



## DEF'S DECISION-MAKING TOOLS HEAD TO ALASKA

### Erik Boggs Hones His Team's Survival Skills with Decision Training

Eric Boggs is an outdoor educator, wilderness expedition leader, and kayak skills instructor, who has been a DEF supporter for several years. Last summer, Eric took the DEF Decision Quality Chain to the Alaskan wilderness, where he led a Wilderness Education Association Outdoor Leadership course for high school and college students. On this 21-day, 200-mile kayaking expedition, Eric taught and applied the DEF model of quality decision-making.

Currently earning his masters degree in education and teaching at the OutDoor School, an alternative high school in Eugene, Oregon, Eric has been leading wilderness expeditions for seven years through the National Outdoor Leadership School.

Because important — even life and death — decisions arise during an expedition, Eric believed that the Alaska kayaking expedition was a great opportunity to apply the decision quality chain, from initial planning to everyday challenges along the way. For example, the students charged with provisioning for the trip faced a supermarket's worth of products, a limited budget, space and weight constraints, plus unknown tastes of participants. Explicit discussion of these tradeoffs highlighted the decision at hand and the process needed to ensure a quality decision on provisions.

The DEF decision quality chain, which illustrates the six elements of a good decision, proved valuable for building consensus. In critical group decisions, the students drew individual chains. They then shared their ratings on separate links as a means to arrive at a decision that everyone could live with. In this way, the group was able to clarify values and priorities and reach the consensus that 1) the safety of individuals, gear, and the environment; 2) enjoying wilderness experiences; 3) skill building; and 4) having fun were the most important elements in their expedition. Clarifying these values early made subsequent decisions far easier to handle.

By the end of the first week, various students became "Leaders of the Day," with the responsibility for facilitating critical decisions. Again, they turned to the chain in their leadership role, as they put the fundamental decision-making principles into practice.

At evening meetings, the group talked through the day's decisions. Once again, the chain was useful, this time as a debriefing tool, helping the students build on their experiences and use



Drawing Decision Chains in the Sand

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**Better Decisions - Better Lives**



Plotting Decision Points on the Nautical Chart

journey's conclusion," he says. "Now the students have new skills to apply, even when not kayaking. The real-life decisions they tackled in the wilderness will stay with them, and just maybe, when faced with a critical choice, they'll remember the day they sketched decision chains in the sand."



what they had learned in planning for the next day. Before departure each morning, leaders marked strategic locations on the nautical chart where a decision would be made. The students knew they would be facing decisions at these locations, an awareness that helped build their "decision fitness." At night around the campfire, students read accident reports to highlight risky situations and rate the quality of the day's decisions.

Eric believes that the Alaska expedition served as a metaphor for life. "But the most powerful part of the learning process began with the

*Good decision-making is an essential life skill, but most people acquire it only through a process of trial and error – if at all. We equip people with powerful decision-making skills to help them better shape their futures in an uncertain world. In particular, our curriculum provides youth with the decision skills to take control of their fates and proactively map out their lives' paths. This curriculum is based on a proven approach to making good decisions.*

*By educating people in decision-making and arming them with effective methods, we will enable them to tackle their decisions in a more enlightened and empowered manner. We pay special attention to youth at greatest risk from bad decision-making.*

*Today's youth are tomorrow's leaders. Clearer thinking about decision-making will yield profound benefits for us all.*

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