

Mountain School Tech Tips: Some Tips for Group Management

Group management is one of the most important things you can do as a trip leader and some proactive group management strategies will make your trip easier for you and more enjoyable for the entire group. Below is a collection of strategies you can use to keep your trip running smoothly. Pick and choose between them. If there are strategies you like, use them, if not, feel free to ignore them.

In no particular order:

- At the start of your tour, get together and talk about the plan for the day (use your map to illustrate the route), the potential problem areas (such as avalanche slopes) that you may encounter, and how you will collectively manage your group throughout the upcoming tour.
- Make it a practice to set "regroup locations" for each leg of your journey from the time you leave the trail-head to the time you return to the vehicles. Most trips can easily be divided into legs that make some kind of rational sense, such as the first trail junction, the pass at the head of the valley, the end of the logging road, etc. Make sure everyone knows where the next regroup location is and that they need to stop there and wait for the **entire** group. Regroup locations should be frequent, say every 10 to 20 minutes of travel time. Regrouping once every hour, isn't a group management strategy, it's a disaster plan. Choose safe locations away from avalanche slopes, terrain traps, and overhead hazards for regrouping.
- If need be, review the map with everyone at each regroup location to ensure you remain on track.
- Assign a tail gunner for each leg of the journey - one member of your group who brings up the rear. Ideally, this should be someone with a reasonable level of experience. The weakest member of your group should **not** be the tail gunner.
- Agree as a group to keep the person immediately behind you in sight. If your immediate follower on the trail is lagging, slow your pace to keep them in sight. If everyone in the group periodically checks to make sure they can see the person behind them, it is impossible for the group to get separated.
- Pay particular attention to the people who seem to be struggling. These are the people who are constantly lagging behind, struggling to keep up, falling down frequently, etc. Don't be afraid to ask them how they are managing or if they are getting tired. Better to find out before you descend 800 metres that they are near exhaustion than when you are facing a long uphill climb to return home.
- When skiing downhill through the trees, use the buddy system. Each person should have a buddy to ski with and is responsible for keeping their buddy in sight at all times. Don't forget to set a regroup location for getting the entire group back together at the end of the run. This might be the bottom of the run for short runs; for longer runs, try and find some obvious regroup location part way down. Perhaps there is an open area, a transition to logged forest, or a short flat spot or bench that can be used as a terrain

marker for regrouping. Use your map to help you identify these locations if you cannot see the entire slope. If there are no obvious regroup locations on the way down, regroup every one to two hundred vertical metres or 10 to 20 turns.

- If the terrain and snowpack conditions warrant one at a time travel, make sure everyone in the group is in agreement on which slopes you will cross/ski one at a time, what the spacing between skiers should be, and where the group can regroup safely. Post a look-out to watch each person cross/descend the slope, so that you have a “last seen point” in case of avalanche. Most importantly, don't abandon the last person to ski down or across a slope. It's disturbing, to say the least, if you are the last person in your group to cross/descend a slope to get to the other side and find that everyone else has left.
- If there are particular hazards on the route, for example, terrain traps, cliff bands, convex rolls, or thin, rocky areas, that skiers should avoid when descending, ascending or crossing a slope, make sure everyone knows where those areas are and what options exist to avoid them.

Whatever strategy(s) you choose to implement, make sure everyone in the group has heard, understands and agrees with the plan. This may mean asking everyone to stop talking and listen to you for a while. Don't be afraid to speak up!