

## Group dynamics

### Some things to consider: the What to do

- Assign Roles: Clearly define who is bringing what and who is responsible for navigation and safety.
- Practice Regular Check-ins: Stop at regular intervals (e.g., every hour or at junctions) to regroup, hydrate, and assess everyone's condition. Let group know about this ahead of time
- Encourage Open Dialogue: Encourage participants to speak up if they feel unsafe or overwhelmed. Listen to concerns! Listen to objective facts that participants may bring forward. Don't be a know it all leader. Participants should trust and verify.
- Prepare for Emergencies: Have a contingency plan in place for unexpected events. Make commitments as to what to do if something changes during the trip (more for multi day trips). Are conditions unusual or outlier? Then previous experience will not apply.
- Peer Pressure: Members may feel pressured to continue despite exhaustion or fear, which can be dangerous. Also don't be pressured to time commitments when the trail is more difficult than you expected – short cuts can be dangerous.
- Decision-making Failures: Lack of clear roles can lead to poor, unassigned decision-making, increasing accident risks. Don't be overcommitted to a goal.
- Cliques and Conflict: Social tensions can emerge, particularly on long, challenging trips, requiring members to stay focused on shared goals.

## **Group dynamics: the How to do**

There is a scale: aggressive to passive. Where do you fit on the scale? Important to know yourself as this can impact who you are as a group leader. Ideally you want to be in the middle  
Think about this in your personal life. Where you are on this scale can vary depending on who you are interacting with – how you see them, sometimes what gender they are, how much you are a friend with them, etc.

Next think about what your objectives are in any group situation and with the different issues that arise.

Ask: why clarify goals?

You may need to act differently if there are different goals

You may get what you want at a huge cost

Clarifying priorities is the first and most important interpersonal skill – figuring out what you actually want, how important it is compared to keeping a positive relationship, keeping your own self respect.

*Safety of course should always be ahead of relationship and self respect.*

Getting what you want. – key question is What specific result or change do I want? Be as objective as possible.

Asking someone to do something, or stop doing something, to commit to, to understand. Etc

Relationship effectiveness: key question is how do I want the other person to feel about me after the interaction is over?

Ex: acting in a way that makes other person actually want to give you what you are asking for.

Always making the relationship more important may not be great for long haul. Finding that balance is important

Self respect: how do I want to feel about myself? – standing up for myself

Defending a friend

Doing something you believe in

If you violate your own morals/concerns may feel worse later

Or you may prove a point but not get what you want - What hill do you want to die on?

*Once you decide what the priority is you can decide how to proceed. If there is a certain objective you need to accomplish, you may need to be more assertive than if keeping the relationship is the priority. Safety of course should always be ahead of relationship and self respect.*

## **General principles:**

Thinking ahead about what we want, knowing our goals, expressing clearly.

When it is not working – stepping back

Remember to keep it simple, objective, factual and not about many different topics

*Describe* the situation to others as objectively as you can. No judgements, no absolutes, just stick to the facts.

No “you never” or “you always”

Describe what you are noticing – live, right now

Keep judgment or assumptions out of the conversation

*Express clearly* how you feel or what you believe about the situation

Keep this focused on yourself so you stay out of criticism.

Avoid making other person defensive. No always, never etc.

*Assert* what you want. For example, say no quite clearly and calmly to a request to go up a side trail that you feel is not safe. Not demanding. Being as clear as possible so there is no doubt what you are intending

Be effective – slow down, step away from being emotional, be with how things are.

No saying “Calm down”

*Reinforce* why you are asking for something. Be as positive as possible because carrots work better than sticks

*Be mindful* by ignoring attacks, diversions, change in topic

keep asking in clear assertive way, pay attention to your emotions and observe/recognize when you are getting distracted

Keep saying the same thing, same tone of voice, don't escalate, don't respond to attacks

Be open to noticing other person's responses

Be mindful as things get more heated so you don't get lost into a fight

Think of the other person's perspective

Appear confident – voice tone, physical manner, eye contact, balance being arrogant versus being apologetic – what message is your non verbal sending?

May have to act opposite to how you feel if emotions getting in the way.

Negotiate if possible: try to compromise as long as it is safe.

Turn the tables “I am not willing to change my mind. How can we solve this problem?”

**To keep self respect**: Be fair (to yourself and the other person), no apologizing for making this decision, stick to your values (don't sell yourself out), be truthful (don't exaggerate this issue or act helpless)

For **maintaining a relationship** when you have to request/refuse something: be gentle, be interested in hearing the other person, validate their concerns (validate the why while disagreeing with the what), have an easy manner (smile, try to be light hearted, use humour, soft sell if possible)

**Ask yourself**: what gets in the way of interpersonal effectiveness?

You don't have the skills

You don't know what you want

Your emotions are getting in the way

You forget you long term goals for short term goals

Other people get in the way

Your thoughts/beliefs get in the way

## Scenarios:

1. You have a goal of getting to a peak. The weather is getting worse. Some of the people (including you) want to go back. A few really want to carry on. How are you going to manage this? On the other hand, would you anything differently if you also are among the few who want to carry on?
2. You get to a spot in the trail where there is some exposure. It is really worrying to one person. It doesn't seem that difficult to you but you can see the person is quite anxious about carrying on. Several people in the group have already gone on up the trail past this spot. What will you do now?
3. One person shows up for the hike and does not have the correct gear. You asked people to bring microspikes but they don't have any. You know you are going to encounter a snow field to cross and they say they are not worried about crossing without the spikes. They also have a tiny pack and you wonder do they even have any warm clothes or rain gear? What do you do?
4. One group person starts talking about a sensitive topic that is upsetting to you and other people in the group. (could be anything from politics to health issues to personal knowledge to climate change). You are trying to be kind by listening to them but this fuels the fire and they keep talking more and more about the topic. What should you to do to prevent this situation worsening? Anything you could do as prevention?
5. The weather is cold and the group is diverse in speed of their hiking. So some of the group feels too cold to wait for the slower people. They keep getting farther ahead. What do you do? Is there anything you would of done at the start of the hike to hopefully prevent this?