

...IDENTIFY LEADERS

OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP

Leadership is exercising social influence while completing tasks and maintaining healthy relationships. Leadership in experiential and outdoor contexts includes responsibility for the wellbeing of people and the environment. Outdoor leaders often require a wide range of skill and knowledge in order to operate in dynamic situations. Select staff and prepare them with the following competencies in combinations that suit your program needs.

COMPETENCIES

Foundation knowledge for leaders may include history, philosophy, social psychology, current issues, future trends, and nature interpretation.

Technical skills are the talents associated with the experiential learning activities conducted.

Risk Management skills are the abilities used to prevent accidents, reduce injuries, and ensure a relatively safe, yet exciting experience.

Environmental skills are procedures and beliefs applied to protect nature from human damage.

Organizational skills are the practices used to plan, implement, and evaluate trips or activities with consideration for legal liability and danger.

Instructional skills are the capabilities to teach the skills listed above and some of those below.

Facilitation skills make change easier and faster for clients by aiding their reflection, integration, and continuation of learning from experience.

Effective communication is exceptionally useful during instruction and facilitation, but speaking, listening, and giving feedback are also very important in all aspects of leadership.

Flexible leadership style involves the ability to easily shift from autocratic through democratic to abdicative based on balancing concerns for task, relationships, and conditional favorability.

Ethical behavior is an obvious hallmark of being professional and includes understanding one's own biases or triggers with the ability to resolve an ethical dilemma through moral reasoning.

Problem solving skills use analytic and creative techniques to identify difficulties, anticipate outcomes, resolve predicaments, and evaluate effectiveness, while using decision making and sound judgment when solutions are obscured.

Decision making skills can diverge an array of options and then converged these to select the best one from among several potential options.

Sound Judgment is a complex cognitive process that can substitute for absent information by drawing on memories of past experiences and refracting those to fit the current situation.

A FRAMEWORK

The following "brick wall" model illustrates how these competencies support and complement one another. Effective outdoor leadership is built atop a foundation of knowledge, made from a mixture of important skills, cemented and strengthened by critical competencies.



The first item in further resources describes a framework (based on these competencies and more) for preparing outdoor and experiential leaders as they progress from entry-level experience to professional competence.

Beau Williams-Orser & Simon Priest

Beau Williams-Orser
LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY
bwilliamsorser@laurentian.ca
705-427-5112

FURTHER RESOURCES

BOOKS

Williams-Orser, B. M. (2021). An Exploratory Study of Post-Secondary Outdoor Leadership Training in Canada. Published magisterial thesis. Laurentian University.

Priest, S. & Gass, M. (2018). *Effective Leadership in Adventure Programming* (third edition). Human Kinetics.

ARTICLES

Galloway, S. (2002). Theoretical cognitive differences in expert and novice outdoor leader decision making. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 2(1), 19-28.

Pelchat, C. & Karp, G. (2012). A historical review of outdoor leadership curricular development and the future with action research. *SCHOLE: A Journal of Leisure Studies and Recreation Education*, 27(2), 1-13.

Shooter, W., Sibthorp, J., & Paisley, K. (2009). Outdoor leadership skills: A program perspective. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 32(1), 1-13.

Thomas, G. (2011). Outdoor leadership education: Do recent textbooks focus on the right content? *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*, 15(1), 3-11.

Wagstaff, M. (2016). Outdoor leader career development: Exploration of a career path. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education and Leadership*, 8(1), 75-96.

OTHER

Gookin, J. & Leach, S. (2009). NOLS Leadership Educator Notebook: A Toolbox for Leadership Educators. National Outdoor Leadership School.

ISO 21102: (2020). Adventure tourism — Leaders — Personnel competence.
<https://www.iso.org/standard/76475.html>

Medina, J. J. (2004). *An exploration of master outdoor leaders' professional development experiences outside of institutional training*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Northern Colorado.

CONCLUSION

Evidence History Social psychology Philosophy Trends and issues	Technical activity skills	Organizational skills	Ethics Judgment Conditional leadership Problem solving Communication Decision making
	Safety/risk skills	Instructional skills	
	Environmental skills	Facilitation skills	

Weaving all the concepts presented in this book may seem like a daunting task. Becoming competent in all these areas may seem even more impossible. Remember that your development as noted earlier will occur over a great length of time and practice. Not everyone progresses at the same speed or in the same way.

However, some tendencies and behaviors are indicative of professionals' growth in their leadership qualities. These tendencies and behaviors can be found in each of the areas of leadership development. In their book on adventure therapy, Gass, Gillis, and Russell (2012) classify leadership development in outdoor adventure programs into emergent leaders, proficient leaders, and exemplary leaders. An **emergent** adventure professional possesses basic knowledge

of the procedures, models, and practices in the field. A **proficient** leader can demonstrate and apply procedures, models, and best practices expected at the "standard of care" in current field practices. **Exemplary** leaders use the very best elements in the field with consistency, clarity, and the best-known expression of effectiveness for clients: they are strategic in utilizing their practices and effective in achieving client outcomes.

The following competency framework shares this classification in a rubric-like manner, describing different levels of professional behavior achieved by outdoor leaders. This framework may be used as a self-examination tool to evaluate one's own competence, or it can be adapted for motivating vocational enhancement for staff.

Table C.1 Outdoor Leadership Competency Framework

	OUTDOOR LEADER IDENTIFIED AS...		
	Emergent	Proficient	Exemplary
OVERALL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports senior-level outdoor leaders in adventure programming protocols Follows established written protocols and procedures Possesses presite experience in the programming area Ensures participants always have access to appropriate equipment, nutrition, and hygiene resources for environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is aware of latest developments of professional practice in adventure programming Ensures consistency between written protocols and actual procedures Possesses the potential to supervise other outdoor leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses learning opportunities from clients to advance the field in new and innovative ways Contributes to writing original protocols and procedures Seeks innovative ways to lead outdoor experiences and shares results with other professionals

	Emergent	Proficient	Exemplary
FOUNDATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EVIDENCE: Understands the critical core competency formula of outdoor leadership based on data ● PHILOSOPHY: Understands the definitions of key terms, adventure benefits, and philosophical questions ● SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY: Understands flow, optimal arousal, and challenge (risk–competence interaction) and how they combine to explain adventurous behaviors ● HISTORY: Understands a national history of adventure programming and outdoor leadership in relations among people and places ● TRENDS AND ISSUES: Understands and self-reflects on the trends that currently influence the outdoor leadership profession and identifies several countries that recapitulate a sequence of birth, growth, plateau, and decline in adventure programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EVIDENCE: Understands a recipe for developing outdoor leaders derived from research ● PHILOSOPHY: Understands adventurous experiential learning and its composite elements ● SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY: Understands the basis of human motivation, expectancy, self-efficacy, attribution, and competence effectance and how they interact to guide client behaviors in adventure experiences ● HISTORY: Understands an international history of adventure programming and outdoor leadership in comparative countries ● TRENDS AND ISSUES: Understands and discusses with colleagues the controversial issues in adventure programming that have been settled and those that remain current and addresses the new concerns related to outdoor leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EVIDENCE: Enables further research through direct collaboration or indirect support ● PHILOSOPHY: Applies the principles of adventurous experiential learning to client programs and trips ● SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY: Assists clients with interpreting their fears, adventures, risk, and competence to make choices in adventure that lead to learning, growth, and change ● HISTORY: Understands the past as a powerful predictor of the future and in relation to the global trends and issues or current controversies ● TRENDS AND ISSUES: Contributes to professional dialogues regarding trends and issues that result in action to make a difference; identifies previously undetected trends or issues and comments on their potential impacts on adventure programming and outdoor leadership
TECHNICAL ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understands the interactions of generic and specific competencies regardless of activity being led ● Possesses more than 50% of the generic competencies and all specific competencies for at least two activities ● Continually seeks to gain technical competencies in other activities ● Is practicing at least one new activity ● Matches minimum qualifications for those technical activities being led 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adjusts competencies based on geographic locations, client populations, program goals, and environmental conditions ● Possesses more than 75% of the generic competencies and all specific competencies for at least four activities ● Aids other leaders to gain technical competencies for one activity ● Exceeds minimum qualifications for those technical activities being led ● Matches instructor criteria for training others in particular technical activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Evolves competencies based on experience rather than standards ● Possesses 100% of the generic competencies and all the specific competencies for at least six activities ● Aids other leaders to gain technical competencies for several activities ● Proactively upgrades competencies ● Exceeds instructor criteria for training others in particular technical activities
SAFETY AND RISK MANAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understands the importance of risk as essential to adventure experience ● Differentiates among real and perceived risks, dangers, hazards, and perils ● Understands how accidents happen and when to avoid, reduce, transfer, or retain risks in relation to potential accident frequency and severity ● Responds to accidents with first aid, search and rescue, evacuation, etc. ● Understands the concepts behind legal liability and how to defend the program and its leadership staff ● Ensures every participant completes and signs all legal and medical risk management paperwork ● Understands the great importance of insurance and the types of coverage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Analyzes dangers and avoids inhibiting factors in the field ● Applies risk management countermeasures to the program before, during, and after possible accidents ● Modifies policies and procedures when needed for risk management ● Leads accident-simulation training ● Responds to crisis accidents by seeking assistance from program resources outside the client group ● Conducts program-wide risk management reviews ● Double-checks and summarizes for privacy all legal and medical risk management paperwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Trains staff and other professionals on risk management procedures ● Oversees the updating of risk management practices ● Presents risk management concepts in professional training situations ● Fosters and takes part in staff exchanges to ensure objective perspectives of risk management ● Responds to crisis accidents by coordinating internal program resources and securing assistance from outside public or government agencies ● Triple-checks legal and medical risk management paperwork

(continued)

Table C.1. (continued)

	Emergent	Proficient	Exemplary
ENVIRONMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follows generalized Leave No Trace (LNT) practices to protect local environment Prepares, travels, and camps with minimal impact to local environment Understands the competing and balancing needs of sustainability Understands the role of interpretive guide to nature, environment, culture, history, and other local heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applies and adapts LNT practices to suit specific settings and protects environment outside the local sphere Prepares, travels, and camps with minimal impact to global environment Understands and fully supports the need for sustainability in programs, activities, and field experiences Interprets local heritage to clients and encourages appreciation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modifies and promotes LNT practices to protect the global environment and helps to change client local behaviors Prepares, travels, and camps with minimal impact to global environment Acts to maintain and promote sustainability in programs, activities, and field experiences Interprets local heritage, leading to change in environmental behaviors
ORGANIZATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands the six stages of trip organization and the 14 steps to trip planning Knows the procedures for traveling, camping, and dealing with difficult conditions Comprehends the roles of technology and social media in trip organization Understands and has a personal stance on the controversial inclusion of technology in wilderness settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducts trip planning with double-checks after each of the 14 steps and triple-checks everything at the end Reserves permits, campsites, equipment rentals, transportation, communications, and more Utilizes technology to accomplish organizational tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drafts full trip plan that addresses common risk management concerns Supervises trip planning and reservations by others Helps other leaders correctly use technology for organizational tasks
INSTRUCTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applies at least two instructional combinations to teach an individual toward intended learning objectives by staying mostly on lesson plan Understands how humans learn and the eight steps from experience through memory to modification and repetition Understands how best to teach people and the three phases for before, during, and after a learning experience Differentiates among the seven combinations of instruction Identifies myths related to teaching to suit learning styles and percentages associated with information retention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applies at least four instructional combinations to teach a small group and supports client members as individual learners Adapts learning to the cultural perspectives of clients Uses the learning gradient to teach physical skills and a series of recall, process, and application questions to confirm learning Designs effective lessons from planning and writing objectives through instructional delivery to ongoing Socratic questioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applies at least six out of seven instructional combinations to teach a large group and individualizes learning for each client member Encases entire adventure experience in one that is culturally relevant for the client Seamlessly transfers learning and teaching responsibilities to the clients Serves as a teaching mentor for other leaders and a resource for staff Models lesson planning, goal setting, or objective writing for other leaders
FACILITATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands the value of facilitation, the importance of three levels of learning transfer, and the role of facilitation in the four program fields (recreation, education, development, and therapy) Applies nonverbal alternatives to discussion Observes behavior and formulates questions around observations <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RECREATION: No facilitation (not necessary); activities are inherently enjoyable and will change feelings) EDUCATION: Understands basic skills (fundamentals and funnelling) DEVELOPMENT: Understands intermediate skills; understands and does basic skills THERAPY: Understands advanced skills; understands and does intermediate skills; understands, does, and evolves basic skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differentiates among the three levels of facilitation techniques (basic to change thinking, intermediate to change behavior, and advanced to change resistance to clinical change) Frames activities with fantasy and/or reality introductions Emphasizes transfer (by metaphor) to integrate learning into clients' lives <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RECREATION: No facilitation EDUCATION: Understands intermediate skills (frontloading and freezing); understands and does basic skills DEVELOPMENT: Understands advanced skills; understands and does intermediate skills; understands, does, and evolves basic skills THERAPY: Understands and does advanced skills; understands, does, and evolves basic and intermediate skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holds expertise in the therapeutic use of metaphor, isomorphism, solution-focused facilitation, addressing resistance, paradox, double bind, and proactive reframing Frames activities with contextual and/or isomorphic introductions Encourages self-reflection and continuation strategies for clients <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RECREATION: No facilitation EDUCATION: Understands advanced skills (focusing and fortifying); understands and does intermediate skills; understands, does, and evolves basic skills DEVELOPMENT: Understands and does advanced skills; understands, does, and evolves basic and intermediate skills THERAPY: Understands, does, and evolves basic, intermediate, and advanced skills

	Emergent	Proficient	Exemplary
ETHICS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examines ethical situations from a singular perspective (principles, values, or feminism) Knows own nonnegotiables, belief systems, and professional standards Follows established ethical standards Practices resolving ethical dilemma scenarios and hypotheticals Acts ethically and professionally with clients before, during, and after the program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considers ethical situations from a combination of three perspectives (principles, values, and/or feminism) Evolves a personal set of ethics that are openly shared with other leaders Reasons morally through intuition, option listing, and ethical rules to resolve an actual ethical dilemma Speaks up on ethical program issues, especially where client and environmental care are concerned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scrutinizes ethical situations from multiple perspectives (principles, values, and feminism) Reasons morally through ethical principles (nonmaleficence, autonomy, beneficence, fidelity, and justice) and ethical theories (universalizability and balancing) to resolve an actual dilemma Contributes to professional ethics discussions and walks the talk
LEADERSHIP STYLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates the expression of a single leadership style (autocratic, democratic, or abdibratic) Appreciates the need to flex toward the other two leadership styles Understands leadership power and how these five (referent, legitimate, expert, reward, and coercive) relate to leadership styles and extremes Knows how concerns for task, relationships, and conditional favorability influence expressed style Identifies client behaviors associated with each of the group development stages (forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning) Understands the associations among leadership styles and stages of group development regarding task and relationship dimensions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates the expression of two clearly distinct leadership styles (autocratic, democratic, or abdibratic) Appreciates the need to flex toward the other leadership style Applies leadership strategies to working with client groups in the five identified stages of development Comprehends the complex factors impacting group dynamics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates the expression of three clearly distinct leadership styles (autocratic, democratic, and abdibratic) Appreciates the need to flex among all three leadership styles based on circumstances Matches leadership style correctly to clients' group-development stages
COMMUNICATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands theories and practices behind effective communication, active listening, and feedback Understands the communication fundamentals of public speaking, instructing lessons, facilitating change, and resolving conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is adept at communicating with and listening and providing feedback to others Personalizes messages before communicating with others to gain greater acceptance and transference of the message Is a capable and confident public speaker when instructing and facilitating Successfully resolves conflicts between two individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps others improve their communication, listening, and feedback Successfully resolves conflicts among several group factions
PROBLEM SOLVING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands the differences and connections among problem solving, decision making, and judgment Solves problems following an analytical sequence of steps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distinguishes between problem solving, decision making, and judgment in practice Solves problems following a multiphasic approach by blending analytical and creative methods Demonstrates the correct use of long (complex) and short (simple) forms of a multiphasic problem-solving model Avoids or identifies and resolves common breakdowns in the problem-solving process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaches the unique qualities and special identifiers of problem solving, decision making, and judgment Solves problems instinctively by blending multiphasic approach with intuitive judgment and naturalistic decision making

(continued)

Table C.1. (continued)

	Emergent	Proficient	Exemplary
DECISION MAKING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies creative techniques to diverge options and discriminate techniques to converge options to reach the best decision either quantitatively or qualitatively • Understands how different leadership styles best suit the timing of decision making (abdicatoric with ample time for group development, autocratic during urgencies, and democratic when both extremes are balanced) • Differentiates between major and minor consequences of decisions • Demonstrates two closely associated decision-making approaches (directive-expert, consultative-shared, or consensual-unanimous) • Is aware of the negative influence that bias may have on decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes decisions habitually by relying on heuristically driven judgment and multiphasic problem solving • Does not hesitate or delay when faced with making decisions • Demonstrates four closely associated decision-making approaches (directive-expert, consultative-shared, and consensual-unanimous) • Is able to avoid a minority share (less than 25) of the 50 most common biases in decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes decisions naturally, blending well with multiphasic problem solving and intuitive judgment • Demonstrates all six closely associated decision-making approaches (directive-expert, consultative-shared, and consensual-unanimous) • Is able to avoid a majority share (more than 25) of the 50 most common biases in decision making
SOUND JUDGMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possesses sound judgment founded on a gathered database of intensive and extensive experiences • Understands the judgment-related theories behind learning, memory, brain function, reflection, refraction, and heuristics • Understands in detail each of the dozen most common heuristics and how they interact with judgment • Differentiates between heuristically driven and intuitively driven judgment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draws from database of experience by consciously using heuristics as shortcuts to reach sound judgments • Applies the FACETS heuristics in the field to manage risks • Is consciously aware of using the remaining seven heuristics (availability, similarity, representativeness, simulation, anchoring with adjustment, recognition, and zero sum) to make sound judgments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draws from database of experience by unconsciously using intuition as gut feeling to reach sound judgments • Tunes in and listens to intuition and balances intuition with applied heuristics
RESEARCH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is familiar with research findings that indicate preferred practices and/or professional performance standards • Knows where to go to find current developments in the profession external to program practices • Knows how to differentiate between scholarly research findings and weaker studies possessing flawed methods, invalid assumptions, and/or faulty conclusions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively assists with the pursuit and gathering of new information for professional development • Continues to implement and share new research findings to improve programming and enhance staff knowledge • Tailors research findings to suit clients, environment, activities, program, leadership, and other professional practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to research studies that examine professional practices • Provides feedback to researchers on the application of new professional practices from past research • Establishes solid partnerships with researchers to provide support to the research process and outcomes • Presents new research questions to and works jointly with researchers to find new answers to practice questions from and for the profession

REFERENCES

- Gass, M.A., Gillis, H.L., & Russell, K. (2012). *Adventure therapy: Theory, practice, & research*. NY: Routledge Publishing Company.