

Trip Coordinator Course – Day #4 – Mother’s Day 2013 – May 12, 2013

It was the morning of day four of the Trip Coordinator Course 2013 that sixteen hikers awoke one at a-time after a well-deserved rest and sleep following a day of much activity and a 10:30 pot luck supper and BBQ. All were deeply satisfied with their new found trip coordinating knowledge, Tick information, Nimbus cloud know how and map reading abilities. They were happy to know that the boots weren’t coming on ‘til 10, that there was time to socialize and enjoy a few cups of coffee, and that they could return their hosts’ gracious invitation of accommodation by a good ole’ cleaning bee. A shower was on the minds of most, but with fifteen vying for one stall, many had accepted and pretended that the night was spent in a tent. Lo and behold the trip coordinator Steve had woven in one more scenario, another test of key coordination aptitude, and that was the announcement of a half hour earlier departure. Yet, the group, rather than sulk, rose to the mighty challenge, and frantically kicked the packing and cleaning bee into high gear, determined that if 930 was departure time that it would be so. And, it was, 925, to be precise, out on the lawn, for some boots on, for others not yet, some on guard with map, paper pad and pen, others not quite. It was an amazing feat, and even more so that the group was more than ready to handle a setback on a trip, deal with it head on, without complaints, and work together in harmony to carry out what needed to get done. At this time, the trail head coordinates were provided as well as the game plan of the day, which was that a number of client and trip scenarios would be played out as each coordinator student led the group on the hike. The first tip of the day by trip coordinator Steve was that as coordinator you always lead on an unknown trail, yes, the group was being led off the beaten path. The group was debriefed on the evening too, and the subject of coordinating a meal with a group of tired, cranky and sore hikers was discussed. The challenge of encouraging and getting each to help out is easier said than done after a day of hiking. Hostess Sandy complimented the group on an excellent spread the night before and a good job on the morning clean-up.

Once on the trail the fun began, and the hikers were curious as to the scenarios that would be played out. The wind was gusting fiercely and the first part of the trail was straight up. After a bit of a climb, the first ridge was reached, and the group was brought in for a debriefing. Situation #1 had already played out. A hiker had forgotten his food and water in his car and the coordinator student offered a share of her food and water. She insisted that he take her food and water there and then rather than at lunch time. And, he actually did forget his food and water, which meant that the group had to wait while he and the coordinator student made their way down and back up again. Given the wind, another few tips were handed out, that of securing loose straps, as allowing these to flap may lead to injury, and speaking to the group on the leeward side of the wind, behind trees or shrubs or the other side of a ridge. Another tip offered was to speak to the group in the direction of the wind, so that your voice is carried by the wind. Also, during sunny conditions, it is important to position yourself in front of the group so that they are not staring into the sun. With respect to food and water always ask your hikers at the trail head if they have this on them. If the hike is five minutes in, and it is discovered a hiker has forgotten their food and water in their car, have them return to the trail head to retrieve this, and if you are an hour into the hike, than have the group share their food and water with the one that has got none on him/her.

Additional scenarios were played out in rapid succession, with a new coordinator every second step, and at the most three ridges climbed, before a descent was made back to a quiet spot, to debrief, learn and stand sheltered from the blustery day. The students were rapidly becoming great actors and actresses though the trip coordinating aptitude was yet to be determined. Two scenarios were played out of a client questioning the leaders’ ability to navigate and lead, and his or her knowledge of the trail and direction. The key in this type of situation is to address the issue right away before the rest of the group starts questioning too. It is important that the individual is reassured, that they are acknowledged, and to give them a role and a part, in coordinating the group and getting

to the destination. A coordinator should have this type of client hike right beside them, so that he or she can check in regularly, and provide the needed assurance and comfort.

Two scenarios dealt with clients bugging off on their own, and the best practices that a coordinator would employ to address the missing hiker or hikers. The first step is to ensure the safety of the group, and to take them to a safe location, near the place where the missing hiker or hikers was/were last seen. The second step is to instruct groups of two to search potential accident areas and to go out on timed expeditions of five minutes. It is important that as coordinator you remain at the safe location. If it determined that the hiker is missing than 911 is called and the location coordinates are noted and provided.

A few other scenarios brought out the lesson of delegating in that one situation can quickly spiral to two, three and more scenarios/situations than a coordinator can shake a stick at. In one dramatic play out, a hiker with a broken shoe lace, led to another with an earache, one with a broken pack strap and another with God knows what. Unfortunately, situations such as this can in part be avoided if the group had been brought to a safe and sheltered location, out of the fierce wind that was blowing. In delegating, each situation to others in the group, the coordinator can remain in control of the overall situation and provide the needed oversight. In the medical scenario played out, a hiker had broken her leg while taking care of number 2 business, and the situation quickly grew worse, as the group was left around the scene. In rapid order one hiker was throwing up because of the unsightly scene and another with another earache because of the blowing wind. In a medical scenario, it is important that others are delegated to provide first aid first, that the group is then brought to safety by the coordinator, followed by calling 911 and attending to the injured by further delegating that he/she is made as comfortable as possible and if needed shelter is provided, depending on weather condition. The group may be asked to hike back down the trail head, but be asked to remain there, once 911 has been called.

The Winnie the Pooh scenario provided belly aching laughter despite the serious of the scenario played out. In this scenario a hiker bolts down the trail completely freaked out by the encounter of a bear and her two cubs. In this scenario it is key that the group stays put and close together, and from there, make their way back to the place that the crazed hiker was last seen. It is unlikely that a bear will attack such a large group.

The frozen hiker scenario, that is a hiker that is unable to move due to a fear of heights, requires a bit of ingenuity and creativity to encourage he or she to move along. Steve shows us a number of ways to bring such a hiker down using either your upper leg or the feet of other hikers planted firmly on the rock. In having others stand in front of the frozen hiker deflects attention away from the height concerns and the focus to getting down. The same will work for a hiker that is afraid to walk along a ridge by having others in the group walk closely in front and behind.

Another key tip was to bring spare shoe laces on your hiking trip. As well as, to let hikers run off at the end of the trip and focus on the safety of the group and reminding the remaining hikers of hiking as a group and that should they run they are off the trip. And, if the goal of a trip is not reached, stressing the safety of the group by acknowledging incoming inclement weather or the time of day.

Some of the comments on the overall day were that it was fun to play out each scenario and that it was wished for that it would have been nice if the weather wasn't so blustery.

The key take home message for the day was safety of the group first and foremost. That said, the day was wrapped up on a patio, with a warm meal and a few cold beverages, with all sixteen hikers accounted for and safe. All were satisfied of all the information and words of wisdom and experience that Steve and Sandy shared, and the fun that was had not only hiking but acting out the challenges that one could encounter while coordinating a trip on a hike. Best of all new friendships were formed, and new hiking buddies were discovered.