

## **Adventure Program Management Reflection Paper**

(Sample)

The Adventure Program Management workshop was a critical educational component for my overall understanding of how to be prepared to manage all aspects of a Challenge Course. The workshop was so different from others in that it was not very physically active, but even with lots of intellectual content the trainers kept us as physically active as possible. This speaks to the Adventure Philosophy's ability to engage people in physical activity with any content, adapting activities like Have You Ever?, Continuum and Comfort Zones to be in-line with the knowledge that needs to be gained and learned.

These three initial activities led us into the five main content areas of the workshop, which were (1) program design and development, (2) staff training and development, (3) program review and evaluation, (4) risk management-policies and procedures, and, (5) equipment and course management. By starting with the icebreaker activities that we did, the group gained a general knowledge of everyone's previous experience and their goal/s for attending this workshop. This was very useful in making connections with each other so we could reach our goal/s. My goal was to compare my school's Local Operating Procedure (LOP) Manual (which I had written and is for an indoor climbing wall) and overall program goals with similar manuals/programs and be made aware of any areas that my school was overlooking or neglecting.

The workshop's core content started with program development and design. We discussed the qualities that a good program would have, qualities like challenge course inspections, staff training and development, program/peer reviews and accreditation, policies and procedures manual, and program design. We were presented with various models to use as pre-assessment, assessment and post-assessment tools to evaluate these qualities.

The first of three models was the Intentional Programming Triangle that can be used to establish the foundation/value for the program that leads to a mission with goals and objectives, so that you know *why* you are doing what you are doing. The foundation is the base, or bottom of the triangle that

supports the mission, goals and objectives. The second model was the GRABBSS assessment to identify the needs of an individual or team before, during and/or after a session – and this is the beauty of this assessment, it is constantly appropriate to use. Each letter of the acronym represents an area to consider when programming, such as goals, readiness, affect, behavior, body, stage and setting. And the third model was the A.P.P.L.E. Model for assessing the facilitator’s effectiveness - assessing, planning, preparing, leading and evaluating the program – this is “planning your work and working your plan” as one member of our group noted! I really liked the Intentional Programming Triangle, and brainstormed with my colleague who was attending the workshop also, about our school’s values and mission, considering how we could intertwine and compliment our Challenge Course Program values with the schools’ values.

This led into a discussion about building support for programs and sustaining programs, and how important it is to communicate and include people at all levels, in all stages of the program. At our school, we are in the initial stages of designing and installing outdoor and indoor high and low elements to add to our indoor climbing wall. Therefore this information in particular was critical for us as we think about the various school levels and administrative levels, and who needs to be involved in the process. We talked about how the program aligns with the internal school system, how people can be aware of the benefits, and how we can tap into their affinity to build them as stakeholders. I found myself thinking that this workshop came at the perfect time for us because now we have the information we need to make informed decisions and plans! My goal for the workshop is already being met!

As we continued to cover the qualities of a good program, we moved on to staff training and development. At the school level we have a set staff, so as we looked at Project Adventure, Inc.’s Venn diagram that spoke of the Training/Education, Talent/Aptitude and Experience levels, we realized that to find the *Ideal Candidate* we would have less flexibility in some areas, but a greater potential to train all teachers at the same time. The great benefit here is that all teachers would have consistency in training. We have started this training in our school district, and have been able to bring all 12 Physical Education, Health and Wellness teachers from two high schools together. Along with having the

consistency of training, this has created an amazing cross-town connection among the teachers, and a greater sense of community within our town, which was not contemplated. Through the trainings teachers have been able to develop their adventure programming skills, and at the same time they are becoming invested in the longevity of the program!

In thinking of the longevity of the program, we discussed the need for program review and evaluation. We discussed the differences, benefits and concerns of accreditation, certification, licensing, and peer reviews. We discussed the various professional organizations and resources that are available in the challenge course field. For our district, we have decided that due to where we are in our program, we will focus on following the Association for Challenge Course Technology (ACCT) regulations, having annual course inspections by a qualified challenge course professional, and getting the mandatory Massachusetts State License. We will re-evaluate our program needs when we have our outdoor and indoor elements installed and in use, and as we add to our LOP.

The workshop then moved into the meaty content of risk management - policies and procedures. Risk management in a nutshell has three parts: (1) weighing the potential for risk/safety, (2) having written policies and procedure for minimizing the risk/increasing the safety, and (3) implementing (1) and (2). We reviewed the “20-Year Safety Study” and the “25 Years of Challenge Course Accidents What You Don’t Know Can Hurt Someone” (pp.78-94, *Adventure Program Management Workshop Manual*, Project Adventure, Inc. February 2007) reports. The outcome of reviewing these startling and sometimes scary studies, is what the trainers presented as the *Top 5 Strategies for Risk Management*: (1) Staff training and selection – look to the programs needs, then to staff selection, then to training, (2) Program Design – choose what is right for the group, not the timeframe, (3) Have a good plan – don’t get caught in someone’s bad plan, (4) Policies and procedures – know them and follow them/be a prudent professional, and (5) Prepare for progressive activities – assess readiness, do not think you have to stay on schedule or that you have to please the client, because this is when most accidents happen!

I really was sobered with all this content, which is a good thing. I have noted the correlation between having proper policies and procedures in place to help prevent accidents and incidents, and how

vital it is to stay alert – both physically on a challenge course and mentally as one prepares the plans, policies, etc. I now see that the LOP is crucial for risk management, and should be assessed as the program grows and is fine-tuned through experience. I will stay alert to this as we add elements to our course and update our LOP to be comprehensive.

As we looked more closely at LOPs, we moved into discussing equipment and course management. We reviewed the need for daily equipment inspections for harnesses, helmets, ropes, hardware and connectors such as carabiners, belay devices, ladders, element structure and access points, etc. We discussed how to inspect the above equipment and the lifespan for harnesses, helmets, and ropes. We discussed the need for tracking logs for equipment inspections and for rope use and what information to record. This information and process makes so much sense to me, as it has a direct effect on the risk management/safety considerations for the program as a whole.

As we wrapped up the workshop, we were asked to reflect on our goal/s. My goal had been to compare my school's LOP to others, to shed light on areas I was overlooking or neglecting. To my surprise I discovered that I had covered all the content areas, and had a solid manual to implement. The viability now will be in adding to the LOP as we have more elements installed, and then following the manual, from staff training to policy and procedure implementation, assessing the program before, during and after each session.

I am excited about what I have learned and am so thankful to have attended this workshop. I am reminded of how PA's high school Full Value Contract speaks directly to all aspects and levels of Adventure Program Management - Be Present, Pay Attention, Speak Your Truth, Be Open to Outcomes, and Create a Safe Environment – this is another assessment tool for me!