many times [but now realize that] I had no right to think that because I had done it before, I can do it every time.*” (ANAM, 1990, p. 30)

1. Routine/mindlessness

What's the common element?

- *“We both decided that the accident was caused by a lack of common sense, but more because of the lack of difficulty involved. Seeing no present danger, we overlooked the obvious...”* (ANAM, 1991, p. 45)
- *“I had done this climb many times [but now realize that] I had no right to think that because I had done it before, I can do it every time.”* (ANAM, 1990, p. 30)
- *“I have been on this wall many times before, often solo. My concentration was not there.”* (ANAM, 1989, p. 55)

1. Routine/mindlessness

What's the common element?

- *“We both decided that the accident was caused by a lack of common sense, but more because of the lack of difficulty involved. Seeing no present danger, we overlooked the obvious...”* (ANAM, 1991, p. 45)
- *“I had done this climb many times [but now realize that] I had no right to think that because I had done it before, I can do it every time.”* (ANAM, 1990, p. 30)
- *“I have been on this wall many times before, often solo. My concentration was not there.”* (ANAM, 1989, p. 55)
- It was said that they had been in this cave many times before and *“knew what they were doing.”* (NSS News, March 2008, p. 8)

1. Routine/mindlessness

What's the common element?

- *“We both decided that the accident was caused by a lack of common sense, but more because of the lack of difficulty involved. Seeing no present danger, we overlooked the obvious...”* (ANAM, 1991, p. 45)
- *“I had done this climb many times [but now realize that] I had no right to think that because I had done it before, I can do it every time.”* (ANAM, 1990, p. 30)
- *“I have been on this wall many times before, often solo. My concentration was not there.”* (ANAM, 1989, p. 55)
- It was said that they had been in this cave many times before and *“knew what they were doing.”* (NSS News, March 2008, p. 8)
- *“Every few years, there seems to be an accident like this. Experienced climbers and guides engaged in routine operations become mentally engaged in something other than the tasks at hand.”* (ANAM, 1988, p. 41)

1. Routine/mindlessness

Characteristics of mindlessness (Langer, 1991):

- Rigid invariant behavior that occurs with little or no conscious awareness.
- Treating information as though it is context free and true regardless of circumstances (Paul Petzoldt said, “*Rules are for fools!*”).
- Most common when people are distracted, hurried, multitasking, and/or overloaded.



WRMRC



QUEENSLAND
STATE
GOVERNMENT



This document may not be reproduced
without the consent of the author 2015

WILDERNESS RISK MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

WWW.PDFBOOKS.WR.MRC (800) 711 111

1. Routine/competence

Characteristics of mindfulness (Langer, 1991):

- Being actively alert in the present.
- Being open to new and different information.
- Having the ability to create new categories when processing information.
- Having an awareness of multiple perspectives.

1. Routine/mindlessness

“[It is likely to result from] a single exposure to information. When information is given in absolute (vs. conditional) language, is given by an authority, or initially appears irrelevant, there is little manifest reason to critically examine the information and thereby recognize that it is context-dependent. Instead, the individual mindlessly forms a cognitive commitment to the information and freezes its potential meaning.”

2. Competence: who is the real Master?

“Do not mistake precision repetition for expert performance. The real expert is the one who can beat you with an old wooden racquet, while the wind is blowing and the sun is glaring in his eyes. Adaptability -- a continuous process of *‘reflection, then correction’* defines the true Master.”

What's inside me, the leader, to contribute to a disaster?

3. Social anxiety-ego

“I think one of the interesting things about poker is that once you let your ego in, you're done for.” (Al Alvarez)

3. Social anxiety-ego

So what is really happening when ego gets involved?

- *The Distraction explanation*
- *The Loss of Objectivity explanation*



WRMRC



WILDERNESS RISK MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

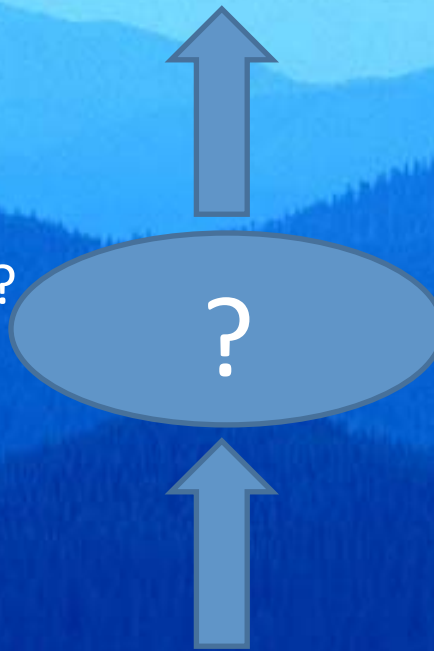
www.parks.edu/wrmrc | (800) 745-6657 x3

This document may not be reproduced without the consent of the author 2015

3. Social anxiety-ego

HUBRIS: “excessive pride; arrogance”

(What’s going on in here?
How can we tell?)



GROWING CONFIDENCE

What's inside me, the leader, to contribute to a disaster?

4. Leadership team dynamics

Toxic combo:

- Strong-willed alongside acquiescing.
- Amorous relationship.
- Ego competition (too similar).
- Others?

4. Leadership team dynamics

Leaderless among peers:

- Unwillingness to verbalize misgivings or raise questions about others' readiness, skills, or competence.
- Hesitancy to slow or stop the action to force a discussion.
- Tendency to interpret any momentum as positive, without a discerning regard as to which direction it is pointed.
- Avoidance of taking ultimate responsibility.

What's inside me, the leader, to contribute to a disaster?

5. Directive leadership, fostering group-think and destructive goal pursuit

Groupthink – a definition: “A deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures.” (Janis, 1972, p. 9). Janis then identifies 8 symptoms of groupthink:

- Illusion of invulnerability
- Collective rationalization
- Belief in inherent morality
- Stereotyped views of out-groups
- Direct pressures on dissenters
- Self censorship
- Illusion or unanimity
- Self-appointed “mind-guards”



Carol
Simpson
© 2004

www.nols.edu/wrrc
800.710.6657 X3
WIRACSE BUSI. MANAGEMENT COURSEWARE

WRMC

This document may not be reproduced without the consent of the author 2015

5. Directive leadership, fostering group-think and destructive goal pursuit

Destructive Goal Pursuit (Kayes, 2006) :

- *Goal*: an idealized future state, an optimal outcome.
- *Theodicy*: people who hold strong beliefs often seek to maintain those beliefs even in the face of contradictory information. Individuals rely on future desired states to rationalize current suffering.
- *Goalodicy*: destructive goal pursuit “The more a person, group, or organization relies on a future as yet unachieved goal as a source of identity, the more likely they will persist at pursuing the goal beyond what is reasonable.”

5. Directive leadership, fostering group-think and destructive goal pursuit

- “*The goal serves not only as the destination but also as the means to justify the continued pursuit of the goal.*” (2006, 44).
- Straw (1993) refers to this as “*an escalation of commitment to a failing course of action.*”
- Put this together with Janis’ ideas about Groupthink. What we observe is that ***when group identity and goal striving are intertwined, leaders may in fact wittingly or unwittingly evoke group-think to maintain commitment to both group and goal.***

Applications and Take-aways

“The cultivation of awareness gives one the basis for detachment, the ability to stand aside and see oneself in perspective in the context of one’s own experience, amidst the ever present dangers, threats, and alarms ... Awareness is not a giver of solace – it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed. They are not seekers after solace. They have their own inner serenity.” (Greenleaf, 1977, pp. 27-28)

Applications and Take-aways

1. Internal audit: personally, where is my “sitting duck?”

www.nols.edu/wrmc | (303) 710-6657 x3

WPRMC | **WILDERNESS RISK MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE**

NOLS OUTWARD BOUND SOR



This document may not be reproduced without the consent of the author 2015

Applications and Take-aways

1. Internal audit: personally, where is my “sitting duck?”
2. Programmatic and administrative audit: where is our organization/program vulnerable (routine, toxic combo)?

Applications and Take-aways

1. Internal audit: personally, where is my “sitting duck?”
2. Programmatic and administrative audit: where is our organization/program vulnerable (routine, toxic combo)?
3. Learning from my past, or our organization’s history; unpacking the epics

“On the occasion of every accident that befalls you, remember to turn to yourself and inquire what power you have for turning it to use.” (Epictetus)

Applications and Take-aways

1. Internal audit: personally, where is my “sitting duck?”
2. Programmatic and administrative audit: where is our organization/program vulnerable (routine, toxic combo)?
3. Learning from my past, or the organization’s history; unpacking the epics
“On the occasion of every accident that befalls you, remember to turn to yourself and inquire what power you have for turning it to use.” (Epictetus)
4. What are the implications for us regarding staff selection? Training? What are some creative ways that we can integrate self awareness of leadership pitfalls into the staff interviewing and selection process?

Objectives for this session

- To more deeply sensitize ourselves to the broad area of human attitudes and their causative and contributory effects on outdoor accidents and incidents;
- To reflect upon and identify potentially dangerous internal attitudes, tendencies, and predispositions that may emerge in our individual leadership practice;
- To identify administrative and programmatic vulnerabilities to leadership error, and begin designing remediation and staff training strategies; and,
- To foster humility, honesty and transparency as professional traits that will allow us both to learn from our past, and ultimately enable us to lead and provide safer experiences for clients and friends in the backcountry.

Resources

- American Alpine Club, *Accidents in North American Mountaineering*, New York, NY, (1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1995).
- R.F. Baumeister, *Choking under pressure: self-consciousness and paradoxical effects of incentives on skillful performance*, *Journal of Personal Social Psychology*, 46, 3, pp. 610-620, (March, 1984).
- K.P. Cross, *Not can but will college teaching be improved?* *Reflections*, 3, newsletter of the Provost's Advisory Committee on Teaching and Learning, University of Western Ontario, 1-11.
- Ben Dattner and Allison Dunn, *Mindfulness at Work*, Dattner Consulting, LLC (2003).
- Greenleaf, Robert, *Servant Leadership – A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, (1977).
- Cathye Haddock, *Epics, lies, and hero stories: the folklore of near misses in the outdoors*. Sierra Vista, AZ: Wilderness Risk Management Conference, (1999).
- Ray Keeler, Ed., *NSS News: American Caving Accidents*, Vol. 66, No. 3, Pt. 2, p.8 (March, 2008).
- Ellen Langer, *Matters of Mind: Mindfulness/mindlessness in perspective*, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (1991).