Lessons from Leaving
An examination of early dismissal / departure data from Outward Bound California
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INTRODUCTION
Having a student depart course early can have a significant and negative impact on an Outdoor Adventure Experience (OAE) for a variety of reasons. The ripple effects from a student departure can affect other participant experiences, intended learning outcomes, itinerary objectives, and practitioner stress levels. In addition to the programmatic costs of early departure, there are often significant financial implications and resource burdens.

If possible, prevention strategies, beginning with screening prior to course, can have serious benefits towards successful completion. If signs or symptoms manifest during the OAE, instructors will want to employ strategies to mitigate behaviors or motivations that may lead to a departure or dismissal. Organizationally, having clear policies and procedures regarding early dismissals will have a positive effect on instructors that are weighing the decision of dismissing a student due to inappropriate behaviors or motivational decline. This study sought to investigate potential patterns, trends, and solutions to this underrepresented issue in the OAE field.

FINDINGS / RESULTS

3 Ways that Increase likelihood for behavioral and motivational issues
1. Removing students from normal coping environments
2. Removing students from social support systems
3. Pushing too far or too fast

3 Ways that relieve anxiety and stress symptoms on expeditions
1. Provide opportunities to expand comfort zones / capacity to manage anxiety.
2. Provide alternate social / support systems that may be more conducive to healthy coping strategies.
3. Provide perspective for real or perceived threats

Our survey found the leading cause of early departures is...

Behavior and Motivation

Average cost of an early departure = $____

DISCUSSION
Motivational and behavior issues continue to dominate the issue of early dismissals from OAE experiences with a combined percentage of 44.4%. Building on the work of Davidson and Ottley (2014), the OAE industry should continue to evaluate and modify the way it trains instructors to deal with behavioral and motivational issues. Further, better tracking and documentation of motivational issues needs to be undertaken to increase understanding of this issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS
1. Reevaluate and restructure how OAE programs are training instructors to handle behavioral and motivational issues.
2. Simulate behavioral and motivational responses during pre season trainings.
3. Consider an industry wide training, similar to wilderness medicine, type of certification in behavior management.

METHODS
Early departure data was collected from the Outward Bound Incident Reporting System (IRS) over a two year period and categorized based on the primary reason for dismissal. If multiple effects contributed to the departure / dismissal, the incident was grouped into the primary or first event.

ACTION ITEMS
1. Identify significant factors to consider when an early dismissal decision is required on course.
2. Examine effects of dismissed students from course for behavioral reasons.
3. Explore behavioral intervention strategies that are available prior to dismissing student (s) from course.

REFERENCES
3. OBCA Anxiety Presentation from Student Management Skills Training 2015 - Trainer: BJ Allen

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