

Basic tools to help with leadership

I have been running British Canoeing Leadership training and assessment courses for a long time. And the same questions get asked on each and every course. This article helps answer one of those questions.

In the context of leading on grade 2 – 3 white water I use two basic processes. Traffic Lights and 5 Questions.

Traffic Lights

Red. Amber. Green That's roughly how traffic lights work isn't it.

So red light - If you are driving down the road and you are coming towards a red traffic light. You slow down and Prepare to stop. You don't just jump on the brakes though. You change gear maybe; you look around you to see what else is happening. How close is the person behind? Where is the white line to stop at? If you slow down a little more will they change so you can keep going? What does the junction look like?

Amber- well again, you are looking at maybe you're going to have to stop, or maybe its about to go to green. But either way, you are checking around you as you would do for the red light. Seeing the dangers and being ready to react.

Green – This is great, you can keep going, but your still ready in case it changes, in case someone comes out of one of the red lights on the junction. You are aware of the potential dangers, but right now you can just keep going.

For me, that is how we are reading the river. Is it red, green or amber ahead? Can I see round the bend? If so and its safe, then great its green? Nope? Then its amber/red, I need to check it out, change position to see round the bend. Or if I can't get to see round the bend or down the rapid then it must be a red.

Once it gets to Red, I then have to employ the 5 questions.

- 1) Where do I want to end up?
- 2) How do I get there and is this the best place to start from?
- 3) What may go wrong?
- 4) how do I sort it?
- 5) How many people can I deal with at any one time?

Where do I want to end up?

This is the first question I need to answer, if I can't see a safe eddy to aim for, preferably a group eddy at the end of the rapid, then I can't even think about a route down.

How do I get there and is this the best place to start from?

This doesn't need to be a full hydrological description of the route. More like to the left of that big boulder follow the wave train down to the eddy. Or Cut in behind the pour over

and work through the boulder garden to the eddy on the right. Sometimes you need to start from a different start, but that depends on the route down.

What may go wrong?

Well using the two basic routes above, first route I clip the boulder and capsize, or I swamp and swim through the wave train. Or the second route, I get pinned on a boulder in the boulder garden and manage to get free, but the canoe is stuck on a rock

How do I sort it?

The first one is simple; I am sat at the bottom ready to catch swimmers or encourage them to self-rescue into the eddy. The second one, I need to be close to or maybe upstream of the pinning potential so I can get to it quickly and sort the situation.

How many people can I deal with at any one time?

So in the first option, I'm happy that they can follow each other a couple of boat lengths apart, as they are ok paddlers, who can self-rescue and the river is flat calm after the rapid. In the second option. 1 at a time, as I can only deal with one pinned boat or swimmer in that boulder garden.

For me, those two tools, use in context, linked with your knowledge of how well the group can paddle, gives you a pretty good solid basis to think about leadership. Are they the only tools? No, are they the best tools? Well I like them, but that's just my opinion. Do they work? Yeah absolutely, just not by them selves.