Recalling a Personal Best Leadership Experience

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Describe the Situation –

**Where** did it take place?

At the Grosse Pointe Club sailing center in Michigan

**When** did it take place?

This took place during the summer of 2015 June through August past halfway through the sailing season in July.

What was **your specific** role?

I started as the learn-to-sail instructor for opti dingy sailboats for the younger ages 6 through 12 and became one of the head coaches by the end of the season coaching all age groups 6 through 15 and competitive racing skills.

What were the **actual results**?

The actual results are that the program still went on despite 50% of the staff quitting, and we finished out the season with a bunch of kids that were confident in their sailing skills and developed a love for the sport.

Why was this situation **important?** If you initiated the experience, why did you do it? What motivated you?

This situation was important because it impacted the lives of 20 kids learning about a challenging sport where skills are gained of facing fears and ambiguous weather conditions while developing a competitive edge. Owen and I took over the program because there were no other options. What motivated me was the devotion and enthusiasm that all the sailors had emerged over the timeline of the summer. Also, my job was fun and exciting!

What were your **hopes and dreams** in accomplishing this?

In accomplishing this position as a sailing role model, my hope would be that the kids would feel competent in their gained knowledge of sailing. My dream is to prolong their love for the sport even after the summer ends and to still challenge themselves to learn more in the future.

How would you describe your **emotions** at the beginning of the situation?

My emotions at the beginning of this whole incident were fearful that I would screw up; however, I realized that I already had the trust and respect of the other coach and all the sailors I coached. I was faced with ambiguity of what I would lead in coaching each day, but took the lessons day by day with where I thought improvement was needed. I also felt that I was under qualified for the role because I know my knowledge of competitive sailing was lacking in comparison to the coaches that resigned.

What **actions** did you take that contributed to the team’s and the situation’s success. In the space below, describe your behaviors as a leader. What things did you do to create momentum so extraordinary things were accomplished? Be specific.

I realized that the competitive sailors had already learned so much from their past racing mistakes that we could improve upon what they already learned. I did additional research at home and asked the other coach, so that I could further help. Another action that I took was being open-minded to new drills and techniques while collaborating with the other coach of how to ensure that the sailors were still challenging themselves.

Did you face any major **challenges or setbacks**? How did you and the team overcome them?

One major challenge or setback that occurred was a lack of surveillance available for all the sailors. The equipment allotted to us by the club to coach was not always properly functioning to coach from the water, so I improvised and used a kayak or paddle board to be sure that I could still appropriately coach closer to the opti sailors.

When there was a regatta coming up, all the sailors would have to come to the alternate racing location for the safety of the sailors towing their boats. This was not efficient for the sailors that did not race at the regatta since they would not have a lesson that day, but it was the only way to promise safety for those towing behind the other coach while he was driving so there was a second set of eyes. To compensate for the learn-to-sail lack of lesson they would learn how to tie new nautical knots while learning more racing techniques from watching.

What were the **guiding principles** that governed your actions? How did you **lead by example**?

What helped to direct my actions as a newer coach was that I signed up to impact these kids’ lives and wanted to teach them as much as I could about sailing. I lead by example by always being confident in myself, so that the class wouldn’t doubt their sailing decisions. I wanted them to learn from their mistakes and ask themselves why they made that decision they made and how it could have been better. For example, when they sailed into the harbor, Benjamin, 6 year old, always wanted me to catch his boat as he sailed to shore, but I forced him to learn how to stop his own boat by heading into wind and knowing where the wind was coming from before it was too late. Lots of my class was fearful of making the wrong choices but I always made them feel comfortable because they were safe wearing lifejackets and that the worst consequence was that they would get wet and fall in the water.

What did you **learn** about leadership style and practice from this personal best experience?

I learned that I can work under pressure and just have take breaths and look at the bigger picture of what is going on. I practiced taking steps and counting the victories no matter how small they were. I learned that I needed to have an open-mind and adapt to what the class needed to improve on their sailing skills.

If you were going to teach a class about leadership based on this experience, what **lessons** would you share about being an effective leader?

The lessons I would share about being an effective leader is to stay positive and optimistic. Don’t blame problems on other people, take action of what you can and offer insights where you can to help the team in different situations as they present themselves.