Screening the Whole Applicant

The importance of motivational interviews in the admissions process
Our Conversation

- Applicant cycle
- Screening spectrum
- **One approach to improving course quality and safety through screening**
- Challenges and benefits of an interview based approach
- Tips for success in the interview process
  - goal setting
  - asking good questions and listening
  - considerations for discussing delicate issues
- What to do with the information
- Student example
- When incidents occur
- Party time!
Applicant Cycle

• Public information about the program
• Declaration of interest
• Pre-Screening
• Physical or Digital Application
• Screening
• Admission or Recommendation
• Attendance
Screening Spectrum

- Basic information and waiver
- Detailed application and waiver
- Detailed application, waiver and medical clearance
- Detailed application, waiver and as-needed follow up
- Detailed application, waiver and routine follow up
- More?
COBS Screening Philosophy

• To have the right person, on the right course, at the right time.

• First step in the safety process

• Not about keeping people out but setting people up
An Ideal COBS Student

• Informed
• Interested
• Physically fit
• Open about medical & emotional challenges

Acknowledge what your program doesn’t do well
Why Interview?

• It’s time consuming
• It’s expensive
• It’s awkward
• It’s training intensive
• It doesn’t guarantee truth
• School hours are office hours
• Students can get prepared another way

The best way for us to filter and support
Oversaturated with Information

- Application – 8 PAGES
- Waiver – 2 PAGES
- Supplemental forms – 23, ranging from 1-4 PAGES
- Admissions and Cancellation Policies – 4 PAGES
- FAQ: Attending Outward Bound – 5 PAGES
- Required Clothing – 7 PAGES
- Course Description & Travel Info – 6 PAGES
- Boot description – 4 PAGES

= TOO MANY PAGES
We talk to every person who heads out into the field with us

- Decreased motivational and behavioral early departures.

- Increased student success rate.

- **Built trust** with parents. *Apprehensive parents were more comfortable working with our program.*

- **Built trust** with participants. *Increased confidence going in.*

- **Built trust** with field staff. *Increased student buy-in students allowed staff to develop a more cohesive group.*
Setting the tone for course & for the interview

• **Who** are you talking to? *Have you tailored your approach to match their age and experience?*

• **Why** are you talking with them? *Do your questions serve a purpose?*

• **How** are you talking with them? *Is your goal to build confidence or set boundaries?*

• **What** are you going to do with it? *How are you communicating information to field staff?*
Asking Good Questions

- Who are you talking to?
- Develop goals for your call. What do you want to learn and what do you want to provide?
- Frame the conversation
- Avoid repeating the application unless you have concerns about the answers or who completed it – this style works best when it is a unique touch point
- Ask open ended questions and steer the conversation
- Slip in program based or incident specific info
Learning How to Listen

• Ask open ended questions and guide
• Leave ample time for them to answer and talk
• Positive reinforcement (using their language, affirming their answers)
• Be willing to offer examples or appropriate personal stories
• Try not asking your questions outright but steering them toward the concept
Getting them to the point: Motivation

Discuss low motivation in a familiar context - sports, clubs, homework, chores, video games.

Learn:
• How they recognize it
• What they usually do
• What they want to do
• Plan for course
• Be honest about what you do not know
• Come in with curiosity
• Never convey shock
• Use their language to ask clarifying questions
• Have they ever explained it to a friend?
• Follow up with a parent
• Follow up with someone outside the home
• Be open to calling back another time
Goals when there are “no questions”

• Check to see if they have the basics:
  – where they are going
  – what they are doing
  – why they want to be there

• Allow for questions from participants and parents
  – is there anything in particular that would be helpful for our staff to know when working with _____
  – what are you hoping they come away with?

• Check on gear and prep

• Add any program / population / incident based questions

• Share the excitement
Incident Based Questions

What do you think you are getting into?
Incident trend: students arriving with no concepts of course
Incident trend: oppositional students on course due to family drama

Wow you’re super tall. Have you grown a bunch recently?
Incident trend: Osgood-Schlatters

Have you ever been to high altitude or experienced extreme heat?
Incident trend: Acute Mountain Sickness or heatstroke, often with a history
Incident trend: serious hangovers in 21+ population
Now what?

How do you synthesize and share what you have?

Think carefully about how you share information

– Knowing everything about someone before you meet them can lead to prejudgment
– Once you write it down it is admissible in court

Some staff want it all
Others don’t want any

Medical/motivational overview
Optional Detail
30 Day Mountaineering Student

- 23 year old male
- 6' 245lbs
- 3rd course selection
- Counseling for depression
- Current Probation
When things went wrong

• Debriefs with parents were easier due to the pre-established relationship

• There was extensive documentation to reference

• We knew that we had talked with everyone

• Field staff had increased confidence in administration
Outcomes of an Interview Approach

• Fewer motivational and behavioral early departures
• Lower rates of undisclosed issues
• More students arriving with appropriate gear
• More students arriving with high buy-in
• Strengthened relationships with field staff
• Improved platform for incident response
• Improved platform for connecting with alumni

For COBS, these outcomes have been worth the investment
We’re done YAY!