



To be an outdoor leader

Flexibility

To be a leader indoors in the usual environment, where the walls limit the area is one thing - to be outdoors, where everything can happen at the same time, and where you do not have complete control of everything that goes on in every bush, is another thing. To be an outdoor leader means that you have to be flexible at all times, and that you might have to deviate from the planned programme. But that is also what makes it educative, exciting and fun.

Outdoor know how – the foundation for a good outdoor experience

To enjoy our outdoor experience as much as possible and explore nature, we need to know how to keep dry, warm and full. When learning how to dress, trying out your own equipment, making a fire, cooking and feeling well at ease, you also have the opportunity to look around and discover nature with all its possibilities.

To develop within your field

Every person has the opportunity to find a side, which they can develop. You as an outdoor leader can discover new sides of the persons within the group. Who is that chopping wood and enthusiastically making sure that the fire is kept burning? Why, it is the otherwise so "disorderly" Albert. The mystery of cooking, reading recipes, stirring the pot and making it taste delicious – now it might be Linda or Robert making the decisions, even though you do not hear much from them in the ordinary workplace or classroom. To apply maps to the surrounding environment takes a lot of practice for most people, but Lasse is talented and he feels pride when he can present the final argument. Elin forgets both time and space when she collects nice pebbles and stones by the shore. Feel how soft and rounded their shape is! Around the fireplace, Niklas tells riddles and guessing games that the others try to solve. The laughter thunders through the air and slowly transcends into seriousness when the fire burns out and you start thinking about the stars and the fact that it is dark when you have to go pee. It is never as dark as this in the city, but you are scared there as well. You can discover all of this and more if you pause for a moment and give the people time and opportunity to be themselves. To quietly watch the group work, a process where everyone adds their contribution to the final result, is for many leaders unaccustomed. In the classroom or club houses, the leaders are taking charge and planning the work. We are raised to believe, that everything should be planned and that there always has to be something "happening". But for children, there is always something happening – if they get the chance to experience it themselves.

It is also easy for us adults to believe that we have to be around for things to work, a role we usually carry with us from indoor situations. As an outdoor leader, you have to be a part of the group but still not know or do everything yourself. To help with heavy duties (carrying rocks, fetching firewood) could be a way to contribute without having to be at the centre of attention. Doing things together create a mutual understanding and the interest in learning more grows.

Approach

Leadership outdoors is, as all leadership, about what view I have of people. My approach to other people and the way I am. It is about the climate of the group. If you have a supportive climate, you are not afraid to embarrass yourself. You learn from each other and ask for help if you need it. You often laugh at your own and other's mistakes without anyone feeling like a failure. In the group, you grow as a person and feel at home with each other. This concerns you and your leadership!

The alive, small, close group of friends is the strongest instrument for development and change there is. We should make use of that.

Stig Helmers

Choosing your model of leadership

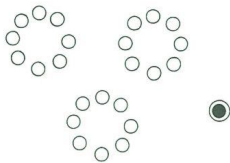
When it comes to choosing what pedagogical methods to use in outdoor life, the choice is not so simple. It depends on the size of the group, the age and experience of the participants, the location, the way of travelling, time of year, weather and not least, the amount of leaders. Lecturing, the small group, the patrol system, the autonomous group and guidance in natural outdoor life are examples of different models.

Lecturing



We use lecturing when we are standing in front of the group acting as "experts". It is useful when we are stopping in front of the birch tree and I as a leader tell about the tree and what it can be used for, or when we have arrived at the location where we are going to set up camp for the night and the leader decides where the wind sheds should be and what the programme for the rest of the day is. With this model it is difficult for the participants to affect the content. It is suitable if you quickly want to communicate a message to the whole group. But the message can not be too long. The interest in a group withers quickly! Lecturing has its positive aspects but presumes that you are the one at the centre showing how competent you are! Think about it: How can I make everyone feel like they are taking part and how can I encourage everyone's competence?

The small group

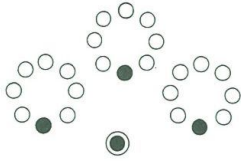


We are familiar with and often work in smaller groups at school, at work and in different clubs. The small group is often a short-term arrangement and does not have a leader. The small group has usually received instructions from someone else about what they are supposed to do, for how long and how to complete the tasks. The small groups can often be organisational solutions to activate all the participants.

It is first when a group receives or take on a task, that everyone accepts and considers important, that the group comes to life. To commonly conquer problems, to succeed, and even (reasonable) setbacks, release forces and open new possibilities for advancement and maturity.

Stig Helmers

The patrol system



The small group can be seen as a predecessor to the so called patrol system, which you for example use within the Scouts movement. The patrol is the small group that sticks together through thick and thin after you have, step by step, worked to create a "patrol feeling". To create it you use symbols, name of the group, write a logbook, patrol flag and maybe an own place. In the patrol, the older and more experienced take care of the younger, everyone feel that they are important and that they have a meaningful role. The leader is chosen or elected for a shorter or longer period. Another part of the system is the department leader, who gathers the patrol leaders. Together they plan and make decisions that concern the whole group. But then, the responsibility to carry through the decisions is left to the patrol leaders.

Today in schools, the old rows of desks and the master's desk are usually gone. You work age integrated in the same educational department where the older help the younger and you have a leader for the group. The schoolwork is often carried out as projects. The group has a name (often from plants and animals), a group symbol and you write a diary. This is close to what within the Scouts is meant by patrol.

The autonomous group



The autonomous small group is a group that lives its own life and does not have a formal leader. In this group, the food gets cooked and you do "what you feel like" without any leader "interfering". This model can be found in a well functioning group of friends where they are used at working together. Your role as a leader is signified by ordinarily letting things happen without affecting it. Not unless something has to do with safety, then you interfere! This type of leadership demands that you do not have any prestige or demand that things should be done on certain times. Many need to "stay cool" to let the group develop on its own.

Guidance in natural outdoor life



The natural outdoor experience means being in nature without arranged organisation, and to understand why you seek nature. The goal is to feel that you are a part of nature, but outdoor life can also be an instrument of achieving greater understanding to affect society. To guide in natural outdoor life you should have access to as unaffected environments in nature as possible. As a leader you have to have good knowledge about the participants as possible, their previous outdoor experience, condition and health. The size of the group depends on the time of year, way of travel and what the nature looks like. It is important that the group take part in planning and carrying through your plan. The participants should have different knowledge to complete each other and be able to contribute to the competence of the group. The time aspect is also important, you have to be out long enough to get to know each other and feel the rhythm of nature. Equipment and clothes should be as affordable as possible, and when it comes to food you strive to serve locally produced

food instead of energy-consuming food that has been produced far away. Roger Isberg describes what demands should be put on a qualified guide in natural outdoor life in his book *Färd-Möte-Människa*. The term "emotional knowledge", including both knowledge and emotion, is central:

- I. *Good emotional knowledge of free nature; a will and capacity to carry through types of outdoor life that does not damage the life of nature.*
- II. *Good emotional knowledge of the process of guiding, a will and capacity to carry out guidance in natural outdoor life that does not damage nature or hurt the participants.*
- III. *Participation in society with a main interest in working for a better harmony between nature and humans, as well as between humans.*

Roger Isberg

To be a guide

I went out together on a bay with a group of people training to be guides with experience of canoeing and outdoor life. We headed right towards a persistent cloud of rain. The rain clattered on the paddles. We were surrounded by water beneath as well as above us, but we still felt warm and dry. When the canoes rounded a cape, we were greeted by white waves and headwind – we had been paddling in lee!

Just looking at each other was enough to agree to head for the shore. We set up camp behind a gathering of spruces.

The task as a guide is to help find a joyful meeting with nature. If it would have been a less experienced group of people, I would not have chosen to end up in this situation. If I still would have, I would have had to scream louder than the wind, made sure that everyone got to the shore and helped raise the camp in lee.

As a guide in natural outdoor life with a small group we seek real situations from which we can learn. We cook food when we start becoming hungry. We orientate to get to the mountain or the water. We live a full life. We are outdoors to experience a rich life with simple means. We express our inner ambition in actions.

The most important demand put on a leader is liking people and nature. Sometimes it is sunny and sometimes it rains. It is when the wind blows hard and it is troublesome that a guide is needed.

Sometimes guidance is presented as a form of leadership! But it is about having a view of people and nature that makes you act spontaneously in varied situations, where every situation needs its kind of leadership!

Roger Isberg

Guide in outdoor life, formerly a teacher at Sjöviks folkhögskola and presently in North America.

Develop your leadership

The model of leadership that you choose depends on for one thing the purpose of outdoor life, the age and maturity of participants, experience and not least the situation. There is not just one model that is right. Instead it is often a combination. But through being conscious about this, you have the opportunity to change and develop your leadership, yourself and the members of the group. It is also important that you together with the group talk about how the different ways of working has been, so that everyone achieves an understanding for and can reflect upon the importance of the leader. If you are several adults or leaders together in the group, it should be a standing point to reflect upon your and your co-leaders way of working and behaviour.

The responsibility of the outdoor leader

As an outdoor leader you have a responsibility to both participants and family members to know what to do if something unexpected should happen. It is you as a leader, with your judgement, who decides when a situation is critical! It is the outdoor leader who knows what capacity and energy the participants have. Feel free to let the outdoor life become an adventure with challenges! Afterwards you feel the gratification of managing it. But it cannot become too hard! It comes down to creating a trip based on capacity and not on what you think is exciting or cool. As the one responsible, you have to have the courage to abort the trip in good time. An outdoor experience does not rely on how far away it is, it can be enough to be in the nearby surroundings.

Advice to you as an outdoor leader:

- Show that you like to be outdoors. Be enthusiastic!
- Be interested, ask questions and explore together with the participants.
- Use your imagination and be in it!
- Take care of the opportunities that come along the way, and if possible, develop them!
- Are you many? Divide into smaller groups.
- Stop and gather the group as close to you as you can when you or someone else wants to show something!
- If you are out with children, kneel down when talking to them so that you are on the same level.
- Do not talk against the wind!
- Place yourself with the sun in the eyes – it is the participants that should see. The best position is when the sun shines from the side. Then everyone can see each other.
- Find a place without wind when stopping for a break.
- Have set times and keep them – this way, unnecessary waiting is avoided.
- Especially keep the set times for food! Without food – grumpy participants and your judgement might fail too.
- Make sure everyone is properly dressed – have a hat, mittens and scarf to lend someone just in case!
- Always have some spare games up your sleeve, it is good if you are waiting or if someone is cold.
- Please surprise with raisin and fruit.
- Adapt the trip so that everyone can join!
- TURN AROUND IN TIME!
- Think about the effect of model learning: People do as YOU do, not as you say.

*If you walk quickly quickly
and look straight ahead
you get quickly to where you are heading.
If you walk slowly
and look at everything at the roadside,
if you pick up a stone
and smell a flower
- you do not get quickly to where you are heading.
But the stone
and the flower
have become your friends.*

Kaj Beckman

Activities suggestions

Rubbing circle

(to see all participants)

The participants stand in a ring as close as possible without touching each other. This is a way to get close contact with everyone and a formation where you have the possibility of looking each other in the eyes, varying your voices and feel a sense of belonging. No one has to feel like an outsider.

Reflection: In the rubbing circle you have the opportunity to make contact with all the participants. Empathy, engagement, fantasy and attention can develop in opposition to when the participants are spread out in the terrain. It is also easier to open up for a dialogue in the "closed" circle where you can hear what everyone is saying.

Circle reasoning

(about helping each other learning about a tree)

Pick a tree, for example a birch, and form a circle around it. Now, everyone says something about the tree. It can be anything from what it is called in Latin to the Swedish hockey team Björklöven, which means "the birch leaves". When everyone has said something, you go around the circle again and again, until all knowledge and fantasy has been drained. If you cannot think of something, everyone can help and come up with clues.

Reflection: As a leader we have a tendency to come up with set answers. But in this way, everyone can contribute with something. You train your ability to associate, to speak in front of a group, and discover that together we have unimagined knowledge. Some of the associations can be connected to other knowledge. In the classroom, you can continue to work with the birch through having your own "birch corner" and where you can collect all the facts you can think of. A small "birch list": White trunk, crooked birches in the mountains, drinks loads of water, is not liked by people who are allergic to pollen, good for bird's nests and bird houses, likes light, bark, furniture, birch twig beaters, baskets out of bark, bark shoes, bark roof, cut your roses when the birch leaves are like mouse ears, colour yarn, put small fresh leaves on your sandwich, birch leave tea, birch twig rugs, easy to draw on, sauna, songs, drops its leaves in the winter...

Helicopter view: Observing yourself and your leadership from above

You and your colleagues are discussing your last excursion, looking at what you did and how you did it. What happened when you were cooking? Who took initiative? Was everyone so tired that they just sat down and waited for someone else to get things done? Did everyone help or did someone always have "something else" to do? Were you the one giving orders about what should be taken care of, or did the students take initiative? How was the sundial constructed? Was it your plan or was it the result of Pelle's question about what time it was?

Reflection: By looking back at the different situations and thinking about what happened, you have the opportunity to be more conscious about your leadership next time, and discover new assets among the students or participants in an outdoor environment. But it is not only when things turn out less fortunately that you should reflect upon leadership. "Why did things turn out so great this time?" This is a question, which is not easy to answer unless you do a careful analysis. It is not enough to simply say: "Today, the participants were good". You have to see the reason behind it. It was probably your leadership. You have to examine the details to get the answer.

Authors

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Reference

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