

GUYdelines

A few thoughts for outdoor lovers and leaders from

WILD GUYde Adventures, LLC

Vol. 15, No. 2 (Spring, 2021)

©Lester R. Zook, 2021

Warm-up and Engage: Can you think of a time that you underwent training for a particular role or skill that was highly effective? Can you think of a training that you reflect on as a waste of time? What was the difference?

The sweet spot: balancing challenge and support

Thirteen-year-old Jonny had tried wild caving at his summer camp, and had such a great time that he wanted to show his mom what it was all about. So, later that fall, I got the phone call, and arranged a date to take the two of them through Bowden Cave – a marvelous West Virginia exploit with a river flowing underground. As we entered, I showed them the cave map, and gave some navigational instruction. We traversed the large passages and then squeezed and straddled along the Watercourse, and I periodically referenced the map, had them orient the compass, and pointed out major landmarks. We got to the Up and Over Room, and after pausing for some snack food, I asked Jonny if he would like to lead us back out. His initial hesitation gave way to full engagement, as he aligned the map with the compass, began identifying directional features, and pointed out our travel path. Occasionally, he would get a bit stumped, and we would problem-solve his way back into certainty. Within myself, I had purposed not to tell him anything – simply to guide him by asking questions. When he finally led us out into the sunshine, his countenance was beaming, he knew he had done well, and his mom was so proud. We had somehow landed on that sweet spot – that perfect blend of challenge and support to create learning!



Use the model below (p. 2) to visualize these two dynamics as they interact. Imagine an experience High on the Challenge axis but Low on the Support Axis – probably overwhelming or intimidating for our students and staff. Now imagine an experience High in Support but Low in Challenge – this is your boring, what-are-we-doing-here event. When we are training our students or staff, or giving them a project to develop, the task facing us is to develop an instructional program or design that finds that perfect balance of these two elements. We need to load up some challenge to get people to move off dead center, to breed discontent with the status quo, and to keep growing as a business or organization. There is no standing still in the modern business

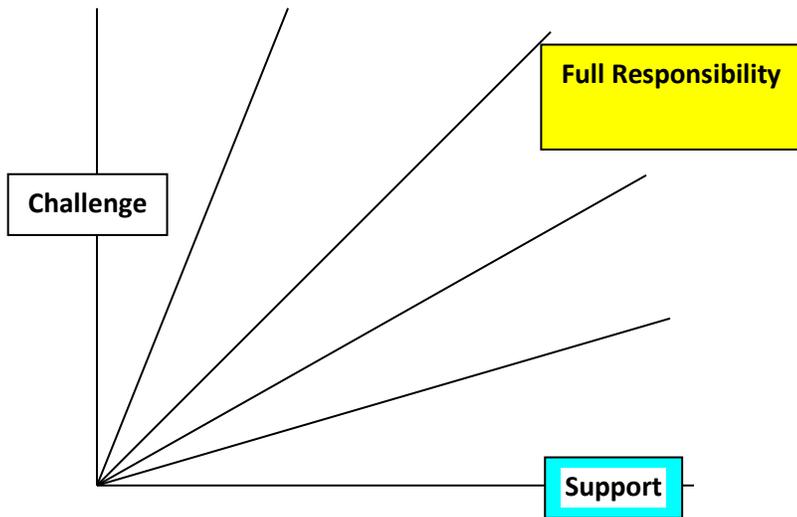
world; staying in the same place is moving backwards in regard to the competition.

GUYdelines is a quarterly newsletter, published by *WILD GUYde Adventures, LLC*. All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this work or portions thereof in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without permission in writing from the author at:

Lester R. Zook, *WILD GUYde Adventures*

1047 Stuart St., Harrisonburg, VA 22802

(540) 433-1637 lester@wildguyde.com



But we must also discern how to provide necessary support, so we do not overwhelm our charges, or create defeatism. They need to know that we will supply adequate resources for them to take on the challenge, so they won't be frustrated. They need to know that one of those resources is us – that we will not do the task for them, but we are available for counsel, feedback, and advice. Can you think of learning experiences that you have had, where one of these dynamics outweighed the other? What was the result?

Another great application of this simple model is that we can provide meaningful learning experiences at the High/High level (for experts), or we can provide meaningful learning at the Low/Low level, simply by adjusting these two dynamics correspondingly – both experiences end up in the Full Responsibility zone. Even young children can have growth challenges if we are discerning and careful in our design. When my son was 6 years old, we hiked out to Hidden Rocks in the National Forest. After enjoying ourselves there for a time, I asked him if he would like to hike back to the parking lot alone. We reviewed some landmarks and made sure he had on his whistle, and then I assured him that I would be shadowing about 10 minutes behind. Needless to say, I was never much into “helicopter-fathering,” preferring more the “free-range approach” to parenting. And he did just fine!

John Dewey is reputed to have said that one must know only two things to be an effective teacher -- *the nature of the subject*, and *the nature of the student*. *The nature of the subject*, in this case means that the teacher knows the complex terrain of the content, and the variables available so that he/she can adjust and fine-tune the difficulty. *The nature of the student* in this case means that the teacher is aware of the learner's capabilities, past experiences, tolerance for adversity and discomfort, and optimal learning style. Then, in that alchemical art and process of instructional design, the teacher blends these two into that learning experience that will prod but not dishearten. John Dewey also said that people will only really think when they have a problem, so part of good teaching, getting people to really think, is discerning and proffering the appropriate problem.

This same model is sometimes used to explain the interaction between Risk and Competence, used to understand outdoor accidents. High in Risk and Low in Competence produces *Devastation and Disaster*, or *Near Misses*. Low is Risk and High in Competence produces *Playing* or *Technical Experimentation* with no significant consequence. The sweet spot between risk and competence is referred to as **Flow** – Csikszentmihalyi's term for that place of total engagement, where time seemingly stops, action is cleanly linked to effect, and execution feels effortless. When good learning is happening, I would suggest that we can both observe flow and then name this sweet spot as **Full Responsibility**. When our learners feel self-efficacy in their situation, when they take personal (or team) responsibility for outcomes, and when they feel they have all the tools at their disposal to really make a difference, we have found the sweet spot. Taking responsibility in life, while difficult at times, is the most empowering thing that we can do. Owning our decisions and taking responsibility for their consequences frees us from unfocused resentment of the past and provides the freedom and power for tomorrow. We can create a new reality for the future. Not being willing to take responsibility consigns us to being victims of the future as well as the past. In the case of this teaching model, too much challenge and not enough support makes our students victims of overbearing demands and unresourced expectations. Too much support and not enough challenge makes them victims of their own lethargy and comfort, with no incentive to move themselves or the organization forward.

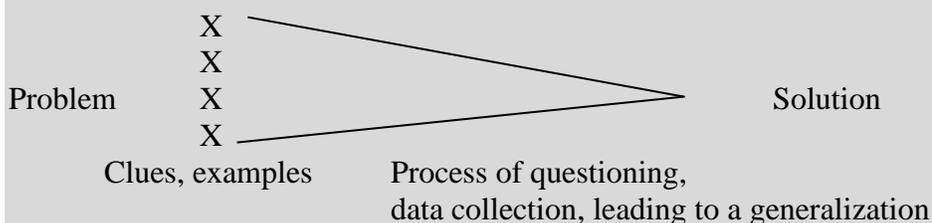
Inside the experience with Jonny and his cave navigational challenge, I found that the teacher must first discern the student's readiness in light of the current context. But teaching did not stop with simply setting him loose then to learn on his own, through aimless trial and error. I also needed to be attentive throughout, ready to support and guide with questions at times of uncertainty. *Guided discovery learning* is how experiential educators label this process. Guided discovery is built on the notion that if a learner is capable of learning a particular concept or skill, they are also cognitively or developmentally capable of **discovering** that concept, helped along by a process of skilled and careful questioning. If they can't answer an immediate question, we need to re-evaluate and rephrase; maybe we took too large a leap. Sometimes when leading a challenge course initiative, I will figuratively *mute* a more experienced participant by instructing them that they may only ask their group questions, to help them toward their solution. This can be initially frustrating for them, but ultimately, can yield a much deeper learning experience for this individual; they must now focus, not on dispensing knowledge that they possess, but on helping their team members construct their own. I offer Guided Discovery here, and Problem Solving (later in the Leadership Toolbox) because both of these approaches make it very easy for you to fine-tune the balance of challenge and support provided.

At the end, when learners have constructed their own knowledge, they retain it longer, and own it more deeply; essentially, they have **taken responsibility**. Ultimately, getting us out to the sunshine was Jonny's achievement, not mine, but it was immensely satisfying to witness, and be a part of. We nourish students by creating meaningful learning opportunities for them, and then, when they excel, it renourishes us back.

Leadership Toolbox

Two different (but equally useful) approaches to Experiential Learning, useful for training.

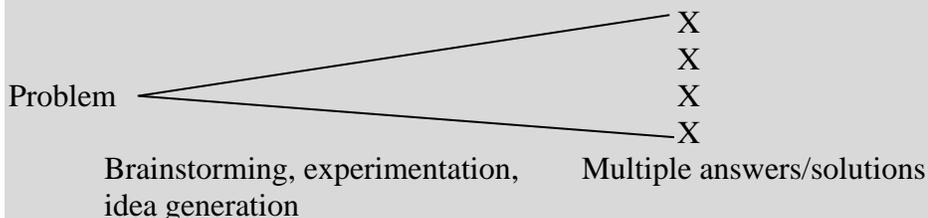
Guided discovery: deductive; start with a problem, and a variety of disparate clues; then, through sequential and scaffolded questioning, arrive at the answer.



Examples:

1. Look at a twig, a dry leaf, a log, and a piece of limestone. I have a match and want to start a fire. Can you deduce the characteristics of burnability to tell me which would make the most appropriate fire-starter and why?
2. Prove that there are deer in the woods.

Problem Solving: inductive; start with a problem or challenge, and then generate multiple diverse answers by experimentation and applying different paradigms or disciplinary lenses.



Are you coming to Virginia for a family vacation, church group trip, troop 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, along Virginia's Blue Ridge, and in the Potomac Highlands of West Virginia. Check out the 2021 trip options below, or call to talk about your own creative adventure idea!
(540-433-1637 or lester@wildguyde.com)
You may also visit www.wildguyde.com

CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE: 2021 Daytrips with WILD GUYde Adventures, Harrisonburg, VA

Top-Roping at Hidden Rocks, Virginia: This is the rock climbing trip for the adventurous beginner – you don't have much experience, but you want a great outdoor day with your family or special friends. Thirty minutes west of Harrisonburg, we'll park just inside George Washington National Forest, gear up, and hike a scenic 20 minutes through rhododendron and hemlocks and across some mountain streams to a secluded sandstone cliff. There will be pink and white mountain laurel in June, and wild huckleberries in August. You'll be introduced to harnesses, knots, helmets, and the *belay system*; then we'll try some easy warm-up climbs to remind you that the kid inside you still likes to clamber on things. We can go on to some harder climbing that invites you to try new skills and movements. And we'll finish the day with a rappel – backing over the edge, with nothing between you and the ground below but 60 feet of air and a great view! Closer to Luray or Northern Virginia? We'll visit **Waterfall Mountain** in the Massanutten Range, or **Little Stony Man** on the Blue Ridge for TALL climbing and spectacular Shenandoah Valley panoramas! Closer to Lexington or Roanoke? We'll visit **Goshen Pass** and climb above the gorgeous Maury River!

(Full day \$250 for 1-3 people; \$60 for each additional. ½-day \$175 for 1-3, and \$45 for each additional)

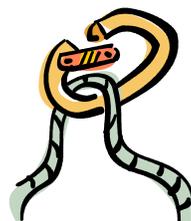


Beginner Climbing at Seneca Rocks, WV: After 90 minutes of curving mountain highway (okay, *country two-lane*), you'll gasp to see a spectacular blade of Tuscarora Sandstone, whose summit sits almost 1000 feet above its North Fork Valley floor. Seneca Rocks is a scenic place for the beginner or family to learn the rock climbing basics, top-roping and rappelling to an awesome West Virginia backdrop. Easy routes guarantee early success, but more challenging climbs also wait to test your skills. Seneca Rocks is an awesome place to climb, just beyond the sign: "*Here ends the realm of the hiker!*" (Full day \$275 for 1-3 people; \$65 for each additional. ½ day \$200 for 1-3; \$50 each additional)

Multi-Pitch at Seneca Rocks: A little more experienced in climbing? Maybe you tried it at camp or the local rock gym? Ready for the next step? Join me for the multi-pitch experience, seconding the route as we lead-climb to the top of the fabled South Summit! This is the only technical summit in the U.S. east of the Mississippi. Seneca has routes at all ranges of difficulty, from starters like *Old Ladies Route* (5.2) to mid-range classics (*West Pole* 5.7) to old school hardman routes like *Crack of Dawn* and *Madmen Only* (5.10). Every one of them will give you a new appreciation for the expression "*high and vertical.*" Register your accomplishment and ruminations in the summit journal, wave to tourists way down in the valley, and then head down to *terra firma* via the three-pitch rappel. Finish the day with a splash in the North Fork River swimming hole at "Gravel Beach"; then pick up a cold drink and a West Virginia memento at Harpers General Store before sleeping the ride back to Virginia and "the Burg."

(Full-day: \$225 1st person; \$150 each addl.)

Instructional Climbing: This is a tutorial for those who have a little exposure to climbing, and want to gain eventual autonomy. Lots of instruction in current best-practice and hands-on trying it for you in rigging top anchors, belaying skills and equipment alternatives, movement coaching, and rappel setup



and protection. There will be individualized attention and repetitive practice, as well as some exploration of the historical evolution of climbing equipment and protocol. You will finish the day with a lot more confidence in your basic skills. Bring a partner so you'll have someone to climb with later.

(\$175 1st person; \$125 each for 2nd and 3rd)

WILD GUYde Adventures offers two other rock climbing options: a **Boy Scout Rock Climbing Merit Badge** tutorial for troops and leaders. We send a booklet to get troops started on their knots and First Aid requirements ahead of time, and then spend two days going through all the climbing, gear spec., and rappelling activity requirements (\$90 each). We also offer the **PCIA (Professional Climbing Instructor Association) Top Rope Climbing Instructor Certification** course and exam. This 3-day course (\$450) and 1 day exam (\$150) is for recreational climbers who want to add an instructor certification on their resume. It's also very useful for individuals guiding with club, camp, or university outing programs.

Peaceful Paddling: Canoe a ½ day stretch of the **South Fork River**. This Class I and II water is ideal for families with elementary school children – just long enough to be engaging without getting boring. As we wind through pastures in the Shenandoah Valley, you'll learn basic canoe strokes and maneuvering. Dangle your feet or plunk your head to cool off. And keep watching for blue herons, turtles on logs, and cows in the water!

(\$140 1-3 people; \$35 each additional)

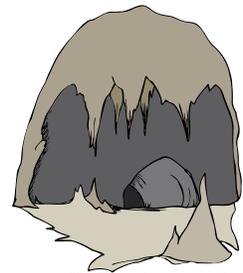


Pick-up-the-Pace Paddling: A fuller day of canoeing awaits further down the **South Fork**. This provides a little more excitement for teenagers, adventurous parents, & other paddle pilgrims! A casual start allows a review of canoe strokes and partner teamwork.

An amazing rope-swing breaks the quiet – you won't believe what comes out of your mouth when you let go ("Geronimo!"). More paddling through runs and pools, always under the shadow of Massanutten Mountain. Lunch on the bank and then back into the boats. Finally, at Milepost 17, *Compton's Rapid* – a great shoot-through with some higher standing waves! Paddlers call it a "Fat II," but stay wide of Pillow Rock! Below, there's a jumping rock for another cool-off before paddling the final mile to the take-out. Load the boats and start the drive home – happy, tired, and maybe a little sun-tanned! West Virginia travelers may want to visit the gorgeous "Trough" on the **South Branch of the Potomac**. High and remote mountain walls on each side of the river, and keep your eyes open for bald eagles!

(\$175 1-3 people; \$45 each additional)

Half-Day Caving: The underground sidewalk and the tourist cave light show are not for you. You want to see it the way it was before the electrician got there! Primitive caves have all the features of the subterranean world – *speleothems* (stalactites, flowstone, soda straws, and columns), *lots of real mud*, and sometimes even *bats* (but most of them are asleep, and all of them are harmless). Pull on your coveralls, clip on your helmet, adjust your headlamp, and down we go. There are squeezes if you want them, and belly crawls for the adventurous --- but there are also corridor ceilings higher than your house, and large cavern rooms for the claustrophobic. Learn cave travel safety, underground navigation, and some "total body movement." Find out what the year-round underground temperature is, and then finally emerge back into sunlight with a new appreciation for what happens underneath Virginia when limestone and groundwater meet. The gleam of your smile might be the only thing shining through the mud on your face! Caving trips can be **Beginner Caving** (mostly horizontal movement – walking, stooping, or crawling) or **Intermediate Caving** (for folks fit enough to handle strenuous vertical moves, and more sustained physical effort). Various locations are available in both Virginia (20 minutes from Harrisonburg), and West Virginia (between Franklin and Elkins). *Caving trips are not advised for individuals who might be unfit, excessively overweight, or who live an extremely sedentary lifestyle, or for very young children.*



(\$125 for 1-3 people; \$25 for each additional)



Design Your Own Adventure: Numerous other options exist, including hiking and climbing guiding along **Virginia's Blue Ridge** or at the **NROCKS (WV)**, group orienteering challenges in the National Forest, a climbing self-rescue clinic, outdoor fitness training, and flatwater paddling instruction for beginners and children. We can customize to meet the interests of your family, scout troop, or youth group. Call to talk about your needs.

Things you oughta know:

- **Lester R. Zook** is the **WILD GUYde**. He is a *Wilderness First Responder*, and is a certified member of the *American Mountain Guides Association (Single Pitch Instructor)*. He has been leading wilderness adventures and training camping leaders for 30 years, and loves to take people outdoors! **Ethan Zook** has been a camp counselor and adventure leader at numerous camps. He is a *Red Cross Lifeguard* and a *Virginia Paramedic*. **Aaron Zook** is a climber, caver, and paddler, a *Red Cross Lifeguard*, and has been through *Wilderness First Aid*. **Mary Tapolyai** is a *WFR*, and a *Leave No Trace Master Educator*. Together, we are a small family business that strives to provide exceptional service, and create value in the lives of our guests.
- More detail on activity possibilities is available by visiting www.wildguyde.com. Call or e-mail to ask questions and to arrange dates, rates, and meeting points:



(540) 433-1637 or lester@wildguyde.com

- **WGA's** guiding season is 7 days a week. Rock climbing is March through October, paddling is best in the spring and summer, and wild caving is year-round. Call early to reserve; weekends in particular can fill quickly.
- **WILD GUYde** will provide all technical equipment (ropes, harnesses, helmets, etc.). A personal *things-to-bring list* (clothing, water, lunch, etc.) will be provided.
- We can also help with **lodging ideas**. We can recommend from *primitive* to *posh* – National Forest campgrounds, drive-up motels, and some delightful Bed and Breakfast inns!
- For groups of 10 or larger, we disregard the starter fee and simply bill the per-person rate.
- Payment is by cash or check, payable to WGA; unfortunately, credit cards cannot be accepted at this time. Gratuities are never expected, and always appreciated!
- Some activities have inherent risks – that's the meaning of the word *adventure*. Participants will be asked to fill out a *Medical Form*, and sign a *Participant Agreement* acknowledging certain dangers. Some activities are physically strenuous, emotionally demanding, or require sustained cognitive attention to task and detail. We make every effort to create a great day, but **WGA** guides do reserve the prerogative to deny access/participation if, in our judgment, the client is not likely to be successful, or might pose undue hazard. Clients also may not be “under the influence” or “feeling the effects” of alcohol or recreational drugs at the time of the event.
- **WILD GUYde Adventures** incorporated in Virginia in 2004, and is fully insured. **WGA** is a permittee with the George Washington and Monongahela National Forests, and along Virginia's Blue Ridge. **WGA** is an equal opportunity provider and employer. **WGA** practices environmental stewardship, and is a member of the *Access Fund*, the *National Speleological Society*, the *Virginia Tourism Corp.*, the *Christian Adventure Association*, the *Shenandoah Valley Travel Assoc.*, and the *Harrisonburg-Rockingham Chamber of Commerce*.

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)

The beginner cave tour was such a terrific finale to our spring adventure in the Shenandoah Valley. We were a group of two families: four adults with three children (7,8,9) and all had a blast. Lester is exceedingly friendly, knowledgeable, safety-conscious, and put everyone at ease (I was probably the most trepidatious in the bunch, and his calm, helpful, and warm demeanor assuaged any nerves).

So happy our group booked this adventure: we army-crawled in the mud, squeezed through tight holes, learned about cave safety and navigation, and simply had a one-of-a-kind experience underground. Thank you! (Kathryn, 2021)

I went with my parents for our first outdoor climbing experience. Lester helped us get use to the differences from indoor climbing, had great advice, and was very informative. Both my parents learned how to belay and I picked up on a few skills for outdoor climbing in the future. Overall a great experience, I would do it again too! (Devi, 2021)

As for feedback, I think you are the real deal. Experienced outdoorsman, environmentalist, educator, tour guide. Your online information is in depth and shows a real attention to detail that makes parents know that the likelihood of accidents due to "stupidity" will be unlikely. I thought your commitment to REAL outdoor education, not just taking folks for a thrilling adventure was apparent in all that you did. (Grayson, 2021)