

Cards vs. Capable?

Are you taking the course to get a card or to get capable? If you are taking it to get a card, that's unfortunate, because likely you have set yourself up for a painful day of obligation. Even worse if the instructor teaching you has the same goal in mind (and worse - has told you that!). It will likely be an experience neither will ever want to share again and attaining the pre-stated goal of "getting it over with to get out early" will be welcomed!

WHY? I ask that question at the beginning of every course I facilitate. Why are you here? (In the room, not on earth... ☺) The answer I normally get in certain realms is "to get a card" or "because work sent me". Unfortunately the workplace regulatory world has set society up to collect cards and some training agencies have jumped right on board to collect cash to deliver the cards. On-line "skill based" training is a fine example of this. You can collect knowledge on-line for sure, but a skill is an action, which involves doing – moving the body and demonstrating you have ability. The on-line option will **not** enable a student the capacity to competently acquire a skill. If you think so, somebody has sold you well into fooling yourself. It no doubt will meet your time and budgetary limitations, but if the skill is a safety based ability, your perceived vs. actual motor skill may catch-up to you in a very implicating way.....

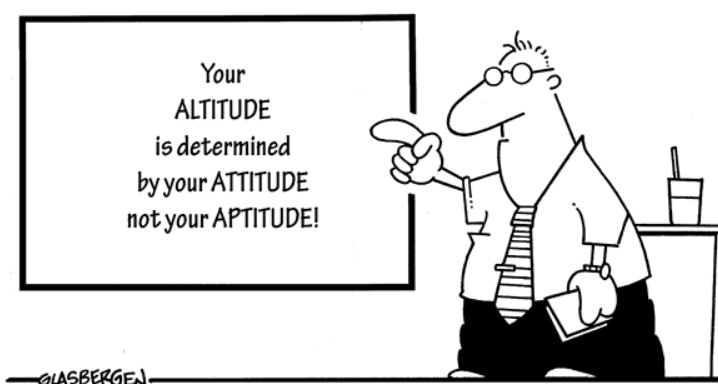
If facilitated correctly, your course should not only get you your card, but make you more capable. If facilitated correctly, your course should make you feel confident with the information, complete as an experience and by the end of the day wanting more than just that card. If skill based it should empower you to act vs. stymie you with an overload of "what to do's". Procedures are only of use if you are using them everyday of your existence or are able to click off a cue card while you work through them. If the adult is empowered with the "why's" they can overcome a ton of "how's". If the facilitator hasn't the capacity to understand and explain the whys of the realm they choose to educate in, they are doing a load of disservice to the information, the discipline and most importantly the capability collector – you. The text and skill videos are all nice, but a "capability" building facilitator will likely stick them in the corner for post program reference or homework! The majority of participants showing up to a wilderness program have more motives for their hands than card collecting. There are real outcomes from only "perceived abilities" when you are in the back forty and capability collecting is essential, especially if you are responsible for others.

Another interesting question is "Why do we educate?" Numerous responses result, but ultimately it boils down to changing behaviour. Changing an attitude and imparting a new ability through knowledge and skill. A poorly facilitated session leaves you connecting the poor experience with the information. The information is usually pretty good, but the goal of enhancing your awareness and abilities (changing your behaviour) does not result and often leaves you wondering more than understanding. If facilitated correctly your program should motivate you to question the why's and especially in wilderness education, make you self-accountable. Numerous true wilderness users know that deferral is not an easy option because they are not in the "golden hour". So when they take a wilderness first aid course or a paddling course, they are "super-absorbent" capability collectors and want to know everything possible to ensure they make the best decision possible. What do if their pal swells up like a puffer fish on island "x" or can I get back in the boat if I flip out? Allot I've taught have had a close call (experienced a shot across their bow) and will not stop asking until the facilitator enables or empowers them to prevent it from happening again and confirms "what to do if...?" Proper facilitation holds great responsibility to ensure best practices (standards and guidelines) are imparted "affectively" through experiential education techniques. If you "affectively" teach someone, you change their behaviour, if you "effectively" teach someone you meet your curriculum or what page X says in the book. Which would you prefer as a learner?

Ask anyone about something they will always remember, the reason that is so is because they were “affected” by it.

First Aid / First Response courses are information loaded, but helping somebody is a physical action – an interpersonal skill, it should result in a confidence and desire to act. Choosing a boat and paddle takes some knowledge given the environment you want to paddle in – you can do that on-line. Making the boat move safely and effectively without getting baptized entering or exiting is clearly a skill. Having a patient vomit (really just oatmeal) on you in a scenario or getting dunked from a boat into the Atlantic is a reality you cannot truly be “affected” by unless you experience it. Hence the world of experiential education... power and confidence through doing, discussing, re-doing and affirming.

The amount of verbal resumes I have heard in my role as Training Officer for the past 10 years with our local Search and Rescue team and in general when speaking with “wilderness experienced” interested new members would have you believe most society is one step away from rescue specialist. The SAR program is strictly outcome (capability) based and regardless of your previous skills, we start you from scratch in the training program. Those wilderness practitioners who speak humbly about the things they have done and not list their various cards often result in being the best responders. They are usually excited about taking the various training courses too. We call that the “attitude vs. aptitude” paradigm, but that is fuel for another article. What is your “current” practice – what is your proven confident capability today? That is the best question you can ask yourself, from there you can grow to become a lot more capable and ultimately safer.



No one will ever forget that fateful day when the motivation coach spoke to the young student pilots.

So I submit to you – taking a course to get a card is an unfortunate experience, for both you and the instructor. Taking a course to become more capable will put the responsibility of getting educated on you and you will require those teaching you to meet your needs, not just the requirements on the pieces of paper in front of you. If you are a user of the information, especially in the outdoors, getting bang for your valuable time and energy will ultimately make you more capable of returning to trek / paddle again another day.

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