

# Building relationships with participants in Department of Conservation programmes:

effective management of experiential groups  
in the outdoors

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION TECHNICAL SERIES No. 12

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# Abstract

In 1996 the authors spent some time in the field observing staff working with volunteers and visitors to the conservation estate. They also ran a small national workshop for conservation volunteer coordinators. On the basis of this work, this report was written to provide useful information to staff who want to build on the relationships they have with volunteers and visitors. Staff can influence the pro-conservation behaviours of participants in their programmes by making use of the framework of experiential learning. This process involves participants in a cycle of rich experiences, fosters the expression of thoughts and feelings about the experience, enables an examination and evaluation of new ideas resulting from the activity, and leads then to new experiences.

The report expands on those interpersonal behaviours that can aid this process. These include:

**Story telling** - providing the buzz experience that intrigues people and makes them want to hear more.

**Forming the group skills** - involves setting the boundaries (with regard to the tasks, times, territories and roles to be adhered to), and getting the message across by ensuring that all the right links are made between staff, volunteers and visitors and the purpose of the group, thus ensuring that the needs of all are met.

**Being responsive** - by being able to listen and reflect effectively and establish trust and safety within a group.

**Modelling enthusiasm and commitment** - by being in touch with feelings and all aspects of your own personality.

**Informing** - by passing on facts.

**Coaching** - by passing on new skills effectively.

Staff demonstrate by their own actions the behaviours that they want to foster in the volunteers and visitors. The shift from one to another - from informing to listening and from story telling to action - requires special skills, the practice of which will ensure that participants have a positive experience.

## 1. Introduction

This document is intended to provide useful and relevant information to Department of Conservation (DoC) field staff who work with volunteers and in experiential visitor programs. Participants in these programs provide DoC with an important link to the community. People who are prepared to put the time into attending volunteer and experiential programs are probably potential or existing environmentally-responsible citizens. The need for this document was identified as a part of a research project on maximising outcomes for volunteer experiential programs. In this report we outline means by which the leaders of experiential and volunteer groups can build relationships with groups and hence build mutual respect and influence between DoC and group participants.

As a part of the research we participated in five field projects that utilised volunteers and we talked to DoC staff, to volunteers and to others associated with the projects. It was the sharing of ideas with all parties that led to the writing of this report. Martin Ringer's earlier report (Ringer, 1996) provides a sound theoretical rationale for the design and implementation of voluntary conservation programs and is a thorough examination of what is required if we are to develop pro-conservation behaviours in persons who take part in volunteer and experiential programs. But the report has been considered too academic by some of our grass roots staff, so this current report is intended to meet the needs of people who are in the thick of the action, i.e., in the field with volunteers and experiential visitor programs.

A key aspect of our study is to offer suggestions on how DoC staff can influence participants to adopt pro-conservation behaviours as a result of their involvement in DoC experiential programs. Staff can influence the pro-conservation behaviours of volunteers and participants in experiential conservation programs by making use of the powerful 'framework' of experiential learning. This framework, shown in Figure 1, enables participants to make sense of and learn from their own experience rather than casting staff in the role of expert or teacher.

A participant will undergo a number of activities - like packing a backpack - during field events. These experiences provide 'concrete experience' as shown in Figure 1. Let's say you've told participants how to pack a pack, with the sleeping bag on the bottom, heavy stuff near the top and parka at the top. Your group starts off walking in fine weather but soon is caught in a heavy thundery downpour. The group stops to put on wet weather gear but one of them - Fred - pulls everything out of his pack onto the wet ground, looking for his parka which he packed at the bottom of his pack. In the experiential learning cycle we show above, we would say that packing his pack and then finding it done incorrectly form a concrete experience. As you continue walking in the rain, Fred mumbles about the 'stupid pack' that did not enable him to reach his parka like a 'decent travel pack' would have. He clearly does not see that he has contributed to his own discomfort with poor packing techniques. At lunch time the weather is fine again the discussion around the group gives you an opportunity to have Fred reflect on and learn from his experience.

You say:

*'Wow, it's ages since I've walked in rain that heavy. I love the power of thunderstorms. This is a new parka but I think I still felt a few drops getting through. How did other people fare?'*

others make different comments about their enjoyment or dislike of walking in the rain and how well their parkas stood up to the rain. Fred says:

*'My stuff is all wet because the stupid pack only opens at the top and I had to take everything out in the rain to get to my parka.'*

Now is your chance to get him to reflect on his experience a bit more closely.

You say:

*'Yes Fred, I heard you muttering away at the time about the pack design. It seems like you are used to travel packs with zips that open up right around to pack. The trouble with those packs is the zips leak in heavy rain like we've had today and long zips fail more often and then you've got a useless pack full of gear - often miles from nowhere.'*

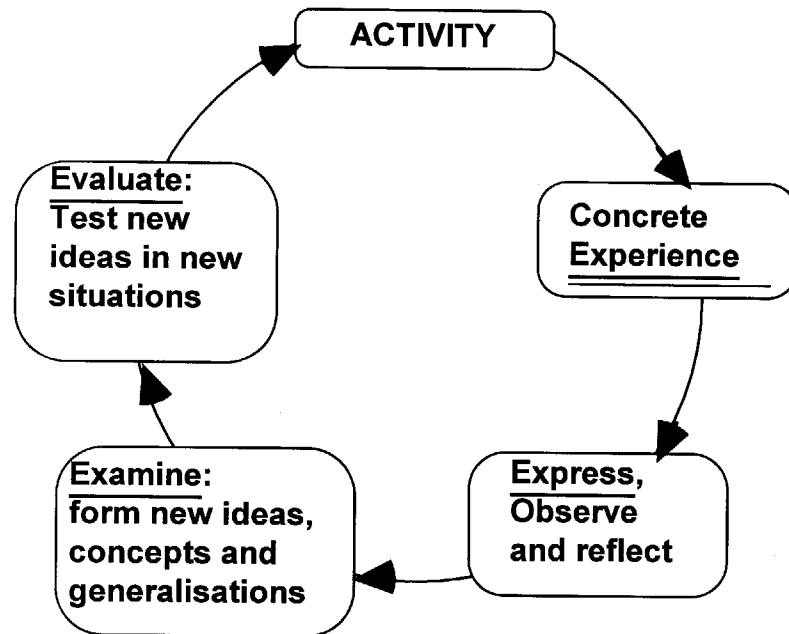


FIGURE 1. EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (ADAPTED FROM GREENAWAY, 1993; KOLB, 1984).

Fred is silent, thinking, then says:

*'Funny, I thought you were being a real fuss pot when you were going on at us this morning about how to pack a pack. Now it makes more sense...'*

Another participant - Julie - interrupts:

*'Yes, and if your wet sleeping bag touches mine in the tent tonight you're in trouble! Group members laugh. Fred says 'OK, OK, I'll re-pack the whole dammed thing now.'*

This brings Fred to the final stage in the experiential learning cycle where, after reflection on his experience, he re-conceptualises (changes his mind about how to pack packs!) and then tests his new thinking in action by re-packing his pack. The true test of this new concept will come when he has to retrieve his parka in the next downpour.

This whole idea of experiential learning underpins the remainder of this document even though we may not be very explicit about experiential learning in some of the sections that follow. The essence of this report is to share those skills that will help you facilitate the experiential process.

After reviewing the notes that we took during our field visits we reduced the essential group skills to the six below:

Telling important stories.

Forming the group.

Being responsive.

Modelling enthusiasm and commitment.

Informing - passing on facts.

Coaching - passing on skills.

Each of these skills contributes to the process of experiential learning and represents a field of expertise that DoC field staff may wish to develop (see Ringer, 1996, especially Appendix 3 and p. 36).

## 2. Telling important stories

Imagine that you are sitting in a long and boring lecture being bombarded with facts about the conservation estate in New Zealand. Your eyes are heavy. Your recently eaten lunch is settling and flooding your body with warm sleepy contentment. If only you could just hide somewhere and snooze...

Now the speaker says:

*'They said it was impossible. They talked about attempts in Singapore, the UK and the USA to create "mainland islands" in urban environments and that these had either failed or had only succeeded through massive Government funding. I thought "damn you, I'm going to do it anyway". I knew that I'd get hassled by the conservatives in the Department so I pulled in a few close confidants and we started plotting...'*

Suddenly you are wide awake and interested in the speaker. What has changed? A story is unfolding and a good story captures your imagination. Good stories have a place for us in them, for our aspirations and our dreams, for our fears and doubts. Here we have a story about hope and vision that is being played out in your work environment. You know what it is like to be told that you 'don't do that sort of thing around here' Now you want to hear about the vision and struggle of this speaker and how things worked out. You can be the speaker as the story unfolds. The sleep is no longer on the agenda.

So how do you learn to tell good stories to engage the participants in volunteer and experiential visitor programs? Or maybe you already tell great stories but you're not sure what makes them good. Let us examine the inside workings of a story.

### 2.1 THE STORY EXPERIENCE AND PRACTICAL TIPS

The story needs to be relevant to the topic that forms the theme for your group. When you are visiting a site, most of your stories should relate to the location being visited. We were on Tiritiri Matangi Island recently when Barbara told the story of how Takahe were introduced to the island. It was highly relevant to the group because we were there to learn about the conservation effort carried out on the island. We'll use this story to illustrate the discussion about stories. (Notice that we're telling you a story now.)

The story about the Takahe began with Barbara and Ray requesting that Takahe be introduced to the island and being refused by the scientists responsible for the Takahe program. The scientists refused because the environment on Tiritiri Matangi was unsuitable - mainly through not having the 'correct' diet. Barbara smiled at that point in telling the story and said that Takahe bones have been found throughout New Zealand and so their original range probably included Tiritiri Matangi. She did not say that the scientists were wrong or stupid. She just pointed out - in story form - that the scientists in their concern for

preserving the species may have overlooked some facts about the past distribution of the bird.

So here we have some more essential features of stories. Conflict of some form adds interest. The hopes and fears of the listener need to be engaged. In our case we were all amateur conservationists who hoped to make a difference through our own actions in our own areas. Barbara portrayed herself as being like us and having a perspective that was not shared by the 'experts'. This gave us hope that we as lay-persons could make a difference through valuing our own experience even if it didn't always agree with the opinions of the 'experts'. Our fear was that we truly did not know what we were talking about and nor did Barbara. So we were well and truly engaged in the story by then.

Next, Barbara talked about how persistence paid off and they were finally allowed two male Takahe, 'because males were more expendable than females'. The birds started eating a whole range of vegetation, even though in their refuge in Fiordland's Murchison Valley their diet was very restricted. This validated Barbara and Ray's opinion that Takahe would adapt to Tiritiri because of it being in their historical range of habitat. (Round one to the lay-person!). The males started to make a nest, even in the absence of a female, so Ray and Barbara requested a fertilised egg. The egg was sent and successfully hatched. (Round two to the Takahe!) In this part of the story the persistence of the 'lay-person' pays off and the birds are sent. The outcome was successful and we as the audience feel happy that people 'like ourselves' can make a difference. The power of nature determines the Takahe's next moves: to eat a wide range of food and to make nests. Now the lay-person comes in again for a round of persistence and the birds triumph in the end by hatching the egg.

Barbara ended the story by talking about the successful Takahe breeding program that now exists on the island. Here we have the triumph of lay-person's knowledge and persistence, coupled with the natural 'wisdom' of the Takahe. The idea of a male hatching a fertilised egg in the absence of females adds intrigue to the story. You might see the scientists as the losers in the story, but Barbara was clear that it was not ignorance or bloody mindedness on the part of the scientists that led them to resist the transfer of Takahe to Tiritiri. It was their absolute determination to do the best by the Takahe breeding program. We could easily be critical in retrospect but criticism is not in order. If Barbara had run down the scientists in this story she would have undermined our confidence that the conservation estate was in good hands. That loss of confidence could be destructive to all parties.

## 2.2 COMMENT

Effective story telling captures the imagination of your group. It can be used as a 'buzz' experience to get people on board and enthused about conservation. In fact, stories can be used to enhance any part or parts of the experiential learning cycle. They can be used to give examples of concrete experiences, to stimulate participants to reflect on and talk about their own experiences, to introduce new concepts, or to offer hypothetical situations in which participants can 'test' their new ideas. You might even tell a story that illustrates the whole experiential learning cycle.



Stories are already being told in the Department and you have the makings of stories in your memories of events in your life. Your skill is to find the useful ones and learn to tell them in ways that engage the souls of your listeners as well as having hope embedded in them. They need to be stories that mean something to you personally so that you tell them with your own personal energy. Be prepared to try your stories out on other DoC staff and get a response. You don't need to analyze them to the extent that we have done above. Just ensure that they feel right to the listener and that you have a reasonable expectation that they will influence the pro-conservation behaviours of the listeners.

## 3. Forming the group

Most of the time that you are involved in experiential visitor programs or volunteer programs you are working with a group of people rather than just one or two people at a time. Even when you are with a very small group, you need to be able to keep the needs of the whole group in mind all of the time. Groups are different from just a collection of individuals. They react together. If you talk to only one or two individuals others will feel left out. If you tell one off all the others will react as well although not all in the same way.

### 3.1 SOME PRACTICAL TIPS

Being aware of the group process is something most of you will already be familiar with. For example, if, early in the life of a group, a volunteer holds a slasher with his fingers around the blade as he walks, you will need to tell him to carry it safely. If you are alone with him you can be very direct and you might say something like:

*Jim, please shift your grip on the slasher. When you are walking your hand should be on the shaft of the slasher and the blade should be facing down and be behind you. I could not stand the idea of your cutting yourself.'*

When you are with a group, everyone notices how you treat others in the group and they imagine that you will treat them the same way. So with Jim you might say:

*Jim, if you don't mind, I want to use your slasher as an example so we can refresh our safety instructions. If Jim fell now and his slasher bit the ground before his hand, the shock could slide his fingers along the blade. The reflex action of gripping the slasher while falling would make it likely that Jim's hand would be cut. So to prevent that we hold the slasher by the handle, with the blade facing backwards. Let's see that Jim. I'd like you all to remind each other when you notice other team members slipping a bit on safety practices. Accidents would stop us from getting the work done - apart from being unpleasant.'*

In this latter example, it was important not to shame Jim or to single him out as the only one who might make mistakes. You need to meet your need for

improving group safety without putting him down. Your sensitive handling of Jim will signal to the group that you are capable of addressing important safety issues at the same time as showing respect for group members. But avoiding shame and embarrassment is only one aspect of forming and managing groups. Other aspects we'll look at include making links with the group and setting appropriate boundaries.

Let us illustrate these ideas in more detail through another imaginary scene. Firstly, we will listen in on an introductory talk for a volunteer group. Samuel, a DoC field-based Conservation Officer was responsible for erecting a 1 km long 'possum-proof' fence across a peninsula. He had a volunteer group from a local polytech to assist him. Samuel's drive and energy had succeeded in getting sponsorship from a local business, but DoC was only providing Samuel's time and the use of a vehicle. He had lived in the area all his life and it had grieved him to see the damage being done to the flora and bird life on the peninsula as possums invaded the area and multiplied to plague proportions. This was Samuel's 'pet' project.

Volunteer students from the polytech outdoor education course gathered in the DoC vehicle shed on the first morning of the project. It was raining. The first job was to carry heavy posts and rolls of wire from the road end to the fence. Sam was in the shed when the first students arrived and he had arranged impromptu benches for them to sit on. He had hot water available for tea and coffee. He was a bit of a comic figure, with a heavy yellow raincoat streaming with rain, short stubby hairy legs with short gumboots wired together and a large beer gut visible even through the bulk of his parka. Samuel's approach is summarised in Box 1.

There are a few basic pointers that help to keep a group focused once you've done the early 'linking'. These principles involve achieving clarity on boundaries and relationships: Task, Time, Territory and Roles. In practice, the leader would pay close attention to how the group was responding and make sure that the talking was broken up with practical tasks to avoid a long and tedious talk session at the start.

### 3.2 TASK

A gathering of people becomes a group when all members share a common purpose. Just as DoC would not be an effective organisation if its members did not share a common purpose, a group needs to know what is their purpose or 'primary task.' A typical statement of a primary task includes both the expected outcome and some clues about how the outcome will be achieved. In the example above, Samuel described the primary task:

***'We are going to fence off the Moturoa peninsula with a possum proof fence. First we need to clear a walking track along the route (that has already been surveyed and marked with red tape), then we carry in the materials. In early Spring, while the ground is still soft, we'll dig the post holes, dig the trench for burying the bottom of the netting and then place the posts. Then as the ground hardens in early summer we'll hang the netting and bury the bottom of the netting. In January we'll thoroughly check the stability of the whole structure. Then we're done!'***

BOX 1. A SUMMARY OF SAMUEL'S APPROACH.

**What Samuel said:**

'Well thanks for coming along today, its a real stinker eh? I thought you'd like kayak lessons in a warm pool more than struggling through mud and rain with heavy loads.'

(Some laughter and comments like 'you don't know our tutors from the group'.)

'I'm Sam Johnstone. I work for the Department of Conservation so I'm in charge of this job we are all about to start. How much do you know about the project? You must know a bit to want to come here, or did someone force you along?'

(He answers some questions about the duration of the project, then cuts in:)

'Right, it seems like a good idea to go over the a bit of the background of the project before we go out there and get wet. We are going to fence off the Moturoa peninsula with a possum-proof fence. When we've done that, the possums on the peninsula will be exterminated and we'll also keep rat and cat numbers down. You know, when I was at polytech I used to paddle a dinghy around the peninsula to fish on the other side, and in the mornings you could hardly hear yourself think with all the Bellbirds and other birds shouting away at each other. Now it's like a graveyard. I don't like going there any more because it seems like such a sad place with no life. So after we've done our bit, DoC is going to re-introduce many of the bird species that used to live there. But first we've got another job. Who knows what that is?'

(Students answer that re-planting needs to be carried out first for food sources.)

'Now, we can't stay inside all day gasbagging, but there are a few more things we need to talk about before we go out and get rained on. First, do you all know each other? Are you all in the same course?'

(Some students say 'no'.)

'Well I don't know your names yet either, so lets start simple. Just say your name and why you volunteered for this project. I mean, why would anybody in their right mind get wet tired and dirty when you have the option of staying inside?'

(The students all say their names and what interested them in the project. Samuel asks some of them a question to clarify their interest. He then goes around the group repeating the students' names, and asking for help when he forgets.)

'Now, the business end. The whole project involves... (he summarises the work plan — see sections 3.2 to 3.5 in the text.) I am the architect, engineer, fencing skills instructor and driver on this project. For a start most of you will probably rely on me quite a bit for skills training and advice, but you will quite quickly become pretty good fencing contractors yourselves.'

'Now, you need to listen very carefully to this next bit because it may save your life or at least your leg.' (He does the basic safety talk.)

'OK, hop in the bus and let's go...'

**What he was doing:**

Linking himself with the group and introducing the task or purpose of the group.

Linking himself with the group and beginning to link the group members with the task.

Linking himself with the purpose of the group and the group with the purpose.

Linking himself with the purpose of the group and linking himself with the group by relating his history, sense of place, passion and interest in the project.

Linking himself with the group by encouraging them to share their knowledge.

Encouraging group members to link with each other.

Facilitating group members to link with each other and with the purpose of the group at the same time.

Clarifying the overall project and describing the role relationships and authority system.

Linking with participants by showing that they will gain skills by working with him.

Starting the practical task of passing on essential information to the group.

Starting the task.

That was a fairly elaborate statement of the primary task, but the real guts is in bold print. The ‘how’ is the text that follows that statement. Now we have the primary task clear, let’s look at the time<sup>1</sup>.

### 3.3 TIME

Being clear about time boundaries enables participants to know when they’re ‘on task’ and when they can relate in a purely social way. Volunteer groups need social time, but it can be difficult to balance work with play. Clarity about time makes it easier for all participants to manage this balance. Again, listening to Samuel:

*‘The whole job is likely to take about six months in all. Now that’s a long time to sacrifice your spare time, so we’ll make sure you have a bit of fun. Each work day we’ll gather in the depot to catch the bus for the car park. The bus leaves at 7.30 am sharp. We’ll work until 12 with a twenty minute break at around 10. Lunch is 30 minutes and we knock off at 3.30. From 3.30 to 5 we will have free time. I’ll offer informal walks around the peninsula to talk about plants, birds, creepy-crawlies and life in the lake, but that is just for those of you who are interested. Others can swim, sleep or whatever, so long as you stay in groups of at least four people. The bus leaves at 5 pm sharp. It’s a long walk if you miss it.’*

Here, the overall time commitment is stated and the time boundaries within each work day are specified. This will be fine-tuned as the project unfolds, but clarity up-front reduces ambiguity and conflict later on. Next we will examine boundaries involving physical space — i.e., territory.

### 3.4 TERRITORY

In talking about territory, the purpose is to establish clarity about the function of and restraints on the physical spaces that participants will be entering or will be excluded from. Samuel tells this participants about the territory involved in the conservation project:

*‘We won’t be spending much time at this depot, but I’ll point out the parts that matter. The toilets are over there behind you. They are locked and you need to get the key from me and return it to me. We’ve had vandalism problems, not only with the toilets, but also with the workshop, so it’s locked too. For your own protection you should only go into the workshop with a DoC staff member. Otherwise we can accuse you of ripping off our gear’ (he smiles). ‘Seriously, you have to be pretty careful not to cause bad blood — partly because some of our permanent staff think that volunteers do work that permanent staff should be doing.*

*Out at the car park you can’t get back into the bus after we’ve left it because it has to be locked to stop the thieves who cruise around the car parks ripping things off. You can go anywhere on the peninsula itself except Puketata. There’s an old burial ground on the slopes of Puketata and there’s no way we’re going to mess with that.’*

---

<sup>1</sup>Note that while the task here is a physical one, this is not always the case. The task of the group could also be to develop a sense of enthusiasm for conservation, getting to know others in the community who share a common interest in the environment and so on. (i.e., the physical activities are a means to an end.

The territory statements enable participants to move with confidence so they are more likely to act with initiative and enthusiasm. Not knowing what is 'off bounds' creates anxiety and reduces a group's effectiveness.

### 3.5 ROLES

Finally, each group member needs to know what their legitimate role is in the group and what responsibilities and authority are held by themselves and other group members. Samuel comes to our rescue once again:

*'I'm the one in charge of this big adventure. I put my neck on the line for the project and I really want it to work. If it doesn't you might see me in the queue to collect my unemployment benefit next year' (he smiles). Also I am responsible for your safety and welfare. I have a contract with your polytech to organise this project and I need to report each month on how it is going. I don't like throwing my weight around, but in accepting this job you also accept in any disagreements that I do have the authority to tell you what to do. Otherwise I couldn't handle the safety requirements properly. Your tutor, Julie Jones, is responsible for your written reports to the polytech and for dealing with problems with attendance and other stuff that relates to you being officially at polytech. Finally, we will be organising you into what we call 'self-managed work teams' which means that each will appoint its own management system for keeping on-task, and not messing around. I will visit each team at least twice each day for technical advice, for a safety check...'*

The ideas that we have illustrated here about forming the group will be helpful for you in your work, but they don't guarantee that your groups will work well. Groups are exciting and illogical phenomena. At a deep level, group membership seems to nudge people into behaving in irrational ways. Groups can bring out both the best and the worst in people. Among other things, they tend to attribute great powers to the leader, and as a leader it can be helpful for you to understand how much impact your behaviour can have on the group.

### 3.6 COMMENT

If you know about the basic principles of influencing groups, then you will be more effective at getting your message across. We have focused on just a few principles. You can think of a group as a set of connections or 'links.' These links are between:

- You and each of the group members.
- The group members themselves.
- The group members and the purpose of the group.
- Yourself and the purpose of the group.

If all of these links are taken care of then you will be well on the way to a successful group experience. The leader must also put in place the basic boundaries and that involves task, time and territory as well as establishing role clarity for all participants. Often this will involve a mixture of talking, listening and negotiating. An effective group is one where you get your needs met as an individual, DOC gets its needs met and participants successfully meet their

needs. In the section above we have talked about how you establish boundaries to help meet your needs and DoC's needs. We have looked at how you need to get your message across. In the next section we describe some aspects of how to respond to the ways in which group members express their needs. We call this 'being responsive' to your group's messages.

## 4. Being responsive

'Responsiveness' is a central part of communication between people. For group leaders, being responsive is a key element in building trust and emotional safety in the group. People will be productive and will demonstrate initiative when they feel safe. The basic premise from which we start is that safety and trust are essential elements of any team. The discussion then leads on to some specific techniques that you may use to develop trust and safety through being visibly responsive to your team. We have used the words 'team' and 'group' to indicate a group which has a shared understanding of the purpose of their being together. This could be a group of volunteers who are about to undertake a work project or a group of visitors on an experiential conservation visit.

Safety and trust in a team grow as members watch how the leader and other members respond to the comments and behaviour of each member of the team. People commonly talk about trust needing to be high, yet trust is just a name for a sense that each member feels safe from attack and being shamed or ridiculed, and believes that their needs will be acknowledged rather than dismissed. Each member's assessment will be different, and will vary quickly from minute to minute. Each participant builds their sense of trust and safety by placing meaning on each small event in the incessant stream of events that make up the life of the team. The meaning that one person places on a particular event is likely to be different from the meaning that any other member places on it. Yet teams also meet for a purpose, and the team leader has a responsibility to support and encourage the team to move towards its purpose. Although trust and safety are usually factors that speed this process, their presence alone does not ensure that the team meets its goals.

So what does a leader do to increase the probability that team members will decide that they 'trust the group' and that they 'feel safe'? The notes below are distilled from our own experience as team members, from a number of models of team work, and from extensive discussion with others.

There are two vital principles for guiding all of your responses. They are:

- **Always stay focused on the purpose of the team.**
- **Stay curious.**

We talked about the need to be clear about the 'Task' or purpose of the team in the section on forming the group - elsewhere in this document. In this section we offer some practical means of demonstrating interest and curiosity in the participants' point of view. Clarity of purpose and curiosity in participants' views are two of the most important principles for maintaining safe and

purposeful groups. Staying focused on the purpose does not mean that you 'cut off' people who ramble on, but that when you respond to them you do so in a way that leads the team back to its purpose. 'Staying curious' in very simple terms means 'if you jump to conclusions, be prepared to keep jumping to another conclusion, then another ...etc.' In other words, you need to be constantly aware that the meaning that **you** get from what a person is saying is not necessarily the meaning to **them** of what they are saying. The only way to find out if you are both **really** talking about the same thing is to check with them. 'Are you saying that...'

**What follows is a simple sequence for responding to team members in a manner that they will probably experience as your having taken notice of what they've said and really 'heard' them.**

#### 4.1 GATHER ALL THE INFORMATION

When a person talks in a group or team, there are three different places from which you, as team leaders and team members, get information. These sources of information are the speaker, the other group members and yourself.

**The speaker.** Things to pay attention to with the speaker are the content of what he or she is saying, the **feeling** behind what is being said, the tone and timing of their speech, their face and body movement and appearance.

**Other team members.** You can make a guess at the reaction of other team members by noticing where they look when the person is speaking, how their faces and bodies move, and whether they laugh, snort, sigh, etc.

**Your self.** The most important information you can get about what is happening in the team is by paying attention to your intuition, your 'gut' feeling and what you think to yourself about what is happening. You are bombarded with hundreds of 'pieces' of information each second when you are in a group. For example, each person in a team of ten people is communicating non verbally through how they sit, how they move, who they look at etc. Even sitting totally still is a form of communication. So you are having to keep ten communication channels open at once! At the same time, you are trying to keep track of the purpose of the group, the clock, and your function as a group leader, as well as listen to the person who is speaking. Your conscious mind cannot hope to keep track of all of the information. What happens is that your unconscious mind takes in the information and translates it into feelings and intuition. If you only take notice of your conscious mind, and ignore your feelings and intuition, you are closing off over 90% of the information available to you. Staying tuned to your intuition and feelings requires a lot of skill. Remember to 'check in' with yourself regularly.

Now that you have the information from all three sources:

#### 4.2 REFLECT

Reflect back to the person what you recognised, saw and heard or what you think they were on about. Be aware, though, that what you hear and see may not be what the person thought that they said and did. An acute observer will

pick up the unconscious communication as well as the conscious. Your reflection can be at one of three levels:

1. content - what they were talking about,
2. feeling - the underlying feeling that they expressed or implied,
3. meaning - what you think the meaning is of what they communicated.

In work teams, most people are happy to talk about content ('facts'), but few people consider feelings to be relevant or even useful! Feelings can be pretty scary for many people, although they don't need to be. A skillful reflection of the **meaning** of a statement will sometimes be less scary than a reflection of a feeling to the talker. Meaning statements can be very useful. For example:

Fred, a member of a volunteer team, says loudly and red in the face:

*Are you telling us that after working for three months on this perimeter fence we don't even get invited to the official opening? You've got to be joking!*

A response to that at the **content** level is:

*Not necessarily, we haven't finalised that decision yet.'*

A response at the **feeling** level is:

*'You seem really pissed off with that idea!'*

A response at the **meaning** level is:

*'I guess that it would seem like a put-down if after all the work you've done on this project you didn't get some public recognition for your efforts.'*

Reflecting back content alone is usually mechanical and inadequate. Reflecting feeling and content can be useful, and addressing the meaning level is usually helpful for the other person and for the rest of the group. As one member of the team experiences being responded to at a meaning level, the other members of the team notice that and will usually make a (conscious or unconscious) decision that they 'trust' the team and the leader.

#### 4.3 LINK WITH THE PURPOSE OF THE TEAM

Your response also needs to directly or indirectly link the person's communication with the purpose of the current team meeting or the long term purpose of the team. For example, a further statement from a team leader following on from the one above might be:

*'I'm in a real bind with this one. You people have done an incredible amount of work and in fact the whole project could not have been done without you. I'm really keen to make sure that you get good public recognition, and from a selfish point of view I don't want you to lose enthusiasm now, when there's still a fair bit of work to do. The official opening is planned for a very small venue so I'll see if I can influence the decision makers to change the venue so you can all be invited.'*

Once you have reflected and clarified the person's **whole** communication they will be prepared to consider other points of view, but if you try to influence them to change their mind before they think you've really heard them you will experience 'resistance'. Once you have seen evidence that the person believes they have been heard, you can 'move alongside' them so that they decide on



the next step that will lead them out of the dilemma or problem that they have just expressed.

In this case Fred may reply:

*'Look mate, it's not you I'm angry with. I know you'll do what you can about the ceremony. And I'm certainly not going to down tools just because some head office boffin has forgotten we exist. And I don't expect a knighthood - just somebody important saying "thanks. "'*

Now that your reflection/clarification has enabled the person to reach a better understanding about the nature of the problem, then alternative courses of action become clear. In fact Fred's last statement gave some clues as to how his needs could be met even if he was not invited to the official opening ceremony. So this next step usually emerges from the person's or the group's own increased awareness that emerges from the discussion.

As a team leader, your task is also to assist the team or participant to refine the next step. Action steps should be:

1. small,
2. achievable,
3. identifiable - in other words they will have a means of recognising when they have achieved it.

With Fred's situation you might say:

*'Fred, I do think we need to take some action on this one. If they can't change the venue, how about we plan another celebration where some senior DOC folks show up to thank the volunteers? Have you got time to sit down with me later today to get a clear plan sorted out?'*

#### 4.4 COMMENT

Team members are more vulnerable than you may realise. Acting or speaking in a way that draws other team members' attention to themselves involves the risk of not being acknowledged or of not being accepted in some way. Self disclosure and active involvement in a team grows as all team members consciously and unconsciously assemble a sense of how much they trust the leader and other members to respond to them in a way that they find adequate. If you as a team leader are able to manage your own clarity and focus enough to respond along the lines of the guidelines above, you will find that your teams are active and supportive, and that they go a long way to achieving their purpose.

## 5. Modelling enthusiasm and commitment

Your behaviour as leaders of groups will strongly influence how your groups operate. Your commitment, integrity, and enthusiasm will, in part, determine the levels of commitment, integrity and enthusiasm demonstrated by your team members. We are not suggesting that you fake these characteristics, but rather that you allow your existing enthusiasm to show. This section is about how you may be able to become more aware of your own enthusiasm and use it in the service of your work with groups. However, the points presented here can be controversial, so be prepared to adopt only those aspects that seem manageable to you.

Today, most organisations value the rational above the non-rational. They value efficiency, cost effectiveness and ‘outputs’ above enthusiasm and involvement. In one way, this makes good sense because rational aspects can be measured and hence communicated to the Minister, the community or, in the case of business organisations, the shareholders. Non-rational aspects are very difficult to measure, difficult to communicate and may not even be valued by those to whom we are accountable. However, in your line of work, one of your most powerful influencing strategies is to be enthusiastic and visibly committed to your work in conservation. From the research on how people become more environmentally aware and committed to conservation, we know that not only must they have ‘hands on’ experiences in the natural world, but that they also benefit considerably from having good role models — people who can share their wisdom about nature in a way that stimulates those around them. So keep up that enthusiasm! The attitude is contagious and inspiring for your ‘followers’, even though it may not always appear to be valued by your managers.

Remember, though, that the importance of being a good role model can be a double-edged sword. As a conservation officer, for instance, you may be enthusiastic about your work in the field but may not enjoy your current position within the Department. If your group members see your enthusiasm for the field work they will be encouraged, but if they see your dissatisfaction with DOC they may become less enthusiastic about helping. Let us look further for clues about how to locate the source of our enthusiasm.

Although rationality seems to be the rule, the outlook for passion and commitment is not entirely bleak. Most of the useful ideas about enthusiasm and commitment talk about how we need to value our ‘right brain’ experience and not just our ‘left brain’ thinking. The right side of the brain is associated with feeling and intuition and the left side is associated with rationality and language. Most of us will be aware of the occasions when our ‘gut feeling’ was giving us a very clear message about what to do next; but it is extraordinarily difficult to give words to the situation — we just know! This is only one example of where our right and left brain communication needs improvement. In fact, it seems that a lot of personal power and energy can be released in

people when they develop their ‘right brain’ functioning and integrate it with ‘left brain’ functioning.

One way of doing this is to become familiar with each of our sub-personalities or the roles we play out, e.g., the office cynic, mother or father, peacekeeper, bureaucrat. Even playing the enthusiastic environmentalist may, in fact, be associated with different roles, depending on who you are. Margaret — one of the authors — is aware that her own enthusiasm for the environment comes with ‘the nurturer’ — the joy of seeing kahikatea seedlings springing up in areas that she has worked to protect, or seeing tuis and kereru flying in to trees that she has planted, (she admits, though, that ‘the nurturer’ in this instance is also well nurtured in this process. Having a conversation with a bell bird is definitely a reciprocal arrangement!!). There is also ‘the taonga’ role — the joy of sharing knowledge with others and seeing them ‘light up’ as they see things for the first time, and so on.

Getting your sub-personalities to talk to one another can be an interesting exercise. It can help clarify problems, the issues involved and lead to profound insights. Let’s take the ‘office cynic’ and the ‘nurturer’ in our conservation officer, Samuel. He’s not sure that he should be taking the kids out onto the conservation estate for the weekend.

Office cynic:

*‘Lot of bloody nonsense trying to get a volunteer program going for the local kids. You’re the volunteer in the end Sam! Nobody in this Department cares if you spend your weekend working with those kids or not! It certainly didn’t make any difference when they were looking at your pay scale this year!’*

Nurturer:

*‘I don’t know. I can understand where you’re coming from but I think these kids really love being in the outdoors.’*

Office cynic:

*‘But why you? Their own parents could take them out or one of the school’s teachers. That’s what they’re paid for. The Department isn’t going to thank you one iota for taking the weekend off to work with those kids. They would rather you caught up with that mountain of paper work on your desk! You know as well as I that the real work of conservation is now the paper work... all this accountability stuff to Head Office. THEY probably wouldn’t miss it if we didn’t go out in the field for months!’*

Nurturer:

*‘You might be right but... I really know this area and I’m arrogant enough to think I can show these kids things that their teachers and parents probably don’t know about. I can’t help thinking that if I don’t show them then they’ll continue to stomp around all over the forest floor squashing those kahikatea seedlings and never stop to listen to the whosh of the kereru or the songs of the tui and the bellbird...’*

Office cynic:

*‘I don’t know... what use is all this idealism in today’s world? Look at us! We spend more time tied up at our desks every year. Trying to do things right rather than doing the right things. Give in Sam... you’re going against the tide!’*

Nurturer:

*I just can't. I can't help thinking that this is one of the most important things I can do with my life... Most of the time I just keep hoping I can do this work within the Department but I guess you're right... but I'm not really a desk sort. I've got to get the message across and just hope that the Department lines up with me again some time...'*

And so conversation can go. The bottom line is that the 'nurturer' is really clear on a course of action and no amount of heckling from the sub-personality 'office cynic' is going to change his or her sense of what is right. Remember, these are parts of a personality. You may have very different roles or sub-personalities, and it can be really interesting to get them communicating, particularly when you're feeling undecided about a course of action. Interestingly, research on sub-personalities or roles suggests that to enjoy our work and to be energised we need to establish a match between our work situation and at least one of the sub-personalities or roles that we possess.

In Box 2 a few activities are identified to help you discover what roles might be relevant to you. Hopefully, you will become more in tune with your enthusiastic role. In future, be prepared to make that part of you obvious to your group members. Tell stories about conservation-related events that you took part in and that excited you (see the section in this document about telling stories). Be visibly enthusiastic when you feel enthusiastic. Encourage others to celebrate their own enthusiasm. You don't have to bounce around and make a fool of yourself. You can still be visibly enthusiastic even when you're relatively quiet. Try it — you'll be a better leader.

## 6. Informing — passing on facts

Research has shown that many people volunteer for conservation project work because they want to learn more about both the environment and about practical means of conserving our natural heritage. In this section on 'Informing' we will focus on how conservation officers can pass on facts about the natural and historical world in ways that capture the interest of group participants. The section on 'Telling useful stories' is relevant for this topic as well. In the 'Coaching' section shown in Box 3, we will focus on how to assist volunteers in learning skills and in developing knowledge that enables them to carry out conservation tasks both in voluntary programs and at home.

Learning about the natural environment may be just a passing interest for your group participants or it may be an all-consuming passion. Some group participants may have almost no knowledge about any flora, fauna or local site history and others may have detailed 'niche' knowledge or broad general knowledge. This variation in motivation and prior knowledge poses a serious challenge for you to present information in a way that meets the needs of this diverse group. Another issue in voluntary project groups is that learning about the environment may only be a secondary goal of your group. If the primary task of your group is to carry out practical conservation tasks, you may feel that spending time learning about the environment is an unnecessary distraction.

BOX 2. METHODS FOR IDENTIFYING ASPECTS OF YOUR PERSONALITY.

**Identifying the source of your enthusiasm, commitment and passion for your work:**

We suggest that you take the time to work through the following activities. They are derived from a workshop in which participants identify the source of energy and passion for their work.

Activity:

*Spend a little time wandering through your memory and reviewing the particularly satisfying times when you have led or participated in an experiential conservation activity. Do that now and then return to reading this paper.*

The process of exploring your energising roles is best done with other people.

Activity:

*Get together with a person that you trust and talk about two or three of those experiences. Aim for increased clarity about the aspect of yourself that was brought to life by the experience(s).*

*Was it a sense of wonder at the beauty/power/destructiveness etc. of nature? Was it an appreciation of the regenerative power of nature? Was it the carer within you? Was it the free spirit within you? Did you have a deeply felt sense of kinship with the other people in the group, with the land, with the flora & fauna... ? Find your own meaning in the events.*

Activity

*Now pretend that the part of you that was touched, excited, energised, centred (or whatever) during those experiences, although still a part of you, is a person in her/himself. How old is this 'person'? What does s/he wear? What is her/his stature, tone of voice, character, personalit... ?*

*If this 'person' was a character in a movie, play, book, myth, fable or some other work of art, who would it be? Give that 'person' a name.*

*You might have found more than one sub-personality, so repeat this process for each one. You might also have a non-human symbol or image for this sub-personality.*

**Nurturing your wellspring:**

Here you have an important part of what makes you 'you'. Let's make sure you have a good relationship with it. Each 'part' of you will need to honour the other and ensure that the other is nurtured.

Activity:

*Pretend that you can talk with that sub-personality where you explore what it needs in order to grow and flourish. Also, tell that sub-personality what you want and need from it. After all, you draw energy, passion and 'aliveness' from its presence and so it serves an important part in your life.*

These activities may seem a bit 'off the wall' to you, but even if you did not carry them out, be prepared to consider that there are specific aspects of your functioning that really get fired up in your work as a conservation officer.

## 6.1 SOME PRACTICAL TIPS

The following imaginary example (Box 3) is intended to illustrate some methods of providing information to groups in ways that are likely to meet group needs.

Let us re-visit Samuel's group (from the section on 'Forming the group'). The group has been together for the first day and the main achievement was getting the project set up. At the start of the group, when Samuel was setting up the time boundaries for the group, he said:

'...From 3.30 to 5 we will have free time. I'll offer informal walks around the peninsula to talk about plants, birds, creepy-crawlies and life in the lake, but

BOX 3. SAMUEL'S APPROACH TO PASSING ON FACTS.

**What Samuel said:**

'OK, the next hour and a half is set aside for recreation and learning about the environment. I'd like to start with an exploration of the possum's world so that we can see more clearly why we need to keep the little critters out of this area. First though, let's find out what you are interested in so that I can plan my future talks and walks to offer what you want. Look around you and let yourself imagine that you could find out more about this area, what lives here and its history. What interests you... ?'

(Group participants talk about their interests — including geology, Maori history, bird life, plants, plant propagation, forest ecology and landforms)

'Well, that's a wide range of interests! What a challenge for one person to cover. I have a good practical knowledge of the Maori names and scientific names of most plants in this area and similarly of the birds. I'm not too hot on fungi or bugs so I'll need some help or some time to check up on them if I get questions. But some of you must know quite a bit about this area, let's not be too shy. Who has some knowledge of the topics that people are interested in?'

(Four of the participants talk about having knowledge of different areas. One participant offers to make use of his mother's knowledge of insects.)

'OK, it seems like the strongest interest is in birds and how they became so scarce or even extinct. In particular, the Huia seems to interest many of you. Then there's quite a lot of interest in finding out what plants you can eat and what are poisonous. After that, there's a whole range of topics that I've written down here.

Let's say the first 3 weeks program will be like this...

Today I'll take you for a tour of possum territory and show you why they need to be eliminated from here to protect both the bird life and the plant life.

Next week I'll show you some bird nesting sites and we'll look at what the birds feed on.

The week after I'll do a quick tour of useful plants and poisonous plants. Then we'll check what topic is next priority.

Those who are interested in visiting the world of the possum, please follow me. Those who have other interests, please stay in groups of four and meet us back at the bus at 4.55.

Now see that dead stick over there. That used to be one of the miracles of this forest. The flowers of the *Alseuosmia* are tiny but their scent is magnificent. But possums love them and have nearly killed them all off. The *Alseuosmia* has berries that used to be an essential part of the diet of birds that were common around here. Now the birds starve. See this Totara tree, the bark is all furry from possum scratches as they climb it to reach their nests...'

(Some time later) 'Spend about ten minutes around this creek bed looking for signs of possums and how they might make life difficult for the original inhabitants. Make sure that you talk with the other people in your group about what you know about the plants and birds, and feel free to ask me questions. I'll stay here on this log.'

**What he was doing:**

Finding out what group participants were interested in.

Making both his own knowledge and the limitations to his knowledge visible. (It's O.K. not to know everything.)

Assessing and acknowledging the knowledge of group participants. Those with knowledge feel affirmed.

Acknowledging that he's heard the requests and that he will respond to them.

Linking the conservation task with the learning event and demonstrating how he will respond to the group's interest.

Linking the possum's feeding habits with the destruction of food sources for birds and hence linking the conservation task with the group members' interest in birds and plants.

Ensuring that group participants value and share their knowledge. This breaks the dependence on the DoC officer's expertise.

that is just for those of you who are interested. Others can swim, sleep or whatever, so long as you stay in groups of at least four people...'

So there is an expectation that he will pass on some knowledge about the flora and fauna. At 3.30 Sam calls a halt to the work and starts his first information session (See Box 3).

The principles illustrated in Box 3, when combined with effective group formation and story telling, make for an enjoyable and powerful learning experience for participants.

## 6.2 COMMENT

To conclude this section, we mention two aspects of your own functioning that can get in the way of being an effective passer of information. Firstly, you may not want to 'big note' yourself in front of groups, and so you may hide some of your knowledge so that you don't look too smart or egotistical. However, if you are reticent about how much you know then you may actually be depriving your group participants of interesting information. If in doubt, ask one of your peers to observe you and give you feedback about how you come across. The second trap is assuming that you do have to know everything. If you get anxious when you can't answer a question, say, about a plant or bird species, you may be disempowering your group. Many conservation groups include members with a great deal of expertise and knowledge. Your skill as group leader is in eliciting useful, timely and relevant information from **both group members and from yourself**. Empowerment for your groups arises, in part, from your encouraging them to value and share their own knowledge.

At a wider level, some volunteers see their voluntary involvement with DoC as a means of keeping in touch with what is going on in the conservation estate in general and, more specifically, with DoC's actions, issues and concerns. For this reason, newsletters for volunteers are important, as are the (constructive) stories that conservation officers tell their group participants about the work of DoC, even when that work is not directly related to the task at hand. Being informed about DoC gives participants a sense of being valued and included. Volunteers see their DoC field trip leaders as being important links with DoC. Being personable, non-bureaucratic and freely talking about DoC's work to people in the group provides important motivation to volunteers. Remember, volunteers really want to get to know you! DoC is still seen by many members of the public to be a powerful and knowledgeable guardian of the conservation estate. Being associated with this guardian provides some people with a sense of empowerment and of belonging.

The informing role of DoC experiential group leaders is useful at the point in the experiential learning cycle where participants are looking for new concepts and ideas to replace ones that have been proven through their experience to be unhelpful or unsuccessful.

In summary, the critical elements of being a successful 'informer' for a group are:

- assessing the motivation and key interest areas of the group members,
- assessing the current knowledge levels,

- being clear about your own interests and limitations to your knowledge,
- encouraging group members to mainly pay attention to the topics in which they are interested,
- encouraging group members to teach each other,
- and, in the case of voluntary conservation project groups, describing how learning about the environment can assist the group in achieving its practical task.

## 7. Coaching - passing on skills and knowledge about carrying out conservation tasks

Coaching is a means of increasing the capacity of individuals to act in useful ways. In volunteer groups, participants often need to learn new practical skills like setting traps, using cutting tools, handling birds etc. These skills have a strong practical physical element and so just talking about what to do is not enough. Coaching is conducted one-to-one, or with a small group, and is a part of the overall process of skills instruction. Many volunteer groups are comprised of adults and adults tend to be more self-conscious about learning new skills than young persons. For this reason coaching - a reasonably 'private' means of learning - is likely to be one of the most effective ways of passing on skills and knowledge about how to carry out conservation tasks.

As was mentioned above, many volunteers are strongly motivated to learn practical skills that enable them to carry out conservation tasks, and so most volunteers will be very receptive to being coached in relevant skills.

### 7.1 SOME PRACTICAL TIPS

Returning again to Samuel Johnston's group, let us see how he coaches a 35 year old man (teacher) to dig post holes. Samuel arrives on foot to meet up with a small group of people who are marking off the positions for the possum-proof fence and digging the post holes. Jake is working on his own in close proximity to the small group. He is visibly struggling, jabbing at the ground with a spade. Sam approaches from a direction within his line of sight. His conversational approach is shown in Box 4.

The person in the example in Box 4 may well be an ideal subject for coaching, but even with resistant people the same principles apply. Coaching is a way for DoC staff to build purposeful relationships with volunteers and to assist volunteers gain useful skills that will assist them with further conservation tasks and sometimes with tasks in everyday life.



BOX 4. SAMUEL'S APPROACH TO COACHING AN INDIVIDUAL.

**What is said:**

Sam says quietly 'Jake, that ground looks mighty hard!'

Jake replies 'You're telling me! I thought that winter would have softened the ground. Haven't we got machines to do this with?'

Sam says: 'We can use post hole diggers in other areas but here we need to avoid root damage as much as possible so hand digging is best. We can see when we reach a large root. That's the trouble with you younger generation, you've forgotten how to use a good old fashioned spade, or are you in practice with a spade?'

Jake replies 'Look mate, I hate to admit it, but this clay seems to have me beat. I'm used to sandy soil. It looks like I could use a few clues.'

Sam: 'OK, wet clay is about as tough as you can get. Tell me or show me how you were approaching the problem and I'll add some ideas on how to adapt your style to clay soils.'

(Jake continues to jab at the clay surface and then gives up, looking to Sam for help).

Sam: 'OK, you're holding the spade well but sand cuts easily. This stuff is very dense and so you need to put your body weight right over the top of the spade. That's one reason why we insisted on boots with heavy soles.'  
(Sam demonstrates the stance, then wiggles the spade as he stands on it.)

Sam: 'The other thing about clay is that it's incredibly sticky, so you have to keep breaking contact between the blade of the spade and the soil — like this...Try it'

Jake copies Sam's stance and motions. 'Much better. Thanks mate, I'll have a go at this for a while and maybe you could check back with me in a while.'

**What Sam is doing & what Jake responds to:**

Sam: Acknowledging Jake's difficulty.

Sam sets the rationale for using the spade and jokingly checks Jake's need for coaching.

Jake acknowledges the need for coaching, but saves face by talking about clay soil. There is now agreement for coaching to start.

Acknowledges Jake's existing (perceived) skill and asks Jake to provide him with an initial assessment of Jake's skill level in this environment.

Acknowledges what Jake is doing well and adds the new requirement for clay soils. Enables Jake to 'save face.'

Demonstrating the new skill and describing the rationale as he goes.

## 7.2 COMMENT

Again, as with the earlier skill of information transfer, there are aspects of your own functioning that may get in the way of your being an effective coach. Sometimes, particularly with inexperienced volunteers, being leader can become a bit of a ego trip — with your 'guru-like' status affirmed and depended on by those around you.

But beware! This is just a phase in the experiential learning cycle but can be difficult to pass up as group members become more experienced during a project and inclined to do their own thing. Less experienced leaders have been known to sabotage the skill mastering efforts of the group so that participants remain dependent on them as leaders.

In summary, the experiential learning cycle calls for participants to develop new ways of acting. When participants have identified the need for new skills, effective coaching is a powerful means of meeting that need. Effective coaching

also links with participants' motivation to take part in experiential conservation activities and can be used to build strong relationships between leaders and participants.

Coaching can be broken down into a number of steps:

- Gaining agreement to proceed — based on a common goal or purpose.
- Assessing the learner's competence and learning needs.
- Providing new information.
- Allowing time for assimilation and practice.
- Starting the learning cycle again.

Skillfully carrying out each of these steps increases the likelihood that participants will have a satisfying experience, learning new skills in the context of experiential conservation activities.

## 8. Conclusion

Important skills for effective leadership of voluntary conservation programs include telling important stories about your own experience of successes and inspiring events so that participants feel linked to you and hopeful about the possibility that they too might make a difference. These stories are all the more powerful in the context of a coherent group that is formed around a clear purpose, and so your skills at forming groups are vital. Once the group is assembled and begins its tasks, the way in which you respond to issues raised in the group signals to group members how responsive you are and how much you can be trusted to respect their needs. Your ability to respond appropriately to group members is reinforced by personal modelling, where you demonstrate behaviours that you would like them to adopt. In particular, enthusiasm and commitment to the conservation ethic and to conservation tasks carries a lot of weight for participants in volunteer groups. The commitment and motivation of volunteers to work without pay is increased by your acting as a facilitator for their learning about the environment. This facilitator role requires special skills, particularly if you want to empower other group members to share their knowledge and enthusiasm. In a more practical vein, passing on timely and relevant information and skills to volunteers not only helps them to conduct conservation tasks as a part of the volunteer project, but also enables them to act in a more environmentally responsible way in other settings.

## 9. References and Recommended reading

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*This book is the best book that Martin has come across that deals in a practical way with what happens in groups, what group leadership is, how the dynamics of power work in groups and organisations. As well, it has sections on basic group dynamics, dealing with conflict in groups, and team development.*

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*This is an excellent and comprehensive book on interpersonal communication in the context of work, family and friendships. There are sections on trust, communication, feelings, listening, conflict and barriers to interpersonal effectiveness. A must.*

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## 10. Acknowledgements

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