**NSP Leadership Development**

***Traits and Skills for Effective Leadership***

***Section 1:******Most of us have been exposed to leadership training before. What is unique about being a leader in the National Ski Patrol?***

The ski industry is a dynamic industry where change is happening faster than we can keep pace with. NSP is an organization with members from many areas of thinking, learning, abilities, cultures, and beliefs. We work with people who may or may not get paid for their patrol work, yet they need the same level of leadership to direct them to make the right choices and do the right thing.

Working as a team is not optional. Seldom can a patroller work an accident or staff a mountain alone. It is almost always a team effort, based on trust and respect.

Our work is very physical, requiring us to be on our equipment sometimes all day long, moving, lifting, and hauling heavy, bulky loads. In addition to being in good physical shape, here again, the team mentality makes the load manageable.

Our job, as either a volunteer or paid patroller, comes with a great deal of responsibility. We help the lost, the injured, and in some cases, we save lives. This is high stress, high adrenaline, high emotion work. Leaders must be able handle these stresses and keep it together for their teams.

Lastly, patrollers commit a great deal of their free time to this job and use their own money to have the best equipment they can afford to meet the demands of this enormous responsibility.

***What Leadership Traits and Skills Support Our Unique Organization?***

When we think about how our organization is unique, it stands to reason that our leaders must have traits and skills that support the unique needs of our members.

Those traits and skills include:

* Being self-aware of strengths and weaknesses and quick to identify gaps
* Being a strong delegator
* Being dedicated to the time commitment
* Being able to take charge
* Being empathetic
* Being an effective listener
* Being an effective and efficient communicator
* Being a good problem-solver

***Section 2: Scenarios***

Read each of the following scenarios and think through how you might respond as a leader in our organization. Which of the above leadership traits do you use? Is there a better answer in each scenario? Could you think of situations which might make each answer appropriate? Use the matrix below to find the scenarios that focus on the traits and skills you are most interested in developing.

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| Traits/Skills Matrix | Scenario |
| Being self-aware of strengths and weaknesses/quick to identify gaps | #1, #2, #10 |
| Being a strong delegator | #2, #4, #6, #9 |
| Being dedicated to the time commitment | #3, #4 |
| Being able to take charge | #5, #6, #8, #9, #10 |
| Being empathetic | #1, #3, #7, #11 |
| Being an effective listener | #3, #7, #11 |
| Being an effective and efficient communicator | #1, #5, #6, #9, #10 |
| Being a good problem-solver | #3, #7, #8, #11 |

**Scenario 1:**

**A patroller comes to you, the area Patrol Leader, and asks you to address an uncomfortable situation in the top house. Night after night, he hears people telling off color jokes that embarrasses him, make him feel uncomfortable, and make him mad. This is the only night he can work. You have never had to deal with anything like this before, what should you do?**

1. Tell the patroller he should talk to them and confront the issue.
2. Seek advice from sources such as other PDs, HR, your assistant.
3. Tell the patroller, this is the way it is, and he should get used to it.
4. Tell the patroller he should let it ride and perhaps it resolve itself.

This is a time when it is great to know your strengths and weaknesses and seek help to improve those weaknesses. If you know this is a weakness of yours, find someone to join your team who is good at addressing sensitive issues. Seek the help and address it or have someone else address right away. Do not let this ride. If there is one occurrence there are probably others. And if there is one person uncomfortable, there are surely others. Realize too that what bothers one person may or may not bother others and being empathetic is an important trait to utilize in this situation. Effective and efficient communication is key when dealing with behavior that is unacceptable. Discussion points must be clear, concise, and without ambiguity.

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| **Traits/Skills Needed**: Being self-aware of strengths and weaknesses, Being an effective | |
| and efficient communicator, Being empathetic |  |

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**Scenario 2:**

**You are the Region Director and it is time for you to schedule refreshers and you have been asked to serve on an emergency division committee that needs your immediate attention. How do you prioritize and divide up your time?**

1. Get your calendar out and schedule some time to get this done.
2. Put off the refresher scheduling for a while; You can get to them later.
3. Tell the Division Director that you do not have enough time to get involved at this

time. Could the committee work be delayed?

1. Reach out to your region staff and delegate the refresher responsibilities or ask for a

volunteer to help with this.

This, like many times in ski patrol leadership, is a good time to reach out for help or if you have assistants, delegate one of these efforts. Be clear about what you need, when you need it, and set a plan for follow up. People do best when expectations are clear and concise. In this situation, your skills and experience might be best utilized assisting on the emergency division committee, leaving refresher scheduling to others on the patrol who can manage the task proficiently.

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| **Traits/Skills Needed:** Being a strong delegator, Being self-aware of strengths and | |
| weaknesses |  |

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**Scenario 3:**

**You are a Patrol Leader and your patrollers seem to be calling in with outside commitments they cannot get out of and are not able to be on the mountain. What do you do?**

1. Realize that outside commitments are important and help facilitate swaps.
2. Let your patrollers know that being a patroller is being committed; They must be there or quit.
3. Manage the best you can with being short staffed.
4. Empower your patrollers to deal with this on their own.

We all know that being a patroller carries great responsibility, to the mountain and to our fellow patrollers. Still our responsibilities outside of patrolling do not vanish when we put on our patrol jacket or vest. As a leader, you cannot lose sight of this nor can you allow a mountain to be understaffed. You must work with your patrollers to find the best fit for their outside life and for the mountain. Be patient and understanding while holding firm that this is a commitment that all must take very seriously. Your problem-solving skills, your ability to empathize, and listen well will help you get through issues such as this.

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| **Traits/Skills Needed:** Being dedicated to the time commitment; Being an effective | |
| listener; Being a good problem solver; Being empathetic |  |

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**Scenario 4:**

**You are a Patrol Leader and you had a busy weekend at the area; there was a critical incident that is worthy of an award for a patroller. You get home, exhausted, and feel like you just don’t have the energy to write up the award report, but you know it is important. How can you best get the award report written up in a timely fashion?**

1. While the incident is fresh in your memory make time to write up the award.
2. Push it off until the next weekend when you know you’ll have more time.
3. Ask another patroller to write up the award.
4. Let it slide as there will be other opportunities to write an award.

This is one of those tasks that you know is important but that you may not have time to get to or are not comfortable doing. There are a couple of options, buck up and do it, awards are not really that hard and they are important for boosting moral and recognizing people and actions. Or, delegate; ask someone to take it on or get help. Write it and then give it to someone to review. Perhaps this is a good project for your region and division awards advisors. As you consider delegation, remember successful delegation requires setting realistic expectations and formulating a plan for follow up.

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| **Traits/Skills Needed:** Being dedicated to the time commitment; Being a strong | |
| delegator |  |

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**Scenario 5:**

**You are the Hill Leader for the day, at the scene of an accident that involves three patients. The radio call relays a sense of urgency and concern. As can sometimes happen, your whole ski patrol shows up. What do you do to best manage the scene?**

1. Take over the scene and start assigning tasks.
2. Pick your most capable patroller to manage the scene, leaving you to act as incident

Command.

1. Tell everyone to clear out except for your favorite patrollers.
2. Allow the first on scene to continue managing the incident.

Area protocol may dictate how this is handled. If not, assess the situation for severity of the injury and who’s on scene. This is where your experience kicks in. If you have a strong leader present, allow that person to take charge. This is a perfect opportunity to test their skills. Always be ready to take over and take charge if necessary. Don’t interrupt or interfere if things are going well. If it starts going south, step up and lead the scene. If taking over the situation deemed necessary, communicating effectively and efficiently will be extremely important. Communicating in a stressful manner when tensions are already high will escalate problems quickly.

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| **Traits/Skills needed:**  Being able to take charge; Being an effective and efficient | |
| communicator |  |

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**Scenario 6:**

**During the morning meeting, as Patrol Leader, you’ve asked for volunteers to help with one specific project that needs to be completed before the area opens that morning. No one is raising their hand and the clock is ticking away. What would a strong Patrol Leader do?**

1. Do nothing until someone volunteers for the project.
2. Do it yourself so you know it will get done.
3. Make some specific assignments to different people and make sure they understand

what is expected and set a plan for follow up.

1. Rock, Paper, Scissors……

We’ve all been in a morning meeting where assignments for the day are being made. Asking for volunteers is one approach used by many patrol leaders. A myriad of factors lend themselves to determining whether asking for volunteers is going to work or not. Having a time sensitive project, that involves customer safety could make this type of role assignment tricky. While the situation itself could make any one of the above answers possible, a strong leader might find that being direct and making the assignments to specific individuals is the best approach. In this scenario, we’d hope to see several traits in a strong patrol leader: being a strong delegator, having the ability to take charge, and showing strong communication skills. When time is of the essence and customer safety could be impacted by not completing a project, a strong patrol leader must take charge and while it might be easier to do the job yourself, a better approach could be using your team to its fullest capacity. Being direct in giving assignments to specific individuals and confirming that the objectives are clearly understood, not only involves more team members, but frees up a leader to oversee the project or manage multiple projects that might be happening simultaneously. Tied to this delegation technique is the best practice of ensuring that expectations are clear and understood and a plan for follow up is made. Can you think of a situation where rock, paper, scissors might be an appropriate option?

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| **Traits/Skills Needed**: Being able to take charge; Being a strong delegator; Being an | |
| efficient and effective communicator |  |

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**Scenario 7:**

**You have a new patroller who really seems to be struggling with work assignments and has been overheard stating that he thinks he will quit patrol. What should you do as the Patrol Leader?**

1. Quit what you had scheduled for the day and take the struggling patroller around the

mountain to better understand the issues.

1. Assign the struggling patrol a mentor who would do a good job at helping him work

through his issues.

1. Ignore the struggling patroller as you remember feeling the same way and expect he

will just work through things on his own.

1. Go ahead and let him quit. Getting new patrollers is easy.

Managing individual personnel issues could arguably be one of the tougher situations a leader within the National Ski Patrol will face. Most of us can recall being in the shoes of someone who has struggled, whether professionally or in our volunteer patrol careers. As with any scenario, the best answer could very well change with a variety of conditions. A strong leader might find that taking this person under their wing for the day, could be the best approach but perhaps to assign a mentor to this struggling patroller, would be best if a longer-term approach is needed. Several leadership traits can be employed in this specific scenario: empathy, strong listening skills, and effective problem solving. Empathy is the ability to experience and relate to the thoughts, emotions, or experience of others. Many leadership theories suggest the ability to have and display empathy is an important part of leadership, especially in volunteer organizations. Leaders today need to be focused on the diversity of their organizations, and be able to create shared direction, alignment, and commitment between groups with very different histories, perspectives, values, and cultures. Being empathetic can only happen if one can listen and hear what is being said in a conversation. Asking open-ended questions in a conversation is a best practice for allowing individuals the fullest opportunity to share insight into what might be at the root of a problem. Once a leader has shown empathy and allowed issues to be surfaced, strong problem-solving skills should be employed. Can a leader come up with a customized solution that allows for a good patroller to remain in the organization and still show fairness to others who don’t ask or need for the extra support? Can you think of a situation where you needed a customized approach to solving a personal problem and what possible trade-offs were made to improve or resolve the situation? It stands to reason that empathy, effective listening, and strong problem solving goes a long way toward meeting these people-oriented managerial and leadership requirements, especially with volunteers.

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| **Traits/Skills Needed**: Being empathetic; Being an effective listener; Being a good | |
| problem- solver |  |

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**Scenario 8:**

**You are the Team Leader in the First Aid Room on a busy Saturday. Patrollers are bickering. A patient seems confused about what is happening. Things seem to be unraveling. What should you do as the First Aid Room Leader for the day?**

1. Take over patient care and tell patrollers to step aside.
2. Go get lunch and come back in 30 minutes to see if things have calmed down.
3. Step up and make yourself a resource. Ask “How can I help?”
4. Very loudly, tell everyone to “calm down!”

First aid rooms and clinics can be very stressful environments. We have all experienced a quiet afternoon on the mountain or in the first aid room, only to have things go completely hay-wire in a matter of minutes. Managing or leading in the first aid room requires a wide range of leadership traits be utilized. In this particular situation, the severity of a patient’s injury may dictate which leadership traits are best to employ. If life threatening conditions are present, it could very well be the best decision to take over a situation and ask overwhelmed patrollers to step aside or assign them to specific supporting tasks. In many situations, a productive approach could be to put yourself in a supportive role and ask how you can help. Using problem-solving skills and having a keen sense of the needed outcome of the situation and the timeframe for resolution will help a leader in this situation decide whether to take over or lend a hand. Spend a few minutes and think about the different situations that might lend themselves to the different leadership approaches in this scenario.

**Traits/Skills Needed**: Being able to take charge; Being a good problem-solver

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**Scenario 9:**

**You are facilitating an OEC roundtable discussion at your Division Spring Meeting. Two or three patrollers have done most of the talking. No one seems too upset, but you would like to make some changes so that more patrollers will get involved. What would you do as OEC discussion facilitator?**

1. Call people out by name and ask for their participation.
2. Ask the big talkers to move to another session.
3. Call for a “time out” and set some ground rules for group participation.
4. Thank the heavy communicators and ask for comments from the patrollers who

haven’t been speaking.

Leading a discussion in a meeting environment may not seem like a difficult task, but it can prove to be quite challenging when different personalities and communication styles converge. Most of us can think of a group discussion which one or two individuals take over the conversation. A strong leader or facilitator is left to try managing the situation in a way that doesn’t stifle the group momentum or offend those individuals who most likely feel that they are making a strong contribution. How well the individuals know one another can dictate how a leader communicates needed direction change in the conversation. A leader who is a strong communicator will be able to make process changes in a group conversation that honors those who have contributed, at the same time welcoming new participants to share. Perhaps delegating sub-topics of the conversations to quiet team members is an approach that gives them ownership in the discussion without competing with other group participants. Would there be an appropriate situation where you might ask participants to leave the group? What techniques could be used to make this happen?

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| **Traits/Skills Needed**: Being an effective and efficient communicator; Being a strong | |
| delegator; Being able to take charge |  |

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**Scenario 10:**

**A Region Director gets a complaint about one of the region’s officers who told an inappropriate joke during an OEC class and needs to deal with it. What would you do to address this issue?**

a. Have a face to face and let the officer/instructor know that if it happens again, they

won’t instruct for the Region again.

b. Spread the word that this person is out if they don’t knock it off and hope the

message gets back to them.

c. Wait until next year and remove them from the OEC Instructor roster.

d. Review the P&P for guidance. Meet with the officer/instructor to find out from what

happened and then go over the Code of Conduct and discuss appropriate and

inappropriate language.

Personnel disciplinary actions are challenging to deal with, especially for those new to a leadership role. “Winging it” isn’t the best strategy for dealing with these types of problems. Like many organizations, NPS has policies and procedures for dealing with disciplinary events. NSP also has Division and National Legal Advisors who can confidentially consult on situations where an event might create legal exposure for the organization.

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| **Traits/Skills Needed**: Being an effective and efficient communicator; Being able to take charge; Being self-aware of strengths and weaknesses |

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**Scenario 11:**

**As the Division Director, you find one of your Region Directors is not following through with their commitment and hasn’t been fulfilling the requirements of the position for the past year. How do you handle this, knowing that this person could be in this position for as many as six years?**

1. Take the hard line and tell them that they are on the verge of being “fired” if they don’t step it up.
2. Set up a private 1:1 discussion with this RD to better understand what the issues are and set a plan to help the RD fulfill his or her obligations.
3. Send them more communications via email regarding what they should be doing.
4. Delegate the work to someone who seems to be more responsible and efficient.

While a couple of these options may be viable, an effective leader needs to understand the underlying issues in any problem. The best approach is to have a 1:1 conversation with person who is struggling. Maybe the RD doesn’t understand the assignments. Maybe they have outside commitments with work and family life that are taking precedence. Good leaders take an active role in helping their team members succeed and that can only happen when a leader truly commits to understanding all aspects of what is going on behind the scenes.

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| **Traits/Skills Needed**: Being empathetic; Being an effective listener; Being a good problem solver |