

GUYdelines

A few thoughts for outdoor lovers and leaders from

WILD GUYde Adventures, LLC

Vol. 7, No. 3 (Summer, 2013)

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Learning from Experience

Experiential learning is much deeper than simply learning by doing. It is, in its essence, learning from an experience, by reconstructing the experience, extracting meaning, and then making applications. John Dewey famously said, “*Learning is thinking about experience.*” We are not educated if we have simply had an experience – we are educated if we have thought about it, extracted meaning from it, and used it as a platform upon which to stand to make positive changes and improvements. Think of the mistakes we have made in life. Better yet, think of one classic mistake that you have made – maybe financial, maybe relational, maybe technical or job-related, or maybe moral. Let’s apply the 3 steps of experiential learning.

Learning from the experience involves first asking “What?” What happened, what did we experience, what was going on around the incident, what, what, what? This is the descriptive phase. We want to gather facts before drawing conclusions. This requires honesty and candor, and no varnishing of the story. This is an interrogative process, so we (next page →)

Summer Fitness and the old GUYde...

On June 2, Mary (17 year old daughter) and I competed in the **Waynesboro Tri for the Y Sprint Triathlon**. Here we are in our finishing sprints. Needless to say, she looks quite a bit better than I!



Then on July 20, Aaron (23 year old son) and I formed **Team WILD GUYde** for the **Odyssey Sprint Adventure Race** in Fincastle VA. After 5 hours and 2 minutes of trail running, off-trail navigation, and mountain biking, we finished second overall, and first in our competitive category. The young guy was fresh, the old guy was cramping, and we were both VERY hungry! Hope you had time to work on your fitness this summer too!

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must not be afraid to ask others for their perspectives. What did you see from where you were standing? Because this stage is backward-looking, we might appropriately call this stage *hindsight*.

Next, we ask “So what?” This is where we attempt to discern the meaning of the event or experience. We look for correlations or cause and effect. We analyze causative or contributive factors, and we are honest enough to ask, “Was any part of my involvement responsible?” We might extract generalizable principles; we can call this stage *insight*.

Finally, we ask, “Now what?” This is where we attempt to refashion the future in advance. We construct some creative applications for future situations, and we are courageous enough to say how we might do things differently next time. This stage might require that we be humble enough to acknowledge that we do not have the broad skill set to create new approaches, and that we might need to read or ask for help or expert assistance. Because we are looking into how we will change the future, we can call this stage *foresight*.

Do you have an experience from your past that you are willing to subject to this progression of questioning, in pursuit of learning? Try it with a pencil in your hand, actually writing responses to the What, So What, and Now What questions. If you can’t come up with an actual personal mistake to analyze, try the one below, taken from this year’s edition of Accidents in North American Mountaineering 2012.

On July 16 [in the Muir Valley of the Red River Gorge, Kentucky], a male climber (22) fell as he descended from the top anchors on the sport route Plate Tectonics (5.9). After cleaning the top anchors, he descended on the double rope rappel. Unfortunately, one end of his rope did not reach the ground. As a result, he rappelled off the end of his rope from a height of approximately 30 feet and impacted the ground close to members of his party. The patient was semi-conscious and in intense pain, and exhibiting signs and symptoms of hypovolemic shock and a fractured pelvis. (p. 60)

Even though you might not be a rock climbing specialist, did you include such safety basics as double-checking your system before committing to it, and communicating your intentions with your partner before making significant transitions? How is it that the climber’s partner was not alert to the situation of the uneven rope ends? The story actually shares that there were a number of other climbers nearby, and that she was conversing and distracted. Finally, what might be the “Now What” list for this climber – how should he approach climbing differently next time?

As I end a full summer season of providing adventures for hundreds of people, I am remembering several situations. How am I going to approach monitoring and encouragement of hydration in my groups after the heat exhaustion incident? How can I improve “time on task” and decrease “standing-around time” for large groups at climbing venues? What might be an earlier intervention that I can create to head off the client who bails at the cave entrance because they think they are claustrophobic? To learn from experience, we must be first humble and honest, and then we must be deliberate and thorough.

We can also learn from the mistakes of others, so we do not need to make them ourselves. Frequently reading accident reports, or reading leadership chronicles of others, and then *engaging in sustained reflection using the three questions* can be very fruitful, without the consequence of immediate personal loss. George Santayana, the noted historian, provided the counterpoint to Dewey’s idea of learning by thinking about experience when he said, “*those who refuse to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.*” All of those mistakes we make in life – what a waste if they do not serve some purpose. How can we diligently learn from our mistakes and those of others so we can avoid future failure, and so that we can improve our own performance and execution?

I welcome your feedback and reflections on this issue's theme. If you have an example of meaningful learning from experience and reflection, REPLY back to me, and let's keep the conversation and learning going!

Are you coming to Virginia for a family vacation, church group trip, boys' club event, or escape weekend? Why not experience Virginia adventure with **WILD GUYde Adventures!** WGA offers guided beginner level outdoor adventures and competent instruction in activity fundamentals. We can take you **hiking, rock climbing and rappelling, caving, or canoeing**. We use various activity areas in the George Washington and Monongahela National Forests, and along Virginia's Blue Ridge. Check out the 2013 trip options below, or call to talk about your own creative adventure ideas!

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How was your trip with the **WILD GUYde**?!

Thanks again for guiding us – the trip was awesome! I'm a little sore and bruised today but it makes me happy because it reminds me of everything we did. The info was clear and the location appropriate. I also really enjoyed how you incorporated learning and team building elements into our trip. (Sarah, 2012)

We arrived back in Florida late Thursday night. We had a wonderful time on our adventure with you and we have all been raving to everyone about how great the trip was! Your professionalism and encouragement allowed us to continue on even when some of us were reluctant to try (me, of course)! The boys raved about the caving and the fact that it looked scary, but once you got through it, it wasn't as difficult or scary as you thought it would be. Todd and I were both thrilled with the learning experience for the kids and feel that we have all grown as a result of facing our fears. Everyone talked about what a great guide you were for us! Overall, our adventure was a wonderful experience and the highlight of our trip to VA! (Christine, 2012)

We had a blast, everything was perfect, and you did an amazing job! The pictures are AWESOME! We would recommend you to any outdoor lover! We agreed that we learned so much from you. (Nina, 2012)

Thank you so very much for a wonderful adventure rock climbing last week. It was wonderful to share the time with my daughter. We both really appreciated your teaching style and the knowledge you imparted. I found a whole bucket-full of sermon illustrations. The location was excellent. We appreciated the fact that we were alone on the climb (except for the beautiful hawk). The photos you took came out well, and we showed them to my wife who appreciated our joy, but was thankful that she chose a more Hobbitish way to spend the day (reading). (Pastor Chris, 2012)

Your customer service was outstanding. Despite my late contact, you found a way to get us in on an adventure. The experience was excellent. The kids had a blast but you were appropriately serious in your approach. Safety was a clear priority as it must be. The experience was well structured and presented a number of great challenges. (Mark, 2012)