

Ropes Course Training Manual

**Updated March 14, 2003
By Barry J. Rudesill**

Disclaimer

The purpose of this manual is to supplement information provided during the two-day, on-site Facilitator Training Program at YMCA Camp St. Croix. The information contained within is by no means a complete program in and of itself, nor does reading this manual provide one with enough information to facilitate a Ropes Course program.

This manual is intended to be used in conjunction with the on-site training program. YMCA Camp St. Croix shall assume no responsibility for accidents and/or injuries resulting from the misuse of this training manual.

Ropes Course obstacles vary widely in design, depending upon the Ropes Course Builder, location of the obstacle, composition of the group and weather conditions. The following information is complete, to the best of my knowledge, however this manual DOES NOT constitute all the material necessary to run a safe, effective teambuilding program.

The activities and descriptions that follow are written to address the current safety protocols accepted for each teambuilding activity and are designed to supplement the training received from an A.C.C.T.-accredited company.

Failure to receive proper training and certification prior to leading Ropes Course obstacles will likely result in serious injury and/or death to program participants.

The author of this manual, the teambuilding and initiative resources referred to herein and the builders of the Ropes Course obstacles being utilized cannot be held responsible for damages resulting from the improper utilization of the information which follows.

Copies of this manual are not available for distribution but are intended to be used by Facilitators working with YMCA Camp St. Croix. Some of the material is copyrighted by other authors and is used in this manual simply to provide a condensed reference source for our staff.

Barry J. Rudesill
March 5, 2002

Philosophy And Objectives

Ropes course programs are a part of the larger field of adventure education through which people are motivated to venture out into unfamiliar and challenging territories of life experiences. Growth takes place when people become willing to face the unknown...make an effort to accomplish the difficult. Certain important goals at the very heart of adventure programming tie all of the varied activities together. These goals relate to growth in both individuals and groups. They are:

1. Self - Confidence.

A basic goal is to increase the individual's level of self-confidence. Each participant is asked to attempt a series of activities involving some physical and emotional risk. As he/she deals with the successes, failures, inner-feelings and self-images a true self-esteem may begin to develop.

2. Personal / Group Challenge.

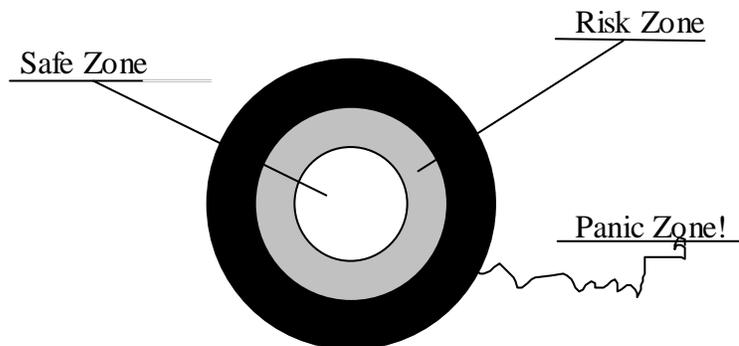
These programs are designed to offer a high degree of challenge for the individual that goes far beyond the arena of pure enjoyment. Participants are challenged in a non-competitive, non-judgmental environment to take risks as they face unfamiliar experiences.

3. Teamwork.

Essentially an obvious goal from the outset, this goal can be overlooked in light of the attempt to accomplish the tasks set before the group. The Facilitators in each activity area should be prepared to stress that teamwork, more so than task, is the primary purpose for which these activities are designed.

Speed or individual excellence is not the goal. Success is determined not by how well individuals or groups perform, but rather by the extent to which they are willing to try something new and work together to accomplish a task. As group members interact in a supportive, caring manner in their attempt to solve a group initiative or offer moral support to a fellow member facing an individual initiative, team building, individual growth and camaraderie take place.

Risk taking is a key factor for these programs, for it is through risk taking that the greatest personal benefit and growth are derived. The accompanying diagram describes the dynamics of risk taking. Ropes course activities ask an individual to take a risk by attempting an activity that is unfamiliar and often quite fearful. As the individual moves into the risk zone, a rewarding feeling of expanded self-confidence will be gained and his/her safe zone will expand. In encouraging the



participant to take risks, it is very important that he/she not be moved so far that panic results. This is where mature, sensitive leadership is needed.

In helping the participant to deal with risk, it is important that there be a clearly understood distinction between actual and perceived risk in conducting ropes course programs. Perceived risk is the risk that a participant feels during a ropes course experience. Reasonable risk-taking is a part of living. Actual risk is the possibility of physical injury to the participant if something goes wrong. Perceived risk should be kept in the activity, but activities should be operated within the parameters of proven safety procedures so that there will be no actual risks.

Safety should be a foremost consideration in planning for a ropes course program; and the three key factors in making this happen are: quality construction, regular maintenance and skilled staff.¹

¹Taken from Rhulen's Camp Tips, "Planning a Ropes Course" @1989, Rhulen Agency

YMCA Camp St. Croix's Philosophy on Ropes Courses

What is a Ropes Course?

A Ropes Course is a carefully developed set of obstacles and posed problems, usually built in a wooded area. Our Ropes Courses and programming are designed to be fun, challenging and to promote team-building and leadership skills and to improve group dynamics. The series of elements begin with simple, team exercises and progress into more difficult problem-solving endeavors.

Why Use Ropes Courses?

Ropes Courses offer improved group dynamics and leadership training in a unique format. Participants are encouraged to work cooperatively to accomplish a series of set obstacles. Communication skills, cooperation, trust and caring are heightened within the group by the shared risks and sense of achievement through the completion of the obstacles. In no other activity are groups challenged in such a way, and nowhere else do those involved come away with such a team spirit.

What Benefits Do Participants Gain?

1. An enjoyable day of thoughtful, shared activity, where individuals can grow to know one another better and feel more comfortable as part of an effective team.
2. Improved inter-social and communication skills.
3. Enhanced problem-solving techniques.
4. Greater confidence and self-esteem.
5. Development of leadership skills.
6. Cultivated cooperation skills.
7. Greater group cohesiveness and support.

YMCA Camp St. Croix's Mission Statement

Camp St. Croix, a branch of the YMCA of Greater Saint Paul, provides experiences that enhance learning and promote the physical, mental, social, and spiritual development of each participant.

We find that Ropes Courses and High Adventure activities help us to fulfill our mission statement while providing a valuable resource for the communities we serve. Participants in the program come away with a greater awareness of themselves and their abilities, coupled with a stronger sense of group interactions and their role within a team.

In addition, we find that those who are classified as "At-Risk" or "Juvenile Delinquents" learn the skills necessary to reintegrate themselves into their schools and into society as a whole. As a result, we feel that these programs are beneficial (if not critical) to help rehabilitate those who are, or who probably will be, in some sort of juvenile program.

Some Statistics...

Project Adventure, the originator of the modern-day Ropes Course program, conducted a series of studies based upon their activities with local school systems. The results are as follows:

“In Columbus, Ohio, Project Adventure has assisted in training and program development for two urban elementary Adventure magnet schools. Average Basic Skills tests have *increased by 30 percentile points in reading and 40 percentile points in math* since the program’s inception four years ago, this despite a turnover rate of approximately 30%.

The Challenge Program, a six-week alternative to incarceration, is designed to reduce delinquent behavior by developing the socialization skills, self-confidence, and motivation necessary to succeed in the schools and/or the work place. A three year evaluation (1983-1986) indicated that 94% of those who started the program completed it, that reading skills improved, on average, one grade level during participation and that the recidivism rate held at 15% for a three-year period. It has the *Exemplary* Project Award from the Georgia Governor’s Advisory Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

... Evaluation of [The Leadership Project] indicated significant change in the target communities. There has been a reduction in the adolescent use of marijuana and alcohol greater than the control group (a random sampling of the state of Vermont) which itself indicated a greater reduction than the rest of the country. Data after five years indicated reductions in the regular use of: beer-40%, hard liquor-49%, marijuana-28%, and wine-52%.

The Rainbow Lake School, an alternative school program, is for socially maladjusted middle-school students. It is a prevention effort to reduce delinquency and the school dropout rate. Students are enrolled for a twelve-week period and participate in a follow-up program for twelve weeks. Data show that, of those who complete the program, 80% are reintegrated into the schools without disciplinary incidents and 92% have no further involvement with juvenile court.”²

In addition, there are other statistics documenting the success rate of the programs run by Project Adventure that are not covered here. However, this should stand as compelling proof of the necessity and validity of Ropes Course Programs.

Here, at YMCA Camp St. Croix, we do not currently have the opportunity of running such long-term programs within the local school systems. However, we are given the opportunity to work with local students not only academically, but also with a team-building emphasis. It is, therefore, imperative that we have a properly trained, professional staff of Facilitators so that we can make the most of the opportunities we are presented with. It would be naive, however, to assume that we could undo years of conditioned responses in a one-day program. Because of this, we must work to do the best that we can to equip these students with the necessary tools so that they may be able to continue to refine the skills we have presented to them, even after they have left the camp setting.

²Information courtesy of Project Adventure, Inc.

Safety First...

We, at YMCA Camp St. Croix, believe that safety is not only important, but should be the primary concern in all of its High Adventure programming. To this end, we have rewritten a significant portion of the rules and procedures for leading Adventure activities. These revisions will serve to help us maintain the high standards of safety and caring which has been demonstrated in past years. To help us carry out the goal of “Safety First”, we have established new criteria for working with the different Adventure-based activities located at Camp St. Croix. These include:

Training –

There are new requirements at YMCA Camp St. Croix that will be enforced in 2002 for all new and former Facilitators. These will require re-certification on the part of all Facilitators every **two years**, unless the Facilitator has been actively leading groups during the *entire* time. Certification will involve attending a 1-2 day workshop (depending upon which Ropes Course/High Adventure areas the Facilitator is to lead), passing a skills test and working under the supervision of a Primary Ropes Course Facilitator prior to full certification.³

Spotting and Lifting Information

Spotting

Spotting is actively safeguarding the movements of another participant. Two basic rules of correct spotting are:

1. **Attention.** The spotter watches the climber constantly,
2. **Anticipation.** The spotter’s hands extend toward the climber (hands with fingers closed together).

The goal of spotting is to keep the activity participant from injury. However, it may not always be possible to physically “catch” a person. The primary area to be concerned with protecting is the head, neck and spine.

Be sure to place spotters in appropriate areas to guarantee the safety of the program participants.

Spotting ratios

As a Facilitator, you must accurately estimate the optimum number and placement of spotters for each obstacle. You should be able to teach the participants the various spotting positions required for each element use. As a Facilitator, you should encourage the “spotting crew” to change with each new climber. Get the group to devise its own rotation system for spotting.

³ The standards placed upon Camp St. Croix do not in any way constitute either a universal knowledge of ropes course procedures, nor does it imply that the Facilitator can operate a ropes course at any other site than YMCA Camp St. Croix.

Spotting Commands

Before any spotting occurs make certain that all participants go through the spotting commands:

Participant asks: “Spotters ready?”

All spotters respond: “Ready!”

Participant states what she/he is about to do: “Climbing, leaning, falling.”

Spotters answer what the participant is about to do: “Climb away, lean on.”

All spotters ask the participant if they are okay by saying: “Center?”

If the participant is okay and able to walk away without assistance, they respond by saying: “Center”.

Lifting

“Lifting” in this context is the acceptable means of assisting a climber to gain additional height to perform an obstacle (such as the wall). The lifter should stand erect, back straight (or against the team wall), with knees bent. The climber step up into the lifters clasped hands, grasps the lifter’s shoulders firmly, and is then lifted onto the obstacle. Two other spotters need to position around the climber to ensure safety.

Always ask, prior to teaching the lift, whether there are any “bad” backs or knees in the group.

Prevent Injury

- All participants should participate in activities of their own free will (challenge by choice).
- Check each participant as they move through the course for his/her physical, mental, and emotional state.
- Review the group periodically to keep a situational pulse on everyone.



Facilitating

What Is A Facilitator?

The rope course is made up of a series of trust-building activities, individual obstacles, and group problem-solving activities known as initiatives. Each activity or obstacle requires the group to work as a team in order to achieve results based upon concrete and preplanned objectives. Facilitators assist the group in becoming a cohesive and effective team.

A Facilitator is a person who enables groups to process information and to reach their own conclusions, rather than simply solving the group's problems for them. In plain English: a Facilitator is someone who stands in the rain/sleet/snow/hail/blazing sun and keeps their mouth shut, except when giving encouragement and defusing combat situations! (Sounds like fun, doesn't it?)

The style and attitude of the Facilitators have a great influence on how participants perceive the experience. A playful and lighthearted demeanor goes a long way towards making the ropes course appear as an adventure rather than a threat. Safety is always a serious consideration, and should be foremost in the mind of a Facilitator.

You are in charge! Your significant role is to ensure that each participant has the opportunity to reflect on the individual and group challenges (what actually took place during the experiences). The effective Facilitator is an active listener. Active listening requires patience, the ability to be empathetic, and a lot of practice. Recognizing participant's feelings is important.

The term team is a central focus of our program. Our goal is to take all conflicts, criticisms, and decisions directly to the team, and assist them in working out these challenges. Don't suppress conflict. Stop the activity and begin to process what is taking place. Avoid imposing your decisions and issues on the group (don't preach).

Why Do We Need Facilitators?

A Facilitator needs to...

- Present problems to the group in a clear and concise manner.
- Enforce the rules and make sure the safety factors are in place.
- Set the tone for the day. This is done mostly through a positive attitude and encouragement.
- Arbitrate disputes and assists any "factions" in becoming an integrated team.
- Encourage the group!!!
- Act as a sounding board for ideas. The Facilitator, however, never tells the solution; he/she simply listens to the ideas presented by the group and comments on any safety concerns.
- Be a resource, not an "answer man". A Facilitator must NEVER tell the group the solution. (Get the feeling this is important? I just said it twice!)

- Bring the main goal (teamwork) back into focus after activities through group processing.

These are jobs that few groups (if any) could do on their own when faced with a problem that is outside their current skill set. If they tried to use the course without a Facilitator, you would have a group of approximately 12 people jumping over obstacles with no concern for their safety or the safety of their fellow teammates, punching and yelling at each other and never concentrating on the reason the Low Ropes Courses exist in the first place: teamwork!

Facilitators are important. Properly trained Facilitators with a firm grasp of their role in the team-building process are absolutely critical.

Guidelines For Being An Effective Facilitator

1. Find out as much as you can about the group before they begin.

Talk with teachers, leaders, etc. to determine what areas the group specifically needs to work with. Take any information you can find, but don't prejudge the group based on what you have heard. A group that has problems "caring" may simply have a problem with their communication skills, which leads to aggressive actions. It's pretty common. Take everything under consideration, but don't let it change how you run your program.

2. Carefully sequence program activities.

Contrary to popular belief, Trust Fall is not a great starting activity! The concept of "forcing" the group to work together by taking them to the toughest Low Rope element first, is the equivalent to trying to cure someone of their fear of heights by kidnapping them, chartering a plane, strapping them into a parachute and shoving them out at 20,000 feet. If they survive, they may have less of a fear of heights, but will they ever trust you or be willing to try something new again? No! Start with the basics. Do some stretching activities. These not only help the group get ready for the day, but also serve to instill a sense of the ridiculous into the program. Then, do some of the smaller initiative problems and work your way up from there! (Most groups I work with will **NEVER** reach Trust Fall!)

3. Develop strong assessment skills.

Find out what the participants *truly* need. Is it communication? If so, do activities that concentrate on communication. Is it cooperation? Give them obstacles where they have to work together. Is it caring? Start working on some more trust-based activities. Note: the only way you will ever be able to assess where groups need help is through experience. No amount of bookwork can teach it. It is something you will discover on your own!

4. Don't economize on training.

There are new requirements at YMCA Camp St. Croix that will be enforced in 2002 for all new and former Facilitators. These will require re-certification on the part of all Facilitators every

two years, unless the Facilitator has been actively leading groups during the *entire* time. Certification will involve attending a 1-2 day workshop, passing a skills test and working under the supervision of a Primary Ropes Course Facilitator prior to full certification. (The standards placed upon Camp St. Croix do not in any way constitute either a full-knowledge of all ropes course procedures, nor does it mean that the Facilitator can operate any ropes course at any other site than YMCA Camp St. Croix.)

In addition, if you ever encounter an obstacle with which you are not familiar or feel uncertain about, please do not attempt to do the activity! Instead, please ask a Primary Facilitator to train you for the element. (This will help us to maintain our high safety levels.) Thank you!

5. Contribute to routine maintenance.

All Facilitators are responsible for inspecting all pieces of equipment they will be using.

6. Stay up-to-date with current procedures.

The instructions detailed in this manual are accurate as of December 2001. Updates will be mailed to all Facilitators. If the change is minor, notification by mail will suffice. If the update is major or involves some specific breach of safety, Facilitators may be required to attend a follow-up training session to retain certification.

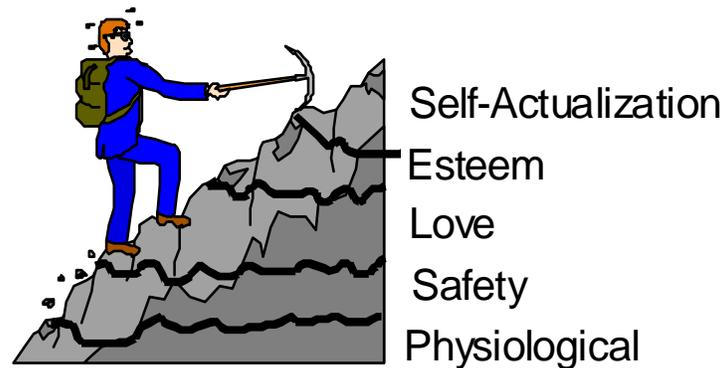
7. Set a good example.

If you are unenthusiastic, your group will show it. If you have a bad attitude, don't be surprised if your group feels they are wasting their time. If you don't follow the same guidelines you ask your group to adhere to, they will disobey (and possibly be hurt as a result). Lead by example. (You can do it, I know you can!)

Some Cliché's To Live By...

1. Present the problem clearly, and be clear about what additional props or equipment are allowed. (If you don't mention it, they will do it!)
2. Support the group's efforts without telling them how to accomplish the task. (You don't know it all. Let them figure it out.)
3. Be patient. (Did you pray for patience? God is granting your request; wait and see...)
4. Don't disengage from what is happening - pay attention, observe behaviors and be positive. (Happy! Happy! Joy! Joy!)
5. Remember that a positive learning experience does not always mean successful completion of a task - no matter how much the instructor and/or participants may want that to occur. (Your goal is teamwork, not perfection.)
6. Trust is the toughest thing to build in a group, and the quickest thing to lose. Do nothing that will destroy their trust in you, this camp, or the ministry we are undertaking.

Psychology of Participants



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

To understand how to be an effective Facilitator, you must first understand how participants react to the program they are involved in. The diagram below illustrates a classic model called Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Very simply, Maslow stated that for an individual to reach the point of self-actualization (learning and being able to use what they have learned), they must progress through a series of stages. These are:

1. Physiological -

A participant must have their physiological, or basic, needs met before they will be able to learn anything from the activities. In other words, if your group is freezing cold, has to use the bathroom, and has been working for 10 hours straight on the Low Ropes without a meal, they are not going to learn anything from the activities! Bathroom/drink breaks are annoying (trust me, I speak from experience), however they are critical. Schedule them approximately every two hours. Obviously most groups will not require them at those times, but it serves to give the group additional down time to process their experiences. **Note:** Obviously, if you are in the middle of an activity, don't drop everything simply because two hours has passed! Complete the activity first. (However, if someone in the group needs to go, you will have to find a way to take care of that problem...)

2. Safety -

A participant must realize that the activities that they are involved in are safe. This does not mean that the group member needs to simply be protected from physical harm, though that is the most obvious safety factor in a Low Ropes program. It also means emotional safety: that their ideas have equal merit, and that people won't make fun of them for giving an honest effort. Emotional safety is even more important, in many respects, than physical safety. If someone is injured physically, they will heal (hopefully).⁴ If someone is injured emotionally, they may be scarred for life by the experience. (I will **NEVER** take part in Wind In The Willows. I think it is a tremendous Trust activity, however I was dropped face-first on a rock during the activity. This tends to destroy trust in people, and especially in the activity!) Watch the group interactions, and make sure that everyone has equal voice!

⁴Note: This is **NOT** a license to freely injure people! It would be...detrimental...to our program if our survival rate is less than 100%!

3. Love -

Is “love” a central concern for our programs? YES! As Christians, we are called upon to love those we minister to. I know this may come as a shock to some of you, but this is a ministry, plain and simple. We are extending a helping hand to those who have fallen down, and helping those who are still on their feet to work more closely (and effectively) with those around them. Does this mean the group must love each other? No. However, the group must have a sense that the other members of their group care for them. If you feel your team doesn’t care about you, are you going to trust them? No. Will you care for them? No. (Probably not.) Will you cooperate as effectively as you could? No. Will you take the time to communicate your ideas and to fully listen to theirs? No. It’s human nature. We usually don’t try to start dialogues with those we dislike!

Can you, as a Facilitator, build caring into the participants? No. If it’s not there, we can’t simply “create” it. If it *is* there, we must do our utmost to encourage it; to help it to grow. The best way to do this is to model it in our speech and actions. You may not like the group you’re working with, you might not like the weather, you might not like the activities, but every word that you utter has got to be to build up the group! Anything less, and the program cannot be successful!

4. Esteem -

For business personnel and others seeking to enhance their on-the-job teamwork skills, esteem is not usually a major factor. Most of these people already feel comfortable with themselves and their abilities. Occasionally, one participant may rise up to a new position of leadership within the group while a leader may choose to step down and simply follow. However, the dynamics of those who already work well with one another tend to be straightforward with respect to self-esteem.

Fortunately, there is another group you may have the pleasure of working with. These are the “At-Risk” teens, and their sense of teamwork, respect and self-esteem provide for a wide variety of interactions that you will not see with a business group. According to one source, the number one problem plaguing society today is the lack of self-esteem! Let’s look at some statistics:

- 1 in 2** will live with a single parent at some point in childhood.⁵
- 1 in 8** is born to a teen mother.
- 1 in 8** never graduates from high school.
- 1 in 9** is born into a family living at less than half the poverty level (\$6,079 for a family of three in 1995).
- 1 in 17** teens will become pregnant this year.⁶
- 1 in 25** lives with neither parent.
- 1 in 610** will be killed by a gun before age 20.
- 1 in 2079** will commit suicide before the age of 25.⁷

⁵Source: *The State of America's Children Yearbook 1997*, available from CDF Publications.

⁶“The Advance Report of Final Natality Statistics, United States: 1994,” prepared by the National Center for Health Statistics

2,800,000 children will be abused or neglected this year.⁸
+3,000,000 will witness domestic violence in their house this year.⁹

38% of all girls are sexually abused before the age of 18.¹⁰
16% of all boys are sexually abused before the age of 18.

(The suicide rate, while at first glance seems hardly a staggering statistic, has larger ramifications. How many are students are in your local school systems? The statistic is in a range from ages 5 to 25, so you must incorporate Elementary School, Middle School, High School and College students in the rating! Now how many are in your local schools? Over two thousand? One of them will kill themselves this year. Does the statistic have more weight now? Next year, if you live in an average area, another student will kill him/herself. And the year after that... And the year after that...)

Do we still question how important self-esteem is? We have 2.8 million children being physically/sexually/emotionally abused and/or neglected; 3 million children who are living with domestic violence; 1 in 25 who live with *neither* of their parents; and 1 in 9 who are living below the poverty level. As you can see, for a lot of these children, there is little or no hope, and little family structure to provide them with a “normal” life.

Does it surprise us that gangs are on the rise? It shouldn't. Gangs are more of a family to many youths than their biological parents. Should we question the rise in violent crimes? No. These young people have no fear of death or dying, so why should they care? They are being raised in a society where life has little value, and where death is simply an ending. Does it bother us that many young people no longer have the capability to make appropriate choices between right and wrong? It should. The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow.

We need to help these children succeed on their own; helping them to realize that they, too, can be a leader; and by giving them skills which will help them throughout their life. If we take the time to care for these participants, we *can* make a difference. (Seeing the call to ministry again?)

5. Self - Actualization -

“The process of understanding oneself and developing one’s capacities and talents.”
- Abraham Maslow

If a participant in our Low Ropes program has their basic needs met (Physiological), feels safe with the activities and the group they are with (Safety), feels that the group and/or leader truly cares for them and their ideas (Love), and that they're ideas have merit and their participation can make a difference, they will experience self-actualization.

⁷*Education in States and Nations: 1991*

⁸“SURVEY SHOWS DRAMATIC INCREASE IN CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT, 1986-1993”, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Sept. 18, 1996

⁹The Department of Health and Human Services, October, 1997

¹⁰These two percentages are taken from the Center Against Sexual Abuse Statistics, 1997

Processing

Processing is a method of reflecting back on an activity to help participants learn and grow through challenges and teamwork. It should lead participants to greater self-awareness and assist them in applying what they have learned to other situations in life.

The role of the leader is to facilitate meaningful exchange of thoughts, awareness, feeling, reaction and support within the group. The leader acts as a guide and a lens. The principal tools of the leader are observation and questioning focused by specific goals and objectives.

Rules of Processing

1. Everyone has the right to speak his or her mind. They are to be allowed to speak freely, without interruption or condescension from the leader and/or group.
2. Everyone has the right to not speak. If someone is feeling uncomfortable, do not call on him or her. Let them volunteer the information. (If the entire group is silent, call on the more “outspoken” members to get the processing started.)
3. Everyone has the right to not be attacked. Do not let the group gang up on someone! **Remember:** they succeed or fail as a *team*. There are no individual failures. This is something that you may have to stress many times before some people will fully understand.
4. The goal of processing is for the group to exchange ideas, not to have the leader tell the group how they did. The job of the leader is to ask questions and moderate the discussion. They are **NOT** to contribute to the group’s assessment except to encourage them if they become overly negative. A Facilitator must **NEVER** degrade the work of a group. If they are pleased with it, you are too! In the sections that follow, you will find many different approaches to processing with groups.
5. Check your interpretation of what was said with the participant. Never assume you understood perfectly. To do this, rephrase the question. “So what you mean is...” This will not only serve to clarify their statement for you, but will also provide a clearer understanding for their group.
6. Reward disclosure by thanking individuals and/or restating what they said in a supportive way.
7. I recommend (not critical) that the group sit (crouch, stand, etc. but try to get them all on the same level) together in a circle (there are no “leaders” in a circle because everyone is facing everyone else). Make sure that you, too, are on the outside of the circle. **Do not** make yourself the center of the discussion...

8. **Do not skimp on processing.** The activities, in and of themselves, are great for exercise and general problem-solving, however to allow the group to realize the full value of a Low Ropes program, they must be able to stop and refocus from the activity to the goal! Your job is to help them to do just that!¹¹

The following are methods of processing activities. Which one is right for you or your group will depend upon a number of factors that I will not even *attempt* to detail here. Experiment with the different approaches; find the one you are most comfortable with, and be prepared to switch if the method you select doesn't work!

Target-Specific Initiative Problem Debriefing Topics¹²

Project Adventure recommends using these questions as a method of processing for groups. These questions, while great for mature, adult groups, lack something if you are dealing with immature and/or non-adult groups. (Remember: age is not a sign of maturity! I've had adults try to fight over activities, too!) Take them as a guide, not necessarily the final word!

Leadership and Follower-ship:

Chiefs (leaders) and Indians (followers). How many were there? How many are necessary to a group? Does leadership ever change from activity to activity? Who was/were the leader(s) in this activity? Why?

Group Support:

What is it? Where does it come from?

Peer Pressure:

Negative or positive in its effects? (I.e. Did one member's attitude sway the entire group?)

Negativism-Hostility:

How do you handle it? Why is it there? (Frustration? Fear?)

Efficiency:

The step beyond just doing it... (Where could they improve in the activity?)

¹¹ How much processing is necessary? This question can be answered by another question: how much does your group need? Take at least 3-4 minutes to discuss the activity. Any less, and you are depriving the group of a valuable learning opportunity. How long is too long? Some Facilitators process for up to ½ hour (or more!) for each activity. In my opinion, that is simply too much. Most people (me included) will tune out. Keep it short, sweet and to the point, however do not stifle the discussion. If the group is involved in a dialogue, do not cut it short in order to run off to the next activity. Judge for yourself how much time you need. You'll know if it's too long and, by the end of the day, if it was too short. Good luck!

¹² Project Adventure, Inc. [Silver Bullets](#)

Competition:

Against self, teams, a nebulous group or record... (Why did they want to accomplish the task set before them?)

Spotting:

Why is it essential?

Sexism:

Who plays what role?

Carry Over:

Do these fabricated problems have real-life significance?

Fear, Physical and Psychological:

Fear of height? Falling? Failure? Looking bad?

Joy-Pleasure:

At the heart of it all - the raison d'etre.

What? So What? Now What?

This approach stresses three main questions:

What?

What did you have to do? What was your task? What was your goal? How did you accomplish your task? Did it help to achieve your goal?

So What?

So what does it mean that you succeeded/failed? What lessons have you learned? Who was the leader? Were there too many leaders?

Now What?

Now what can you do with the knowledge you've gained? How will it benefit you in the rest of these activities? How will it benefit you in life?

Scale of 1 to 10

In my oh so humble opinion, this is one of the simplest, non-threatening ways to achieve a dialogue with your group. It can tailored to specific questions you want the group to answer and promotes discussion due to the nature of the processing style. This method also lends itself to a humorous perspective, as will be explained later. Very simply, it goes like this:

On a scale of 1 to 10...

- How well did you cooperate?
- How well did you communicate?
- How well did you talk to each other?
- How well did you listen to each other?
- How well did you trust each other?
- How much did you care for each other?

Now that the dialogue has begun, ask people why they said a specific number. Those who said that they group was a perfect “10”, why? Were they truly perfect? Those who said “1”, why? Was there nothing the group did right? Is there a general consensus as to what number best fits the group? What is it? Why? Can there ever be a perfect “10”? Why or why not? If yes, isn’t there always room for improvement in a group? If no, what about teams that function incredibly well? Is there no such thing as a perfect group? What if they got to pick who would be on their team, then could they come up with a “10”?

The way to add humor to the processing is to set criteria for a 1 and a 10. The typical way of doing this is by saying, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how did you do on Caring? One being that you hate each others guts and would happily stomp your fellow teammates into the ground the second I turn my back; and 10 being that you are best friends and would lay down your life, wallets/purses, etc. for the other members of the team.”

By doing this, you take the threat out of the dialogue. It takes some of the seriousness out of the discussion, but allows group members to feel more at ease as their answers, provided that they lie somewhere between the two extremes mentioned above, are more generally accepted and realistic than the alternatives given to them. In addition, this approach subtly allows the group to realize that they aren’t as bad as they could be (if they are, contact the National Guard to provide your back-up) and gives them a goal (albeit somewhat unattainable) to strive for.

Remember, as with all processing, do not allow them to be too negative. If they made a mistake, that’s fine as long as they realize it! Your job is to also point out what they did *right!* Success in the goal (teamwork) is the overriding concern, and that cannot be accomplished if the group feels that they are a failure!

Complete the Sentence

Very simply, provide open-ended questions that the group must answer. The questions, listed below, are basic and can serve to promote discussion. I recommend starting with these (especially in groups which will not volunteer information) before moving on to any other processing structure. These will provide a deeper level of understanding about the fears of other group members, and will allow the team to rally around those who may have difficulties accomplishing a given activity.

“I am glad that...”
“I was scared when...”
“The first time I did that, I felt...”

“Success, to me, is...”
“A leader is someone who...”
“I learned that...”

As I said at the start of this section, these are merely ideas. If you have a method that works better, use it! If not, I strongly recommend reviewing all options and finding the processing style that works best for you.

Closure Questions

At the end of the day, sit the group down once again. This time, the goal of processing is to find out how the group thinks they did overall. The following questions represent a sampling of closure questions:

1. What did you learn about yourself?
2. What did you learn about others?
3. How do you feel about yourself and others?
4. What new questions do you have about yourself and others?
5. What did you do today that you are particularly proud of?
6. What skill are you working on to improve?
7. How can you use what you learned today in other life situations?
8. Would you do anything different if you could restart the day with the knowledge you have now?
9. Was your behavior in the group today typical of the way you usually act in a group? Explain.

These questions serve to wrap up the day with a final group introspective moment. It also enables the group members to reflect on how far they have come throughout the course of the day.

Handling Difficult Situations

Lack of teambuilding spirit in the group:

- Do: Review initial group goals.
Process during the activity and focus on the team.
Consider appointing a leader for activities.
- Don't: Ignore the lack of teambuilding spirit.
Feed into it or encourage competitiveness.
Single one person out or embarrass someone.
Lose your composure.

Unsuccessful effort by the group:

- Do: Look at why it's not working, ask the group why.
Refocus the group.
Stop the group and discuss or teach communication techniques.
Redefine success.
Praise effort currently made.
- Don't: Use negative terms.
Give the group the answer.
Lecture.
Take it personal.

Group member makes disrespectful comments:

- Do: Review full value contract.
Provide some guidelines for speaking and addressing you. (If the behavior continues with a youth group, have another adult take care of the situation after you have addressed it with the group.)
Always speak with the Lead Facilitator concerning the details and for any follow-up.
Model appropriate adult behavior and conduct.
- Don't: Ignore the situation.
Let it grow.
Let it hinder your ability as a Facilitator.

Participant refuses to participate:

- Do: Listen and realize their limits.
Be empathetic, not sympathetic.
Be flexible.

Check in with the person to see if they are willing to share with the group the reason for not participating.

Acknowledge the person's role and importance to the group.

Remember "Challenge by Choice".

Break goals down into easily accomplished tasks.

Smile and use tension breakers

Take deep breaths.

Don't: Laugh at the person.

Ostracize.

Humiliate.

Stop the activity.

Yell at the person.

Don't give them too much attention.

Wait until it's too late to deal with the situation.

Assume that participant needs to do it all in order to have a successful experience.

The advice-giving or controlling participant:

Do: Acknowledge good advice.

Reinforce the emphasis on teamwork.

Move quickly to the next point.

Give encouragement to try out a different role.

If the problem becomes too severe, discreetly speak with the person alone.

When soliciting input, go around the circle to ensure everyone has a voice.

Ask if everyone is being heard.

Don't: Ignore what they have to offer to the group.

Let them control the group.

Verbally attack them out of frustration.

Wait to address the problem.

Expect the group to handle it on its own.

Resort to sarcasm or embarrassing the participant.

Basic Background Information...

The activities that you will be facilitating have many things in common. The first is that they can only be solved by teams. If your group is not a team, don't worry, that's what you're there for! Here are a few things that you might wish to cover with the group, as it will help them to understand what it takes for teamwork, and will define the purpose for their activities:

Tasks and Goals

- Tasks:** An activity which the group is challenged to accomplish.
Goals: What the group wants to achieve overall.

The tasks for the groups will be such things as crossing a Toxic Peanut Butter Swamp or climbing the Wall. Do you honestly care if they achieve these things? No. What is the goal of the group? Teamwork. This is the true reason the group is here! A group may forge themselves into a perfect team, and yet be unable to accomplish the task. On the other hand, a group may hate each other, but still rapidly solve the task. It doesn't matter if they can do the activity. If they fail to achieve the overall goal, they failed. Your goal (you lucky person, you) is to see that they become a team. Good luck!

Phases of a Relationship

- Honeymoon:** The group has just gotten together. They are excited, and are looking forward to getting out there and trying new things! Everybody is perfect, and everybody gets along.
- Storm:** This is the critical phase of a relationship! It **MUST** be allowed to run its course! At this point, the group is working out its identity. Leaders are rising and falling, and the general atmosphere is discouragement. Encourage the group, and make sure you prevent a total falling out, but other than that, stand back! You may choose to sit the group down and mediate, but do **NOT** make the decisions for them. They will never form into a team with outside interference! It is a fine line to walk...
- Team:** If a group survives the storm phase, and believe it or not, most do, it will form into a team. For some teams, the storm phase is very brief and gentle, for others, they will be literally at each other's throats! If they survive, they will function as a team. If not...

The 3 C's

You'll hear me refer to the 3 C's throughout the activities that follow. They are:

Communication: the ability to transfer thoughts and ideas to another person. The two components of communication are "talking" and "listening". It takes, on average, four brain cells to be able to talk. Does that mean you'll have anything important to say? Not necessarily. (We all know people who can talk for hours without actually saying anything...) On the other hand, it takes a tremendous amount of skill to listen. This is the number one problem with groups. Get used to it. My favorite example of communication is football. Not because I think football is the best sport out there, but because it truly is a team sport. In football, everyone goes to the huddle. How many people talk in the huddle? One. Why? That way everyone can hear what the play is. If everyone talked in the huddle, a team would fail. No one would know when the ball would be snapped or even what play they are running!

Cooperation: the ability to work together. When communication works, cooperation is *usually* fairly easy to achieve. Usually... The football example is pretty basic: if a quarterback gets the ball, looks around, decides he doesn't like anyone on the field, spikes the ball and walks off, will the team win? No. Everyone has to play, and everyone is important to the game. NEVER let the group leave anyone out of any activity.

Caring: watching out for each other. This means no criticizing or name-calling. It means, instead, that the group encourages one another and builds each other up. It means that if someone starts to fall, someone else holds them up. It means that if someone fails, the whole team gets up and starts over. Football, again, involves caring. How many of you can name an NFL quarterback, past or present? (Take answers.) How many of you can name a professional, NFL center, past or present? (You'll notice that fewer people can answer this one.) Why? A center only gets recognized at one time during the game, other than the starting line-up. When? When they make mistakes. What is a center's job? To snap the ball to the quarterback, get up, and stop the 350-pound man across from him from stomping him into the turf and killing the man behind him. Do centers get paid the most in the NFL? No. Do they get much recognition? No. Yet they stay in the game because they care for their team and want to see it win!

Final Note

Can a quarterback win a game and the team lose? No! How about the center? Not hardly! How about the kicker? Not even close. Each person needs the people around them. In other words, they win or lose as a... TEAM! Don't let them leave anyone behind! Don't let them alienate people from their group or bar someone from participating. Good luck! God bless!