

Creating and Maintaining Safe Learning/Working Environments in the Field



Chris Lay

Administrative Director & Lecturer
Ken Norris Center for Natural History
UC Santa Cruz

cml@ucsc.edu

norriscenter.ucsc.edu

Overview

- My background
- What is a SLE (Safe Learning Environment)?
- Why are SLEs important?
- Elements of a SLE
- Best practices
- Common mistakes
- Review/Resources
- Questions?



My background



What is a Safe Learning/Working Environment?

Creating a culture within your group that emphasizes:

- Effective Communication
- Physical/Emotional Safety of Everyone
- Mutual Respect
- Shared Responsibility for the Group's Wellbeing



Why are Safe Learning Environments Important?



Because accidents happen. Most accidents result from a combination of challenging conditions, inadequate preparation, AND

Why are Safe Learning Environments Important?



**Most accidents involve
Poor Communication**

Why **else** are Safe Learning Environments important?



**Good SLEs = More enjoyable
group experiences**

Ingredients for a Safe Learning Environment

Support Participant Needs

- Be mindful of basic human needs
- Build connections with your group
- Facilitate your group connecting with one another

Shared Vision & Goals

- Share your goals/vision
- Facilitate your group sharing goals & community norms

Create & Maintain a Clear Structure

- Prepare/Plan/Schedule
- Define and maintain clear roles, expectations, and behavioral norms



(Some) Best Practices

1. Establish & Maintain Clear Goals, Roles, Expectations, Behavioral Norms
2. Brief and Debrief Your I-team and Group Often
3. Invite and Give Feedback Often
4. Practice Active Listening
5. Address Issues that Come Up
6. Role-model the Behavior You Expect



1. Goals/Roles/Expectations/ Behavioral Norms

- Do this EARLY
- First Impressions Matter!
- Get Buy-In from your Group
- Meet with both your I-team AND your group



A Sample Group Orientation Meeting Outline

- Welcome!
- Vision and Goals
- Where are going? What are we doing?
- Roles, expectations, behavioral norms
- Specific Issues to address: rules, drugs, harassment,, expulsion policies, etc.
- Group brainstorm of shared goals/ community norms.
- Schedule/Day 1-3 plan
- Questions?
- Final Fun teambuilding activity

****See handout for more detailed language****



2. Brief and Debrief your I-team and Group Often

- Groups operate more safely when they know what to do!
- Groups can improve and be even more safe over time if...
- See handout for elements of good briefings/debriefings



3. Invite and Give Feedback Often

- Feedback helps us see our strengths and identify areas for growth
- Give LOTS of Positive Feedback!!
- Schedule feedback into meetings throughout your course/trip
- Follow the recipes for giving and receiving feedback in the handout



4. Practice Active Listening

- Good listening invites everyone to speak up, question and share observations without fear of reprisal
- Probably THE most important way to build trust and connection with your group
- Active Listening is a skill that you can get better at!



5. Address Issues that Come Up

- Just Do It!
- Conflict in a group often arises when:
 - Roles and expectations are unclear
 - Information is inadequately communicated or misunderstood
 - Individual needs are not being met
 - Roles and expectations need to be modified
 - Commitment to a SLE is not universally held
- See suggested conflict resolution recipe



6. Role-model the Behavior You Expect



Common Mistakes I've made and/or seen

- Focusing mainly on “hard skills” and not “soft”/ people skills
- Skipping or minimizing first meetings with staff or group
- Not taking the time to build connections (rapport) with your I-team & group
- Avoiding taking responsibility for conflict
- Feeling “too tired” to brief your group esp. at the end of a trip
- One instructor says one thing, the other something different
- Breaking the rules because “you’re the instructor/leader”
- Assuming that silence = agreement
- Not deliberately reflecting after an experience and changing your style/tone to adapt to new groups and challenges



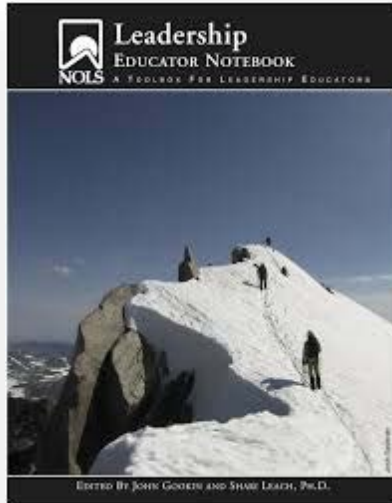
Review

- Nearly all accidents involve poor communication
- Maintaining a Safe Learning Environment can dramatically improve effective group communication (and it can be more fun too!)
- Try incorporating some of the 6 “best practices”- be humble and just do it



Resources

- Use the handout
- Feel free to reach out to me with questions
- Take leadership trainings
- Invite leadership teachers to train your group



THANKS!

