

GUYdelines

A few thoughts for outdoor lovers and leaders from
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Lessons from Jackson

On Sept. 27, I flew out to Jackson, Wyoming and Grand Teton National Park with my bride (of thirty years), to climb and learn. It was the occasion of the 20th annual Wilderness Risk Management Conference sponsored each year by Outward Bound, NOLS (National Outdoor Leadership School) and SCA (Student Conservation Association). I first attended in 2004, and have presented there since 2008. Prior to the conference, I spent a day climbing and learning with Exum Mountain Guide Brenton Reagan. The article that follows for this quarter's issue of **GUYdelines** is a collection of gleanings from the conference; maybe you can find some useful nuggets from my Lessons from Jackson.

1. NPS Rescue Ranger Renny Jackson shared a marvelous presentation on the evolution of high angle and mountain rescue over the years. During his lecture, he quoted Jerome Brunner, educational psychologist and theorist: "Creativity is figuring out how to use what you already know to go (→)

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It was delightful that Robin was able to join me for this trip. Here is the blissful couple standing on the porch of the Jackson Lake Lodge; the view is across the valley at a stunning sunset coming through the Tetons. There are some amazingly beautiful places on this continent!



somewhere you haven't been yet." This is true in an evolving pursuit like climbing, where a lot of what we use was borrowed from other fields, and then adapted for further usefulness. The belay comes from the nautical world, as do several of our key knots (bowline). Stoppers and hexes were first machine nuts strung with rope loops. This concept can also be seen in the world of human survival, where taking what we know about navigation, fire starting, and shelter-making must be employed and modified for usefulness in new and foreign situations. And maybe this can be true in helping a family or a business to thrive – using foundational skills

(communicating, sharing, trusting, innovating) to solve new problems, or combining systems to increase productivity and improve effectiveness.

2. “Risk increases dramatically when you are trying something for the first time” (rescue heli-pilot Andy Hermansky's understatement). Here is a good argument for “testing the system.” Try things well before you need to use them in a desperate situation. This could apply all the way from running through your PowerPoint before you are in front of your audience to practicing 3:1 haul systems with friends before really needing them for a cave rescue (as I did three summers ago).
3. I learned that Glen Exum, pioneer climber in the Tetons and founder of the oldest climbing guide service in the U.S., typically only used three knots: the bowline (connecting knot), the butterfly (loop knot), and the double-fisherman’s knot (joining knot). Someone once said that the more you know, the less you need. Being able to function with minimal resources and extras is a testimony to experience and expertise.
4. I was thrilled to hear the live keynote address by Laurence Gonzalez, author of *Deep Survival: Who Lives, Who Dies, and Why* (W.W. Norton and Co., 2003) Gonzalez presented on “Intelligent Mistakes: Why Smart People do Stupid Things.” The takeaway for me was a growing understanding that the things that we do repeatedly begin to form autonomic patterns (schema) in our brain, which is what makes the human organism such an amazing creature of habit. This can help us manage multiple complex functions at the same time (driving, while looking for that street name and simultaneously scolding the kids in the back seat). But it can also come back to bite us when we are on cruise control, and neglect to notice nuances or changes that may be idiosyncratic,

and then fail to make necessary adaptations. Ellen Langer did the pioneering work on mindfulness – a state she defined as:

- Being actively alert in the present,
- Being open to new and different information,
- Having the ability to create new categories when processing information, and
- Having an awareness of multiple perspectives.

So the challenge Gonzalez left us with was to maintain mindfulness even when engaged in routine tasks, and to be observant about nuances that may create hazards or opportunities.

5. My climbing day with Brenton Reagan of Exum Mountain Guides was a great opportunity to refine and deepen some of my rescue and client management skills. We also climbed the delightful 4-pitch moderate route called The Tree Climb near Hidden Waterfall in Cascade Canyon below the Grand Teton.
6. My workshop, "Stupidity Explored - Mindful Leadership Amplified," was attended by about 80 conference participants, and we had an enjoyable time unpacking this interesting topic. I have previously shared some of these ideas with you in Vol. 7, Nos. 1 and 2 of this newsletter earlier this year.

This was another great conference experience, all the more special because Robin was able to join me. As an outdoor leader and guide, I am trying to practice what I preach -- remaining teachable and ready to learn from my own experiences and the expertise and input of others. I hope you can find ways to do the same!

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