Chapter 11: Challenge Course Leadership

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There is only one thing more painful than learning from experience and that is not learning from experience.   Archibald McLeish

<Vignette>
Stacey appeared to be strongest member of the group. She had successfully completed the whitewater kayaking section of the Hudson River. Rock climbing presented no obstacles that pushed her beyond her comfort zone. She breezed through the grueling backpacking portion of the trip through the high peak region with ease. Yet, she seemed distant from the group. Stacey rarely shared in group discussions at the end of the day. She kept to herself and spoke only when approached by others. When talking among themselves, most group members commented that they did not know or understand Stacey. The purpose of the trip was to develop the participants' leadership skills. The group represented the student leadership team from their home town high school in northern New Jersey. The school administration sponsored this adventure-based experience to New York's Adirondacks in order to improve their effectiveness as peer leaders.

Stacey was new to the school and felt very different from her peers. She used her silence and physical strength, as opposed to team work, to successfully deal with most challenges. Stacey's instructors were concerned that she was holding her true self back. They sensed that she was stifling her leadership potential. Fortunately, the challenge course portion of the course was the next scheduled activity. Other group members were on track and displayed significant personal growth. Group members were slowly becoming an effective team with the exception of Stacey. The instructors put their heads together in order to design an experience that would benefit the group with a special twist for Stacey. A full day was designated for challenge course activities. Stacey's instructors carefully organized a progression of activities that would further facilitate group growth.

Initial team-building activities were crafted to move Stacey into a meaningful leadership position. Stacey was put in a position to make leadership decisions and use interpersonal skills beyond anything she had experienced thus far on the trip. When the group made it to the end of the day, the culminating activity required total group commitment. Stacey was reeling with excitement. The group completed the final activity with genuine group spirit signified by loud cheers and hugs. Stacey finally felt like part of the group. Stacey made significant progress for the rest of the trip as a result of her challenge course experience. Stacey left the program with feelings of connection and respect for her team members! She became a prominent leader in her school.
<End vignette>

Chapter Concepts
* Challenge course programming: Outdoor leaders must be able to design and implement programs based on a body of knowledge and skills specific to challenge courses.

* Challenge course leadership: Outdoor leaders must be able to apply experiential learning theory, adventure education theory or leisure theories to lead purposeful challenge course experiences.
* Challenge course facilitation: Outdoor leaders must be competent in facilitating challenge course experiences for all populations based on a specific set of technical skills and knowledge associated with challenge course experiences.

Introduction

The power of a challenge course experience is dependent upon effective leadership. Activity design, thoughtful progression, attention to risk management and the ability to apply adventure education theory make up effective challenge course leadership skills. Stacey's instructors are properly trained and experienced in the art of challenge course facilitation.

Challenge course leadership is now an integral part of outdoor leadership in North America. Many outdoor organizations in Canada and the U.S. integrate challenge course activities into their programming services. Professionals believe there are over 15,000 challenge courses in the United States today (Attarian, 2001). Outdoor education centers, camps, youth programs, schools, private businesses and a myriad of other agencies offer challenge course experiences. Traditional adventure sports such as backpacking, kayaking, rafting, climbing and caving are partnered with the challenge course experience as a common program offering. Aspiring outdoor leaders must seriously consider developing their challenge course leadership skills in order to be competitive in the job market. Challenge course experience serves as an excellent tool to improve overall outdoor leadership effectiveness.

Challenge courses are commonly referred to as high ropes courses, low ropes courses, team-building courses and group initiatives among other terms to describe this adventure-based activity. Individuals who lead challenge course experiences are commonly referred to as challenge course leaders or challenge course facilitators. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to outline all leadership functions and technical skills associated with challenge course leadership. This chapter provides the foundation for knowledge and skills necessary to be an effective challenge course leader.
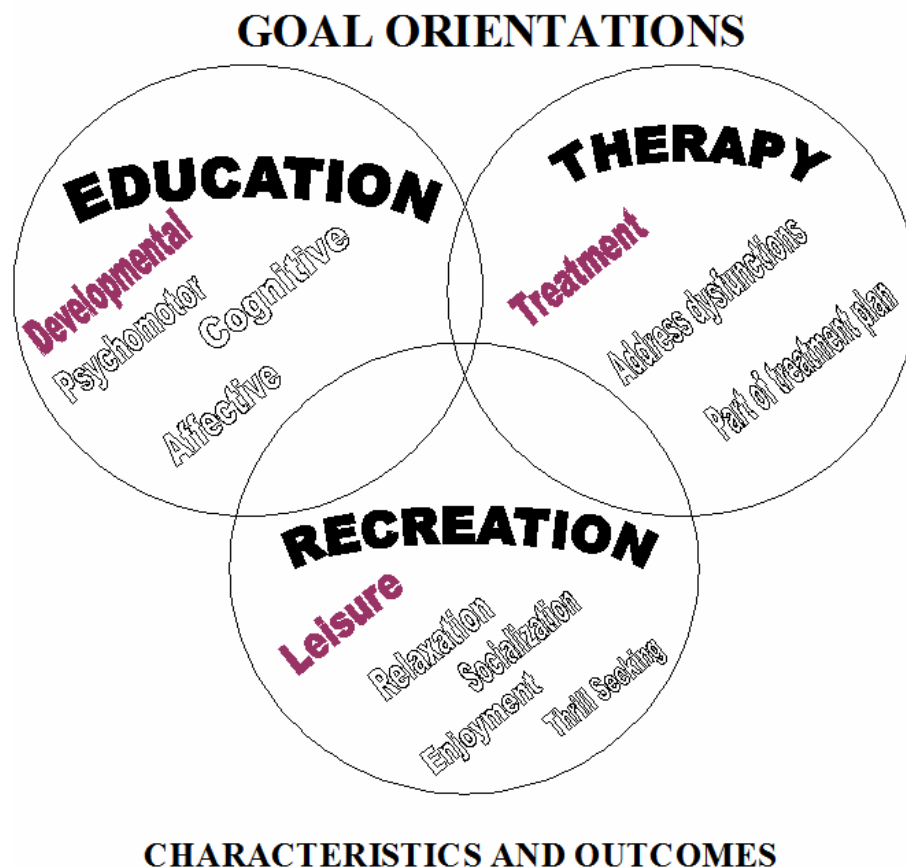
Challenge Course Programs

To understand the art of challenge course leadership, we must first discuss challenge courses in a programming context. Effective challenge course leadership is the ability to provide successful challenge course programs that accomplish predetermined program goals. One of the major barriers in challenge course programming is the lack of understanding both by the public and novice outdoor leader. Challenge course programming is an intentional process that is facilitated by a trained leader. For most, the term "challenge course" typically conjures visions of individuals balancing on ropes, logs and cables 40 to 50 feet above the ground. The uninformed tend to stereotype this vision as large jungle gym with little purpose other than to have fun or provoke fear! Challenge courses are actually much more complex than the stereotypical visions of "high wire acts". Rhonke, Wall, Tait and Rogers (2003, p. 3) define a challenge course as, "an experiential adventure program which offers groups and individuals the opportunity to participate in a series of activities involving mental, physical and emotional risk taking". Professionals facilitate challenge course experiences based on goals and objectives intended to produce specific outcomes. The activities that make up the challenge course experience must be

sequenced and facilitated to meet program goals. Challenge course environments are diverse in physical make up. Whether the facilities are indoors or outdoors the overall outcomes will remain the same if fundamental programming goals are kept in the forefront of a leader's facilitation priorities.

Program Goals

It is important to understand that not all challenge course experiences are intended to be the same. Challenge course outcomes vary depending on the program's goal orientation. Challenge course program outcomes can be viewed in the context of three, global goal orientations (Figure 11.1): (a) recreational, (b) educational and/or (c) therapeutic. These goal orientations may stand alone or be combined to produce a variety of outcomes. Novice leaders must first understand the differences and similarities between these three program goals. They must also know what is involved to effectively facilitate each experience. As you might suspect, these global goals can be applied to many adventure activities beyond challenge course programming. For example, canoeing, rock climbing or backpacking programs can be designed with these goals in mind. The following sections break each goal orientation down by describing specific characteristics.

GOAL ORIENTATIONS

EDUCATION — Developmental, Psychomotor, Cognitive, Affective

THERAPY — Treatment, Address dysfunctions, Part of treatment plan

RECREATION — Leisure, Relaxation, Socialization, Enjoyment, Thrill Seeking

CHARACTERISTICS AND OUTCOMES

These program goals may stand alone or be used in combination for a variety of outcomes.

Figure 11.1: For Challenge Course Chapter

Recreational
Challenge course experiences focused on recreation occur during a participant's leisure time or time free of obligation. Motivations to participate in recreation are as diverse as the individuals who participate. Relaxation, socialization, enjoyment, thrill seeking, skill development and self-improvement are just a few examples of motivating factors. These motivations may be conscious or unconscious reasons why people participate. Skilled leaders provide an opportunity for these personal goals to occur. Leaders ensure safety and exercise facilitation strategies to maximize the leisure experience. A leisure experience occurs when an intrinsically motivated participant can exercise freedom of choice and has perceived control over the activity. It is up to the participants to pull what they wish from the experience. Recreational experiences can foster educational or therapeutic outcomes but this occurs within the leisure context.
(Program example: An eco-tourism company in Hawaii constructs a series of zip lines as part of a jungle trek for tourists. Guides are available to facilitate the technical tasks such as harness fitting and connection to the system. The goal is to have fun by "spicing" up the day hike with adventure. Participants are primarily tourist on vacation who seek recreational activities.)

Educational
Challenge course programs geared toward educational experiences are intentional and developmental in nature. Formal goal setting and assessment occurs. Facilitators intentionally design experiences to foster educational outcomes. Participant psychomotor, cognitive and affective domains constitute specific development targets. Leaders guide participants through a sequenced process based on educational theory. Outdoor leaders utilize experiential learning theory as the basis for their teaching methods. Direct experience, reflection, generalizations and application are the four phases of experiential learning theory that are meshed into teaching process. See chapter 12 on teaching to learn more about the experiential learning cycle. Outcomes are assessed throughout the educational experience. A final evaluation occurs to determine if goals have been accomplished. The ultimate goal is to facilitate change within the participant. (Program examples: An adaptive Outward Bound program offers a challenge course experience as part of their overall program. Program goals focus on developing confidence and self-esteem among participants. Leaders facilitate refection activities and weave discussion into overall goals and objectives. Corporate development experiences also provide another example of educational programming. General personnel, whole departments, leadership teams and other intact groups found within a corporate structure participant in challenge course activities. Participation is based on specific educational intents. For example, the intent may be to increase productivity through team-building. Facilitators take co-workers through a series of team-building experiences to improve communication skills.)

Therapeutic
Recreational and educational challenge course experiences can be therapeutic in nature. Participants may walk away with a sense of renewal and personal growth. Yet, challenge course programming used as therapy is very specific in focus and methodology. A medical model serves as the ultimate foundation for challenge course programming used as therapy. If considered therapy, licensed/certified healthcare professionals are involved. Therapists construct individual treatment plans based on medically diagnosed issues. Comprehensive assessments are completed to determine therapeutic effectiveness. Therapeutic goals might consist of correcting

dysfunctional behavior or to improve an individual's quality of life. (Program example: A regional substance abuse, residential center uses challenge course activities as part of the patients' rehabilitation program. Doctors, counselors and therapeutic recreation specialists all work together to design individual treatment plans. Challenge course programming serves as only tool within a larger treatment process.)

Four Program Components

Challenge course programs typically include a series of activity components that can be adapted to meet any program goal. New professionals must take great care to be well versed in all aspects of challenge course programming. Activities that occur on the ground and high in the air serve different buy equally important purposes. Four fundamental program components must be mastered in order to effectively facilitate a challenge course experience. The components are games and ice-breakers, group initiatives and trust activities, low elements and high elements. Each component serves a specific function within the larger programming process. The four program components must be carefully sequenced based on individual and group needs. Challenge course facilitators guide groups through a process to achieve predetermined goals. Outcomes are then assessed to determine levels of success. What makes challenge course programming part of the outdoor leader's venue is the need for both technical and leadership competencies required to facilitate this adventure-based activity. For example, leaders must know knots, belay systems, spotting techniques, rescue skills and the physics of falls in relationship to breaking strengths of equipment. Each of the four program components requires specific technical skills.

In addition to technical skills the leader must understand adventure education theory and be able to apply it effectively. The challenge course leader should be able to match the level of challenge with the participants' ability and readiness level. The untrained challenge course leader endangers participants physically and psychologically when the challenge is facilitated inappropriately. A properly facilitated challenge course experience, based on sound adventure pedagogy, offers unique developmental opportunities as displayed by Stacey after her adventure experience. The following sections provide an overview of the four program components and skills necessary to facilitate each.

1. Games and Ice-breakers

Games, ice-breakers, warm-ups and deihibitizers are synonymous terms to describe initial activities to warm a group up physically and socially. The leader purposefully uses these activities to foster group development during the early stages of group dynamics. Activities might include name games, tag games or stretching exercises. Program tone and initial group norms are established. Setting a positive tone and productive group norms allows the group to navigate successfully through the reminder of the process.

2. Group Initiatives and Trust Activities

Group Initiatives are known as problem-solving, team-based activities that require no specialized safety systems. For example, facilitators present the group with a challenge to move a bucket full of water from point A to point B without spilling the water. They must remain 10 feet from the can at all times and have the use of six, fifteen foot ropes to move the bucket. Group initiatives

serve as the perfect instrument to develop interpersonal skills and teamwork. Leaders must facilitate these activities so that the group is empowered to solve problems without interference or reliance on the leader. Trust activities are designed to foster a sense trust among group members. Trust activities may or may not be problem-solving based. They vary in design but the outcome is intended to deepen interpersonal relationships. One of the most classic trust activities is know as the trust fall. A group member falls from height into the arms of group members. Leaders must carefully facilitate trust exercises based on an awareness of group readiness. If the group is not ready for a particular activity, it could backfire and undermine trust to cause a breakdown in interpersonal dynamics.

3. Low Elements
Low elements may be constructed as stationary/permanent structures or be designed as portable activities. Specific safety systems must be put into place. Low elements usually require no belay but do necessitate that group members spot to ensure participant safety. Low elements may be individual or team oriented activities. For example, the group is challenged to transport all members through a giant spider's web made of string. In order to complete the activity, participants must be lifted off the ground by other group members and passed through the web's holes. Some holes are close to the ground while other holes may be six feet or more above the ground. Great care must be taken not to disturb the web. Participants must protect the individuals by lifting properly and spotting. Spotting is required to prevent a serious injury from a fall. Low elements also foster interpersonal skills and teamwork. In addition, low elements are used to develop trust, group cohesion, communication skills and intrapersonal skills. Leaders must be aware of safety issues as well as limitations of the activities. Care must be taken to properly brief and debrief these dynamic activities to accomplish program goals. Leaders must be competent facilitators and possess technical knowledge specific to each activity.

4. High Elements
These are individual and team oriented activities that require a belay system for safety. Participants are required to climb or be lifted a significant distance from the ground. Belays systems typically consist of a rope that is connected to the climber. The rope is rigged to prevent the climber from a dangerous fall. High elements share many of the same benefits with group initiatives and low elements. They are particularly effective at bolstering self confidence, self-efficacy and other intrapersonal attributes. Specific technical skills are required of the leaders. Belaying, equipment use, course set-ups and inspections and other tasks must be mastered. Leaders must also be able to facilitate the psychological and emotional issues that result from perceptions of risk. This is where competency in adventure-based leadership comes into play. A leader's ability to properly facilitate a high element experience will influence participant outcomes.

Four Key Leadership Functions
There are numerous leadership concepts discussed throughout this text that apply to challenge course leaders. Challenge course leaders must apply leadership styles appropriately. They must exhibit traits and behaviors that characterize effective leadership. The following represents four key functions specific to the challenge course process. While these functions have application in

other adventure contexts, the following functions represent common practices found within the challenge course industry. These practices enable leaders to facilitate recreational, educational or developmental experiences. They help define the facilitation practices of a true professional.

1. Full Value Contract (FVC)
Establishing a full value contract has been a traditional tool used in adventure based programming (Schoel, Prouty & Radcliffe, 1988). Due to the experiential nature of challenge course activities, a mechanism is needed to provide groups behavioral and attitudinal guidance. Creating a FVC is an effective solution. Challenge course leaders must be able to facilitate the development of a FVC. This skill allows the group to be more self-directive and self-monitoring. A leader uses this technique to intentionally make the experience more developmental as opposed to recreational. Project Adventure provides guidelines for the development of a FVC when working with different ages groups as seen in Table 1. Of course more sophisticated models can be created depending on the nature and goals of a group. The majority of professional challenge course leaders integrate the FVC at the start of a program. See chapter 5 of this text for more information on the FVC.

Table 1 – Examples of Full Value Contracts

Elementary (Grades – 3-5)	Middle School (Grades 6-8)	High School (Grades 9-12)
Play Hard	Be Here	Be Present
Play Safe	Be Safe	Pay Attention
Play Fair	Set Goals	Speak Your Truth
	Be Honest	Be Open to Outcomes
	Let Go and Move On	Create a Safe Environment

2. Challenge By Choice (CBC)
CBC constitutes another tool commonly used by challenge course leaders. The nature of adventure-based programming requires that participants have a choice. Challenge course activities are no exception. Participants typically experience many perceived emotional, psychological and physical risks during program. It is an accepted practice that leaders give their participants a choice when risk is involved (Wurdinger, 1997). Providing a choice promotes an atmosphere of self-control and personal freedom. Therefore, participant motivation comes from within rather than from an outside force. This is a form of personal empowerment. Empowerment creates a positive environment for learning and growing. Challenge course leaders must have the ability to exercise CBC without compromising program effectiveness. CBC is not a license for participant to opt out of participation. See chapter 5 for more information on challenge by choice.

3. Sequencing
Challenge course experiences may last from one hour to several days. They can be part of a curriculum that occurs over the course of a school year. Therapeutic programs may integrate challenge courses into long and short-term treatment plans. Sequencing is the art of organizing activities into an intentional progression to accomplish goals. Leaders create a draft progression of activities when developing the initial activity plan. Competent leaders "will select activities in

an appropriate sequence and conduct programs based on assessment of specific group/individual need, readiness, emotional states and developmental needs and goals" (ACCT, 2002, p. 30). Sequencing changes occurs during the event as leaders evaluate multiple issues. No secret formula exists for proper sequencing. Leaders must be able to plan, observe, react and adjust based on their own instincts and experience (Rohnke & Butler, 1995). The following represents a generic sequence for a full day of challenge course activities:

1. Orientation: A general overview and safety briefing that includes challenge by choice
2. FVC exercise: Leader help establish healthy group norms from the beginning
3. Warm up activities and Ice Breakers: Activities that stretch the body and allowing for initial assessment of group norms and function. These activities help facilitate initial stages of group development. Debriefing typically not used at this point.
4. Initiatives: A progression of problem-solving activities from simple to complex. Debriefs can be integrated into the process at this point.
5. Low Elements: Higher level initiatives that facilitate further group work and trust building. Low elements also are used to assess and prepare group for high elements. Belaying is not required but may be an option. Debriefing is encouraged on a deeper level.
6. High Elements: Activities that require belaying that are designed to promote personal or group growth. Debriefing is also a part of this sequence.
7. Closing activities: Final activities designed to bring the entire experience together as educational lessons from the day are reviewed. Reflection on a group and individual level is involved.

4. Processing
Processing, debriefing and reflection are synonymous terms that describe the method used to facilitate a meaningful experience. Processing theory and techniques are discussed in-depth in chapter 5. Novice leaders probably struggle most with this important function. Training and experience in the art of processing is required to create learning environments that facilitate self-actualization, self-discovery and self-awareness. The goal is to have the group analysis their own process and provide solutions for improvement. Ultimately, lessons learned will be carried beyond the program and applied in real-life situations. It has been established that challenge course programs are a series of activities. How does the leader connect and build upon these activities through processing? Beginning leaders may fall into the trap of systematic debriefing after every activity before moving on to the next. The debriefing typically consists of a question answer session led by the facilitator. Veterans, with large "bags" of tricks" know the process is dynamic. Knowing what point to process and the appropriate processing tool to apply is a skill developed based on experience and knowledge. Refer to the chapter on group facilitation to learn more about processing skills.

Four Areas of Leader Competencies
Along with the general leadership functions, challenge course leaders must possess specific competencies to provide safe, enjoyable goal driven experiences. Competencies relate to the leadership and technical skills necessary to facilitate challenge course activities. No universal competencies exist for challenge course leaders at this time. The ACCT has included competencies in their handbook of challenge course standards (ACCT, 2002). Others have outlined basic facilitator functions and training requirements (Carlson, 2003; Rohnke & Butler, 1995; Rohnke et. al. 1997). It is difficult for the novice leader to know where to start. The

following list represents a summary of common themes found in the challenge course literature. The novice should use this as a starting point to assess abilities and knowledge.

1. General Competencies
Basic leadership skills are needed to effectively facilitate challenge course experiences. Challenge course leaders guide participants through diverse activities that require strict attention to safety. Professional leaders must also focus on program quality throughout the process. Leaders must be able to critically analyze a dynamic process and make numerous decisions to ensure goal attainment. All groups and experiences will be different which will require the use of judgment. Exercising sound judgment based on experience and training is a critical skill vital to all challenge course leaders. Professional leaders must be able to apply theory and properly manage the adventure experience. The following check list represents general leadership competencies that serve as the foundation for professional challenge course leadership. Challenge course leaders must possess the knowledge and have the ability to:

* Exercise sound judgment based on an acute self-awareness of one's abilities and limitations.
* Exercise decision-making skills congruent with an agency's policies and procedures to ensure a safe, enjoyable, goal oriented experience.
* Conduct oneself in an ethical manner consistent with a program's philosophy and mission.
* Create safe environments to protect and nurture a client's physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual domains.
* Apply experiential/adventure education theory in a challenge course context.
* Apply sound risk management principals associated with the body of knowledge associated with challenge course programming.

2. Leadership/Facilitation Competencies
Specific leadership skills are required in a challenge course context. These facilitation competencies represent specific, technical knowledge beyond the required general competencies. Safety and program quality remain as primary facilitation goals. Challenge course leaders that possess the following skills will ensure participant safety and enhance program quality. Therefore, challenge course leaders must possess the knowledge and have the abilities as represented in the following check list:

* Properly sequence activities to meet individual and group goals. For example if the group wishes to work on their communication skills, the leader would select initiatives that tend to promote the use of communication skills. Debriefing would focus on the group's communication process.
* Assess participants' readiness as activity demands increase. Leaders must be able to monitor a group's physical condition, emotional state and ability to focus. Lack of attention or fatigue could result in a serious accident if the activity is inappropriate.
* Assess appropriate situations for spotting. This means knowing when to have group members implement spotting protocol by assessing the potential for a dangerous fall. Safety for all must be taken into consideration in addition to the climber.
* Teach appropriate spotting techniques and monitor a group's application of these techniques. A leader must have strategies to effectively teach spotting techniques. A leader's ability to teach and monitor progress is important so that participants are able to master this necessary skill.

* Determine when belays are needed in conjunction with spotting or when to replace spotting as a safety mechanism. There are conditions when a group cannot effectively spot a member. For example, the climber may be too high off the ground. A belay must be set up to ensure participant safety.

* Assess the physical environment and adapt programming based on environmental hazards such as weather. For example if lightening were a possible threat, the leader would not expose the group by putting them on high elements.

* Apply group development theory. Know how to sequence activities and exercise the appropriate leadership style depending on the developmental level of a group. For example, when the group is forming, the leader should be more directive and facilitate activities to break the ice.

* Exercise conflict resolution skills. If the group enters a conflict stage of group dynamics, a leader must be able to guide the group if necessary. Otherwise, the group could get stuck and not bypass their issues. The result would be a negative, unproductive experience.

* Brief and debrief activities. As part of the experiential learning cycle, leaders must be able to help the group reflect on its experience to reach their goals by briefing and debriefing.

* Properly orient a group for a challenge course program. A leader must be able to set the proper tone in the beginning. Setting tone helps establish mutual expectations and sets the stage for appropriate behavior.

* Design and implement inclusive activities so that all group members are included.

3. Technical Skill Competencies
Along with leadership facilitation skills, a professional challenge course leader would not be complete without fundamental technical knowledge and skills. Technical skills are acquired through training and extensive practice. One incorrect knot or improper belay could seriously injury a participant or the challenge course leader. Periodic updates and skill checks are common practices among professional program providers. As the industry evolves, techniques and knowledge associated with technical operations also change. Therefore, challenge course leaders must possess the knowledge and have the abilities as represented in the following check list:

* Safely facilitate belaying using a variety of static and dynamic belays. Static belays involve proper use of climbing lanyards and other situations where the climber does not depend on assistance from others. For example, a leader climbs a telephone pole using a lanyard, sometimes know as lobster or crab claws, under her own power. The lanyard will prevent a long fall if properly used. Dynamic belays involve the belayer and climber on the same system. For example, the participant tied into a climbing rope and the belayer is on the other end using some type of mechanical breaking device. The climber is dependant upon a belayer to catch a fall.

* Identify, tie and assess a variety of knots. Leaders should be able to tie their own knots and be able to assess the quality of a knot tied by someone else. At a glance, the leader should identify a faulty or improper knot.

* Exercise appropriate equipment use, care and inspections. Many different types of technical equipment exist for challenge course use. Leader should know how to use equipment and ensure that it functions properly. For example, a leader is able to inspect a climbing harness and know when to retire a potentially dangerous harness.

* Inspect course hardware. Leaders must be able to apply general knowledge of challenge course construction. Bolts, cables, wood and other materials should be monitored each time the challenge course is used. Leaders must be able to identify faulty equipment to prevent an accident.
* Set up and take down of events. Many elements require leaders to rig pulley, ropes and cables in order to facilitate the activity. Knowledge of proper set ups ensures safety and enjoyment for all involved.
* Manage safety issues associated with each activity/element. All games, initiatives, low and high elements are different and therefore, have their own unique safety issues. Challenge course leaders must understand the limitations of the activity and the physical facilities that make up that activity. For example, a low element may be designed so that the spotting technique is very specific.

4. Risk Management Competencies
General competencies, leadership skill and technical skills all relate in some aspect to overall safety and risk management. Yet, there is specific risk management skills that all challenge course leaders must master. Challenge course programming has existed long enough so that the profession holds a firm understanding of problem areas. Professionals know from accident data and formal networking when systems or procedures need alteration. Challenge course programming involves inherent risks that cannot be underestimated. Attention to sound risk management practices ensures that professionals are managing risks to the best of their abilities. Therefore, challenge course leaders must possess the knowledge and have the abilities as represented in the following check list:

* Manage participant behavior. Participants that stray from a leader's realm of control could easily hurt themselves and others. A leader must be able to foresee inappropriate behavior before putting the participant in a dangerous position. For example, if a participant cannot focus on simple game directions the leader would assume more complicated elements that require complex directions would not be appropriate.
* Institute an agency's risk management policies. Risk management policies will vary among agencies. Leaders must know protocol specific to the program where they are working.
* Interpret participant medical information. Leaders must be able to understand medical conditions and their relationship to challenge course activities. Leaders must attempt to be inclusive without putting participants at risk. For example, a leader might have to assess how a knee condition would affect participation.
* Administer appropriate agency risk management forms. Medical forms, waiver forms, assumption of risk forms, photo releases and other forms are all part of administering a challenge course program. Leaders have a distinct responsibility to follow agency protocol when administering paperwork.
* Communicate effectively the inherent risks and hazards associated with challenge course programming. Challenge course leaders are trained to manage the risks associated with challenge course programming. Sound risk management practices dictate that leaders articulate the inherent risks to the participant. Leaders typically do this in the beginning as part of an orientation.
* Implement an agency's emergency response plan. In an emergency, a leader must act based on a formal emergency response plan. Protecting others, calling for help, administering first aid and other critical actions are expected of a leader.

* Perform rescues and lowers as outlined by agency protocol. Challenge course activities necessitate that leaders be able to lower participants to the ground from high places. The ability to rescue and lower participants is a critical skill needed to prevent further or serious injury.

Inclusion

Challenge courses are readily accessible to the general population. Ropes course activities do not require specialized environments (e.g. cliffs, whitewater, steep mountain trials) as do other outdoor adventure activities. Challenge courses are abundant, affordable and in some cases even portable. It is the perfect adventure activity available to all populations! Professional outdoor leaders have an ethical and legal duty to include individuals of all abilities in challenge course activities. The untrained and inexperienced cannot visualize people with disabilities 40 feet off the ground traversing an element or solving a complex group initiative. Most stereotype adventure activities as an exclusive domain for the physically and mentally abled. Professional outdoor leaders possess a very different vision and reality. Professional associations have embraced inclusion as a professional obligation. The Association for Challenge Course Technology states that "Challenge Course Facilitators will be knowledgeable of, and provide whenever possible, challenge course activities that are inclusive of participants. (e.g. varying abilities/differences, learning styles, cultural practices)" (ACCT, 2002, p. 30). The Association for Experiential Education (AEE) dedicated a section of their accreditation standards to universal access (AEE, 1995).

A Leader's Duty
The powerful benefits of challenge course programming should available to everyone. It becomes an ethical issue when outdoor leaders exclude participants. The fundamental premise for providing outdoor adventure services is based upon the fact that our participants benefit, grow and become better people as a result of participation. Outdoor leaders are committing an ethical blunder when programs are not designed to be inclusive. Leaders end up limiting who receives these powerful benefits. Outdoor leaders have a duty to make accommodations for all who seek our services. In addition to our moral obligation, laws are in place to protect the public's civil rights.

How to Facilitate Inclusion
Challenge course activities can be modified and adapted with minimal effort. A leader's creativity based on sound programming principles creates a foundation for inclusion. From a technical standpoint, resources exist such as ACCT vendors who design and build accessible challenge course programs. Haul system design, adaptive equipment and technical modifications are examples of ACCT vendor services. From a leadership perspective, Rogers (2003) urges leaders to focus on the team-building nature of challenge courses by remembering the 4-Cs. The 4-Cs are natural outcomes associated with team-building activities:
*cooperation: social integration on a meaningful level
*communication: development of interpersonal communication skills
*caring: relationship formation such as trust, respect, understanding and openness
*consequences: natural consequences that are inherent in experiential based activities used as learning tool – participants learn from their decisions and actions

The 4-C's also reflect the typical needs of individuals with disabilities (Rogers, 2003). These are also global needs for people of all abilities. A challenge course leader's task requires that they match individual needs with program outcomes. Activities are then designed to promote specific aspects of the 4-C's based on assessed needs.

Activity example using the 4-C's
Twenty teenagers are scheduled for a day at the challenge course. Pre-activity interviews with group leaders indicate that individuals are not getting along and tend to be self-centered. These teens are seen as intolerant of one another. Two of the teens have wheel chairs and one is legally blind. The challenge course leaders decide to focus the day on relationship formation. They carefully sequence activities that will facilitate trust and understanding. Problem solving activities are designed that require the resources of all group members. The full value contract specifically addresses levels of participation and behavioral norms. The leaders purposefully guide debriefing activities so that the teens are learning from their behaviors and decisions. The group begins to realize that they can accomplish amazing things if individuals are allowed to be themselves. They begin to realize that each person has distinct gifts that they bring to the group. Respect and a celebration of differences result from the day's activities. Follow up evaluations six months later reveal that tolerance and respect are now the group norms.

Activity Design
Another component to successful inclusive programs is the leader's ability to modify and adapt the activity. The following basic guidelines are suggestions found from several sources (Rogers, 2003; Rohnke, Wall & Tait, 1997; Havens, 1992). Refer to table 11.2 as a guide to facilitate inclusive programs.

The Challenge Course Profession
Early courses were constructed in-house based on the creativity and the ingenuity of staff members. No universal standards existed to govern programming practices. Risk management practices reflected no uniformity among programs. Professionals estimate somewhere between 700 to 800 courses existed in the 1980s (Attarian, 2001). The steady growth of programs pushed the professional outdoor leaders running these programs to express concern regarding safety and acceptable practices. The first formal gathering of challenge course professionals occurred in 1988 at the North Carolina Outward Bound School. These meeting gave birth to the first professional challenge course association in the United States. The Association for Challenge Course Technology (ACCT) developed the first universal challenge course installation standards as their first formal task during their 1991 symposium. The ACCT emerged the summer of 1993 (ACCT, 2002).

The ACCT has evolved into a well respected professional trade association to advance challenge course technology. The organization provides membership services such as conferences, newsletters, industry updates, standards and access to insurance coverage for challenge course programmers. Beyond the original installation standards ACCT also developed standards in the following areas: (a) Inspection standards – includes safety inspections, (b) technical standards for challenge course operations – includes management and operations standards as well as facilitator standards, and (c) ethical standards (ACCT, 2002). In 2003, another professional association officially formed to support the profession. The Professional Ropes Course

Association (PRCA) mission states: "The mission of the PRCA is to develop user friendly standards, ropes challenge course documents, and to define, document and outline the construction/operational practices for the ropes challenge course industry. The documents of the PRCA will be used for course evaluations, insurance criteria, and professional development" (PRCA, 2003, ¶ 1). The PRCA created a manual of standards and provides professional services for challenge course professionals.

At this time, no universal certifications exist for challenge course leaders. The certifications that do exist are specific to organizations and programs. Facilitator training models and curricula are also program specific. Basic facilitator trainings tend to be a minimum of 40 hours in length (Rohnke, Wall &Tait, 1997, Carlson, 2003). Advanced facilitators and course directors require in the neighborhood of 80 training hours. The ACCT (2002) standards list approximately 63 facilitator standards. Forty hours of training would not ensure complete competency in all areas. Therefore, many programs require newly trained facilitators to apprentice or shadow experienced leaders in order to hone their skills under a watchful eye. As new courses are built, many builders offer training as part of their overall service. It is important for leaders to facilitate based on the specifics of course design. The universal installation standards developed by the ACCT have limitations. Builders may exercise varying degrees of flexibility in a course design. Challenge course managers have additional flexibility as local policies and procedures are established. Challenge course leaders must be aware of this fact and be willing to participate in in-house staff trainings, re-certifications and updates each time work is obtained on a different course.

Origin of Challenge Courses
In order to gain a deeper appreciation of challenge course leadership, the history of challenge course programming must be understood. As described in chapter one of this text, the Outward Bound movement played a significant role in the birth of outdoor leadership as we know it today. Challenge course programming was an important curricular component when the first U.S. Outward Bound school formed in 1962 (Miner & Bolt, 2002; Wagstaff, 2003). The British Outward Bound schools borrowed the original concept from their military. The majority of initial British Outward Bound instructors possessed military backgrounds. The first British course was built sometime in the 1940s. It was believed to simulate working high in the rigs of sailing ships. Young British Outward Bound students would undergo rigorous training on the challenge course to prepare for sailing expeditions in the rough seas off the English coast.

Ernest "Tap" Tapley designed and built the first U.S. Outward Bound challenge course. He was charged with the task of creating the first U.S. Outward Bound base camp in Marble Canyon, Colorado. The founders of Outward Bound sought Tapley to lead based on his mythical reputation as a gifted outdoorsman. There were few outdoorsmen who could climb mountains, ski steep terrain, climb steep faces, backpack great distances and mentor young men like Tap Tapley. Part of Tapley's preparation to establish a U.S. Outward Bound school entailed traveling overseas to visit the Eskdale British Outward Bound School. The British Outward Bound instructors knew of Tapley and were eager to share their ways. They made sure that he experienced the Eskdale challenge course as part of his training. In addition, Tapley had U.S. military experience with the 10th Mountain Division and was well acquainted with military

obstacle courses. Tapley's inspirational design for the Marble Canyon course stemmed from these experiences and own creativity.

The First Challenge Courses
The course at Outward Bound's Marble Canyon base camp began with a 35-foot rope ladder. This element produced as much apprehension and nervousness as did rock climbing and rappelling. Students were taught to belay one another. Falls were encouraged in order for students to really experience the full effects of belaying. After a session, students sat around Tapley for a question and answer session. Tapley would ask a question related to the experience. Students would reply. This form of debriefing was exercised to maximize the educational value of the Outward Bound experience (Wagstaff, 2003). The Outward Bound movement began to flourish in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As a result, Outward Bound produced a number of competent instructors. These instructors learned the art of challenge course programming and carried this knowledge to other settings.

Separate from the Outward Bound movement, another movement known as hébertisme utilized challenge course activities to educate youth. George Hébert served as a French Navy officer. His focus centered on the physical conditioning and training of the French navy. In 1913, he gave a demonstration of his training methods before the French Physical Education Congress. "Hébert's view on education was a return-to-nature approach with emphasis on development of 'moral values and virile character" (Cousineau, 1976, p. 3). "He developed obstacle courses in natural areas that required the use of fundamental movements such as jumping, climbing, running, walking, crawling, balancing, throwing, lifting and carrying. In addition to emphasis on physical conditioning, hébertisme created opportunity to discover personal potential and limitations while moving in a natural environment" (Wagstaff, 2003, p. 5). Two Canadian army officers who served in France during WWII were exposed to hébertisme as an educational tool. As a result, they implemented a program in 1949 at Camp Ecole Trois-Saumons located near Québec City, Canada.

Movement into Mainstream Education
Project Adventure holds the distinction as one of the first organizations to integrate challenge course programming into mainstream education (Prouty, 1999). Project Adventure founders and early instructors consisted of Outward Bound staff who were significantly influenced by Outward Bound philosophy. The U.S. Department of Education funded a grant that enabled Project Adventure to be founded in 1971. Project Adventure found its way into schools settings. The exciting brand of experiential education proved to be engaging and motivating for students. Bound instructors continued spreading their influence by constructing challenge courses in other setting such as college campuses and summer camps.

Course Environments
Challenge course facilities occupy diverse settings. Agencies that construct challenge course facilities can be creative with their physical space. Lack of open space does necessarily limit the number and type of low and high element choices. Professional builders have the opportunity to exercise creativity when building elements. The following list represents diverse settings and environments where high and low courses are constructed:

* Forested areas using large trees create a very popular setting to construct challenge courses. The first courses built in Canada and the U.S. were located in groves of trees that would support the use of ropes and cables.
* Planted telephone poles in open spaces later became an alternative to tree courses. Many organizations did not have access or the forest resources to construct a tree course. Planted telephone poles became a popular alternative. Strategically planting poles allowed for a tremendous amount of flexibility in course design.
* The first generation of pole courses gave way to an innovative, free standing design. Three large telephone poles were arranged to form a giant tripod. Low and high elements were then strung between the poles. This design is an organization's choice when open space is limited.
*The rafters and walls of gymnasiums or ceiling space above indoor swimming pools are also used to construct high elements. Agencies such as schools that wish to provide indoor programming utilize what is typically considered wasted or unusable space.
* Conference centers support challenge course programming as a team-building tool for conventions and meetings. Contracted builders construct a temporary course in large open spaces (indoors or outdoors) to be dismantled after the event.

Summary

It is not uncommon for outdoor leaders to gain their initial training within challenge course programs. Facilitators learn technical and leadership skills that are transferable to other adventure settings. For example, novice leaders gain valuable experience guiding groups through the stages of group development. Also, it is the prefect lab to develop group management skills that are transferable to other adventure activities. Since the advent of modern adventure programs, challenge course programming has established itself firmly in the adventure curriculum. The success of Outward Bound played a huge role in the evolution of challenge course programming. Project Adventure and the Association for Challenge Course Technology represent key players in the birth of a profession. Challenge course programming exists as a versatile tool to produce a variety of outcomes. Outcomes are associated with three global goal orientations: recreation, education and therapy. As the profession has grown, so have the levels of leadership competencies. Challenge course leaders must exercise judgment and decision-making skills required of all outdoor leaders. Competencies in leadership/facilitation, technical skills and risk management skills must be mastered. Along with program popularity and availability, comes the duty to serve all people. Challenge course programs must be made inclusive. People of all abilities and backgrounds can benefit. Challenge courses have become synonymous with outdoor adventure experiences. Aspiring outdoor professionals should become familiar with this dynamic program venue. Skilled challenge course facilitators have the opportunity transfer their craft to a variety of settings. Challenge course facilitation plays an important role in the professional life of the modern-day outdoor leader.

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