INFORMATION CARD A

SELF-AWARENESS AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Being Self-Aware

A competent outdoor leader (OL) needs to be self-aware. To be self-aware is to be conscious of one's:

- character,
- feelings, and
- motives.

As an OL, who is responsible for the safety, well-being and organization of a group of people, being self-aware:

- ensures a higher quality experience for all group members, and
- allows the OL to better relate to their group members.

Being Aware of One's Personal Abilities and Limitations

Self-awareness starts with a clear understanding of one's personal abilities and limitations. Without a clear sense of their own abilities and limitations, OLs will have difficulty setting challenges appropriate to the abilities and limitations of group members. As well, there may be a tendency to set the bar too high, which may jeopardize the emotional and physical safety of the members of the group they are leading. This can result in the OL becoming a possible danger to the group and diminishing the quality of the experience for all.

Being Mindful of All Actions

Good OLs are always mindful – intentional – in their actions. They act with regard to the ultimate goals of the group experience, which is a balance between being attentive to the needs of the group members and being attentive to the tasks that must be accomplished.

Managing Stress

- Stress caused by physical danger is not the hardest type of stress for an OL to manage.
- Ordinary situations – a rainstorm that catches a group 5 km (3 miles) away from the trailhead with members who force their own frustrations on the group leader, who not only has to deal with the group complaints, but also with the stream of rain running down the neck of their own parka – are more stressful as they usually occur over an extended period of time, require more attention and require the OL to deal with uncontrollable factors.

Demonstrating Professional Conduct

OLs are placed in a position of responsibility and as such must conduct themselves accordingly in all situations. It is the inherent risk associated with outdoor adventure activities (OAA) that makes professional conduct so important for an OL – safety of the participants is a critical factor.

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Professional conduct is characterized through demonstration of the following qualities:

- trustworthiness,
- flexibility,
- approachability,
- commitment,
- awareness of the position of authority, and
- modelling.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Conflicts in OAAs are inevitable. The challenge, for the OL, is to stop the conflict before it gets bigger, or deal with it as quickly and effectively as possible. Most conflicts that occur in outdoor situations are a result of:

- weather conditions;
- varying levels of experience among group members;
- the challenging nature of the activity; and
- personalities of group members.

An OL who is able to communicate clearly with all group members will be better suited to manage conflict. Dealing with conflict is not a pleasant task, however, the first step is to always speak with the individual and discuss the issues in a calm and sensitive manner.

DECISION MAKING AND JUDGMENT

Decision Making. Decision making is the process of choosing the best option from a collection of possible options. In order to make this choice the OL will be required to use their judgment.

Judgment. Judgment is an informed opinion based on past experiences. Judgment also provides OLs with the ability to anticipate problems before they occur. Their experience in leading people during an OAA provides them the foresight to know when something is going well or when it needs adjustment.

- OLs do not have to make the "big" decisions on their own.
- Communicating with fellow group members and using their experience and ideas to help make a decision is also an integral part of making a decision.
- A decision must be made and carried out decisively.
- OLs must have confidence in the decision that they have made.
- Group members must have confidence in the decision that is made by the OL.

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