

Survivor: Practicing Group Deliberation & Decision Making

Overview

In this team-building activity, students will work together to deliberate and come to a consensus on a matter involving their survival during a shipwreck. Upon completion of the activity, students will examine what characteristics are needed to comprise a successful group.

Grades

4-12

Activity Type

Small Group

Whole class

Materials

- A list of “survival items” for each group that includes all of the following:
 - Sextant
 - Shaving mirror
 - Mosquito netting
 - 5 gallon jug of water
 - 25 Military MREs (Meals Ready to Eat)
 - Maps of the Pacific Ocean
 - A floating seat cushion
 - 2 gallon can of oil
 - A small transistor radio
 - 20 square feet of opaque plastic sheeting
 - Shark repellent
 - A bottle of 160 proof whiskey
 - 15 feet of nylon rope
 - 3 boxes of chocolate bars
 - A fishing kit

Duration

30 minutes

Procedure

1. Divide students into as many groups as you wish. Each group should have at least 2 people.
2. Describe the following scenario to the students:

You and your group chartered a yacht to travel from Los Angeles to Tahiti, a small island in the South Pacific. Because none of you have any previous sailing experience for this kind of trip, your

group hired an experienced captain and a two-person crew. As you were sailing through the Southern Pacific Ocean a fire broke out and most of the yacht and its contents were destroyed. Sadly, the captain and crew were lost at sea while heroically trying to fight the fire. Your group, however, managed to stay aboard the slowly sinking vessel. All you know is that you are stranded somewhere in the South Pacific.

3. Give each group a list of items (see above). Also inform them that they have salvaged a four person rubber life raft, 3 boxes of waterproof matches, and an old newspaper.
4. Tell each group that their chances of survival depend upon their ability to rank the above 15 items in their relative order of importance.
5. Give groups 15 minutes to rank the items. Tell them they must come to a consensus on the order.
6. After 15 minutes have each group share their rankings and their reasoning.
7. When each group has shared, tell them how US Coastguard personnel ranked the items and compare lists:

According to the experts, the basic supplies needed when a person is stranded mid-ocean are articles to attract attention and articles to aid survival until rescue arrives. Items for navigation are of little importance since you do not know where you are, and even if you did, the small life raft would be incapable of storing enough food and water to survive until reaching land. Without signaling devices there is almost no chance of being spotted and ultimately rescued. The ranking and reasoning of the US Coastguard is as follows:

- Shaving mirror: Critical for signaling
- 2 gallon can of oil: Critical for signaling since oil can float on water while burning
- 5 gallon can of water: Necessary to stay hydrated until rescue arrives
- 25 Military MREs: Basic food intake
- 20 square feet of opaque plastic: Can be utilized to collect rain water and provide shelter from the elements
- 3 boxes of chocolate bars: Reserve food supply
- Fishing kit: Ranked lower than chocolate because chocolate is a “sure thing,” while you may be unable to catch fish
- 15 feet of nylon rope: Could be used to lash people and items together in the event of a strong storm or ocean surge
- Floating seat cushion: A life preserver in case someone is pulled overboard
- Shark repellent: Enough said
- Bottle of whiskey: Contains 80% alcohol which can be used to treat wounds as an antiseptic
- Small transistor radio: Of little use without a transmitter
- Maps of the Pacific Ocean: Worthless without navigation equipment. It does not matter where you are; what matters is where the rescuers are
- Mosquito netting: There are no mosquitoes in the mid-Pacific Ocean. As for fishing, it would be of little use since it would not hold the larger fish that may approach the boat
- Sextant: Useless without relevant tables and chronometer

8. Allow students to respond to the Coastguards ranking, then ask students to consider what other key components would be necessary for survival, beyond the few materials the group salvaged. Lead the group into a discussion of what characteristics of the group itself (i.e. personalities) would be necessary for survival, noting student thoughts on the board (i.e. everyone would need to be strong and brave; each person would need to participate in our survival; it would be important for everyone to remain positive and level-headed; etc.)

9. Next, shift the focus from the survivor scenario to the decision making process each group experienced during the activity. Encourage students to self-reflect by discussing:
 - How did your group interact during the activity? What was the overall group climate?
 - How would you describe your participation today? What did you observe in other group members?
 - Did anyone emerge as a leader? Explain.
 - What were the successes and weaknesses of your group's work?
 - What could be done differently or more effectively in your group next time?
 - Was it a successful learning adventure? Why?
 - How did it go for you personally? Why?
 - What can be rewarding about working as a group? What can be difficult about working as a group?
 - What characteristics do you think is most important for our group to have in order to ensure success?