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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the literature associated with outdoor leadership and describes ongoing research about outdoor program directors' hiring preferences when filling outdoor leadership positions. Nineteen articles published in the Journal of Experiential Education, 1983-1996, as well as several book collections of leadership articles, discuss skills and attributes that are requirements for effective outdoor leadership, point out that leadership skills are on a continuum from novice to skilled professional, offer leadership curricula, review research on outdoor leadership, and examine the controversy surrounding the topic of leader certification. The 10 top leadership competencies are listed for each of 6 research projects conducted during 1981-1986. A survey conducted in 1983 revealed a need to examine what is valued or undervalued in the hiring of outdoor leaders. In contrast to previous research that relied on survey questionnaires, this ongoing research project created a forced-choice situation in which outdoor program directors evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of two hypothetical applicants with different backgrounds and qualifications. The directors then indicated whether they would consider hiring either applicant for a position leading groups of adolescents on week-long trips. Contains 15 references. (SV)

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Instructor Qualifications: What Directors Want

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ABSTRACT

We are presenting important new research about the hiring preferences of professionals in the field responsible for the selection of outdoor leaders. This research was still being analyzed when submissions for the Conference Proceedings were due. Participants at the workshop will be given copies of the research results with a summary of the conclusions drawn from these results. A comprehensive descriptive article has also been written and will be submitted for publication in an upcoming edition of the *Journal of Experiential Education*. The focus of this entry is to review the literature associated with outdoor leadership, provide a detailed description of the research project we conducted, and provide insight regarding why such research is needed within the field of adventure education programming.

Literature Review

Since 1983, 19 articles have been published in the *Journal of Experiential Education* dealing with the broad topic of leadership (reference the *Index to the Journal of Experiential Education*, (1978–1996). Perhaps the best collection of leadership articles is contained in *Adventure Education*, Miles & Priest, (1990).

Summarizing the six articles contained in this text, Priest describes the seven skills and seven attributes that are requirements for the effective outdoor leader. Green offers his recipe for effective outdoor leadership and a reminder that leadership skills in individuals are on a continuum from novice to skilled professional. Phipps and Swiderski provide an overview of the

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dimensions of leadership with emphasis on interpersonal or "soft" skills. Raiola reviews some of the current research regarding outdoor leadership and offers a leadership curriculum. Cain and McAvoy offer the results of a three-year Delphi Study on leader judgment and a set of recommendations to improve outdoor leadership. Cockrell reviews the controversy surrounding the topic of leader certification.

In a recently published text, Priest and Gass (1997) summarized the 10 top leadership competencies found by six other, often related, research projects.

Green (1981)
Risk management plans
Small-group dynamics
Liability considerations
Outdoor leadership methods
Judgment
Minimum-impact practices
Decision making
Assessment of group capabilities
Assessment of individual capabilities
Outdoor leadership objectives

Swiderski (1981)
Exercise good judgment
Handle safety problems
Prepare for accidents
Prevent illness and injury
Teach environmental injuries
Follow a wilderness ethic
Model positive attitudes
Demonstrate minimum impact
Recognize own limitations
Recognize problem indicators

Buell (1981)
Design and use a first aid kit
Have knowledge of group safety
Possess physical fitness
Limit activities to capabilities
Anticipate problems
Provide standard of care
Apply physical and emotional
Develop safety procedures
Select and implement logistics
Carry out staff preplanning

Priest (1984)
Ability to anticipate accidents
Wilderness first aid skills
Awareness of group dynamics
Ability to clearly identify problems
Ability to evaluate natural hazards
Ability to foster teamwork
Ability to provide personal growth
Proficiency in land-based activities
Proficiency in water-based activities
Ability to prepare accident responses

Raiola (1986)
Leadership style
Judgment (objective & subjective)
Trip planning and organization
Environmental issues
Risk management
Instructional principles
Navigation
Group dynamics
Nutrition
Field experience

Priest (1986)
Safety skills
Judgment based on experience
Awareness and empathy
Group management skills
Problem-solving skills
Instructional skills
Technical activity skills
Flexible leadership style
Motivational philosophy
Environmental skills

Methodology

In 1983, we conducted a survey to gain an understanding of what people hiring outdoor leaders thought were the most desirable leadership competencies for those wishing to enter the field of outdoor adventure education. At that time, limited research had been conducted on hiring preferences within the field. Buell (1983) had made some preliminary speculations in his research, but little else appeared on this topic that addressed the question of desired competencies in outdoor adventure leaders from the perspective of employers.

We believed in 1983 that there was a critical need to inform prospective staff and program directors of the trend of desired competencies. Our hope was that by taking a critical look at what is valued or undervalued in the hiring process, we might be in a position to hold up to the field the way in which our subjective preferences result in hiring trends.

Our research was conducted over a period of one year and included the following steps. Information packets were mailed to all subjects containing:

1. An introductory letter describing the purpose of the survey and directions for completing the questionnaire.

2. A resume describing an individual's (Landry) qualifications and experience in the outdoors. Landry's resume included biographical data including a B.S. degree in Outdoor Education and institutional experience in the field of outdoor adventure education (e.g., Hurricane Island Outward Bound School, National Outdoor Leadership School). The resume was written with the intent of becoming an outdoor trip leader.

3. A letter describing another individual's (Goss) qualifications and experience in the outdoors. Goss's letter contained little related outdoor employment or association with standard outdoor adventure programs, but highlighted personal adventures and outdoor skills (e.g., lengthy climbing periods in Yosemite Park, three-week expedition to the Brooks Range in Alaska, completion of the entire

Appalachian Trail). The letter was written with the intent of becoming an outdoor leader.

4. A questionnaire containing open- and close-ended responses along with questions pertaining to the respondent's program, position in that program, and past outdoor experience.

5. A stamped, return envelope.

In the packet of information, respondents were asked to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the two applicants for a position leading a group of adolescents on a week-long outdoor experience. In addition, respondents were asked if they would consider hiring either of these individuals as trip leaders.

Discussion

We believe it is important to gain an understanding of hiring preferences using a variety of research techniques and methodologies. In the research detailed in the literature review section of this paper, the primary methodology employed to gain information on desired leadership competencies was a questionnaire. Participants were often asked to rate certain characteristics from least to most important, or enter those qualifications rated most desirable. This is an important technique to gain information about respondents' preferences. Our research attempted to recognize that there may be a distinction between what individuals say they want as desired characteristics, and which leadership qualifications are actually possessed by program staff. We attempted to look at the hiring process from the perspective of the employer who may be operating in a forced-choice situation.

As an example, if we were asked to list the desired characteristics of the ideal car, it might include air bags, anti-lock brakes, good gas mileage, a sporty appearance, and any number of particular characteristics that represent our ideal car. If we were to place our desired characteristics for a car

against the actual auto we are currently driving, there might be a gap. Could such a gap also occur in the hiring of staff? Could there be a list of characteristics that, while desired, are somewhat distant from the actual traits possessed by the staff we ultimately hire?

To answer these questions, we conducted the research that is the content of our conference presentation. We are eager to discuss our research with interested individuals and look forward to the reactions to both our presentation and subsequent article.

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