

# Leadership Development For Developed Leaders

By

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## **Abstract**

Much of the research on outdoor leadership suggests a variety of characteristics and criteria one should possess in order to be a good and responsible outdoor leader. Knowing the factors for good leadership also helps outdoor adventure professionals better teach and train aspiring leaders. It is also important to emphasize that leadership is in a constant state of development and extends beyond training and personal characteristics. Knowing about the factors that impact one's ongoing development as a leader helps maintain one's motivation and desire to continue a leadership role in his/her perspective job. Leadership development is not simply for the young and pursuant outdoor leader but also for those "seasoned" practitioners and professionals who have been in the outdoor adventure field and considered a "developed leader". Research indicates that one's *self-efficacy* has a significant impact in the process of developing outdoor leadership (Koesler, 1994). The results of a recent questionnaire sent to "developed" outdoor leaders helped to identify factors that impact leadership development, factors that inhibit leadership development, and recognized ways in which leaders can continue their motivation, ambition and development as a leader, regardless of age and time spent in the profession.

## **Introduction**

Most outdoor professionals recall the first few outdoor adventure trips in which he/she participated. Perhaps it was a weekend trip with an outing club. Perhaps it was an extended trip such as the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), Outward Bound (O.B.) or the Wilderness Education Association (WEA). Perhaps it was on a river or in the mountains. Regardless, there was something about that trip that enticed you enough to want to extend those memories and experiences into a professional career.

Many outdoor professionals began with cleaning and repairing equipment. Others may have started with the logistical preparation such as organizing gear, packing equipment, preparing meals, loading and driving vehicles filled with eager participants to the road head. Once in the field, you may have assisted the lead instructor by teaching basic classes such as how to pack a backpack or how and where to poop in the woods. These opportunities are thrilling to you since you know you are building the foundation for becoming an experienced outdoor leader. After developing more skills and experience, you were able to move into a lead instructor level. Once you have developed your confidence and expertise at this level, you realize you want to have the responsibility in directing and coordinating an outdoor program. As a Director of an outdoor

program, you may have the opportunity to teach and become more involved in professional organizations. You are finally considered a “developed leader” in the field among your peers and staff. Where do you go from here?

In the process of developing your skills, knowledge, and experience in the outdoors, it’s common that one gradually transfers his/her motivations away from a “ME” way of thinking and toward a “WE” way of thinking. When people first start out in their chosen career, particularly the outdoor field, people tend to be most concerned about self (e.g., what can I do to improve my skills in order to get a particular job, what peak can I bag or river can I run?). However, as people continue to develop their leadership positions, the “WE” (e.g., what can we do to improve the lives of others?) view of success tends to involve many more people. In the “ME” stages there are likely to be more mentors available and people that inspire us. The length of time in any profession provides different challenges and perhaps less obvious things for people to attain or jobs in which to aspire. How does one continue to develop his/her leadership after years of leadership and service in the profession? How does one maintain and enhance his/her desire to developing leadership and continue contributing to the growth of the profession?

Currently, there is little known about what happens to leaders once leadership has been attained. Koesler (1994) found that having a mentor, reaching goals and receiving positive and immediate feedback were important factors for influencing one’s self-efficacy. Furthermore, self-efficacy was a significant factor in a participant’s continued ability and desire to develop his/her leadership.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to determine those factors that impact and inhibit leadership development and to identify ways in which leaders can continue to develop and shape their leadership in the outdoor profession.

## **Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy refers to a person’s personal judgment of his/her perceived capability to perform or attain a particular skill or task (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy theory has provided a conceptual framework utilized by many fields to understand behavior and explain success and/or continued participation in a variety of disciplines. Some of these disciplines are academic achievement (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000), sport performance (Moritz, Feltz, Fahrback, & Mack, 2000), work performance (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998), career development (Hackett & Betz, 1981), and high-risk sports (Brody, Hatfield, & Spalding, 1988). These studies revealed that self-efficacy had a positive impact on individual success, confidence, and future development.

A study was conducted at the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) to determine the factors that impact leadership development after completing a 30 day NOLS course (Koesler, 1994; Propst, & Koesler, 1998). Based on the success of the research conducted in other disciplines, self-efficacy was selected as the theoretical component for assessing its potential impact on the leadership development process. Additional variables (i.e., mentoring, goal attainment and feedback) were selected to determine their impact on self-efficacy (Figure 1).

A pretest and posttest design was administered to 231 students directly before the start of their course and upon completion of their course. Twenty variables (e.g., rappelling off of a rock face, climbing a beginner level climb, climbing a peak over 12,000 ft., reading a topographical map, route finding, leading a small group, organizing an emergency evacuation, etc.) were selected to identify pre-course self-efficacy (i.e., how confident one perceives his/her ability to perform a skill/task) followed by changes in self-efficacy after participation in a 30-day NOLS course (i.e., post-course). Additional questions relating to the variables of mentoring, goal attainment and feedback were also asked pretest and posttest.

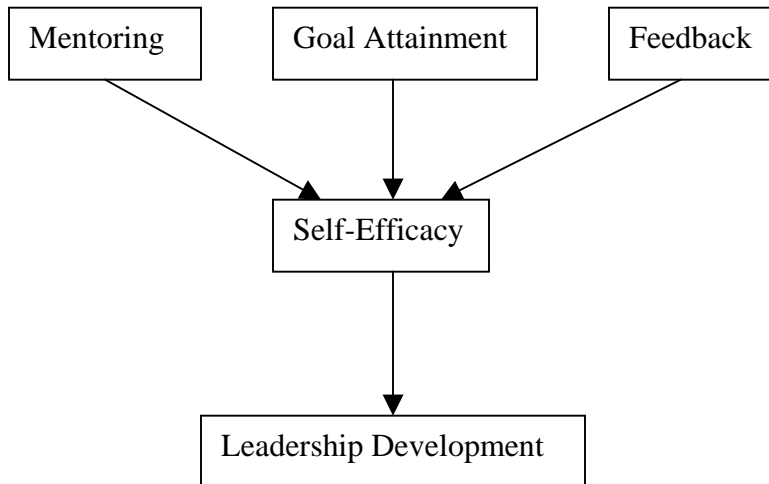


Figure 1. Leadership Development Model

### Summary of Findings

1. Males had a higher self-efficacy at pre-course than females. Given that wilderness skills are often seen and stereotyped as male dominant, females may have perceived their abilities to be less than males at the start.

2. There was a significant increase in self-efficacy at post course for both males and females. In other words, both males and females had the same self-efficacy score at post course. This result suggests that the outdoor wilderness experience had a greater impact on females than males and there was a much greater change for females.

3. Positive feedback was most significant for females and immediate feedback for males. This result suggests that females need and rely on positive feedback to boost their self-efficacy whereas males need the immediate feedback received when they directly engage in a task. The success or failure of this skill or task provides them immediate feedback.

4. Mentoring revealed to be a significant factor for enhancing self-efficacy for both males and females.

5. Mentoring was a significant and direct impact on leadership development for females. In other words, not only does having a mentor important for enhancing self-efficacy but it also

influences a females desire to want to continue her involvement in outdoor education and leadership.

## **Survey Questionnaire**

The question explored in this project was, does the same model that was used in the earlier study at NOLS among young developing leaders apply to “developed” leaders?

In early Fall 2002, a questionnaire was sent via email to thirty (30) professionals with whom the author was acquainted either from professional conferences or from spending time with in the outdoor field over the past twenty years. Below is a synopsis of the preliminary demographic information from respondents

Responses were received from 22 people; 11 males and 11 females.

Age Range: 27-55 years

Years in field: 5-30 years

Representation of Program Types: Non-profit, County Recreation and Park Department, University Outdoor Program, Academic Outdoor Program, Guide Service.

After receiving demographic information, respondents were asked five questions related to their experiences as a leader and factors impacting their development as a leader.

## **Questionnaire Results**

**Question 1: What factors had a significant impact on your initial development as a leader in the outdoor field?** Mentoring and experience had the most significant impact followed by leadership positions, love of outdoors and involvement in organizations.

**Question 2: Now that you are considered a “leader” at your place of business, what do you do to enhance your growth, ambition, and development as a leader?** Networking, continued field experience, attendance at conferences, expand training, maintain certifications, taking personal trips and be around people who inspire and challenge.

**Question 3: Has there been a point in your leadership career where you have experienced a loss of professional direction and motivation in the outdoor adventure field? If so, at what age did this occur and what were the reasons for this loss of direction?** 14 people out of 22 responded with a “Yes.” Of those 14, 8 people said they experienced a loss of direction between the ages of 40-47 due to the following reasons: too much field time, concerned whether he/she is still making a difference, not getting attention to applied research, lack of support from supervisor and burn out. 4 people out of 14 said they experienced loss of direction in their 30’s due to too much field time, attendance in graduate school and instability of job. 2 out of the 14 people experienced a loss of direction in their 20’s due to ethical dilemmas, difficulty in finding a job, ego and image disillusion. In essence, the results reveal that there are different dilemmas that create loss of direction at certain stages in one’s life.

**Question 4: Have you made changes in your career to enhance your development as a leader in the outdoor adventure field?** 16 out of 22 people said “Yes.” Some of the ways that changes have been made is to move to teaching and away from just program development, move to administration to create less field time, location change to a more supportive environment,

change in responsibilities, ongoing credentials and experience, and engaging in a variety of things to keep one challenged.

**Question 5: What factors are important to you in order to maintain and enhance your expertise and leadership in the outdoor profession so that you continue to make contributions to students, the community and to the profession?** Most of the respondents indicated that personal time in the outdoors was important to remind self why he/she is in the field, supportive colleagues and administration, networking and attending conference, spend time in field to stay in touch, read, write and stay current in issues and trends.

The participants at the ICORE session (approximately 75) were asked if they felt the model that was used earlier could also be applied to those leaders already developed. Based on the responses revealed in the session, the result was “Yes.” Developed leaders still need and desire mentors even though the role of a developed leader is to be a mentor. Some session participants indicated that as we grow in our profession we become the mentor and it is more difficult to find mentors; those people whom we respect, who inspire us, support and encourage us. It was also revealed that feedback was also important to receive on a consistent basis. Often times outdoor professionals find themselves in isolation surrounded by other departments and programs that know very little about the outdoor profession. It is important that outdoor professionals make the effort to network outside of their work place, spend time in the field and refrain from working in a vacuum so that feedback and mentoring are more accessible to them.

## **Conclusion**

Leadership is an ongoing process that continually needs developing throughout various stages of ones' life and career. Mentoring and receiving positive feedback are indicated as valuable factors that enhance one's self-efficacy. Networking, attending conferences, and staying current provide us with the support and feedback that is essential in enhancing one's self-efficacy. Furthermore, it is one's self-efficacy that provides us the motivation and desire to continue in the field. If we believe we are making a difference and growing (often times based on the feedback we receive from our colleagues and mentors), then developed leaders will continue to develop their leadership and make contributions to the field.

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