

ADR Skill of the Month

Peddle to Your Mettle

I recently returned from a summer cycling trip through The Highlands of Ireland. As best I can figure it, "Highlands" is Irish for "The steepest, wettest, most exhausting hills an amateur cyclist should ever attempt..." I had never been on an organized cycling trip, so I had no idea what to expect. All I knew is that there were 14 individuals from throughout Europe and the U.S. sharing the experience; that we would be riding about 60 miles a day through the Emerald Isle; and that the trek was described as, "Go at your own pace and there is always a back-up van if you need it."

Having 60 miles a day of quality thinking time, and always open to spotting a useful analogy, I was soon reminded how this trip could be compared to working with a student or with groups and I.E.P. teams that don't seem to be on the same page.

I started out determined to really push myself and complete every mile of the bike route, and certainly the beautiful countryside added great inspiration for that goal. Yet I quickly learned that Ireland's pristine air and stunning greenery are largely due to very wet and windy weather. The rain and gusts did not let up for the first three days, and it just wasn't fun churning up and down those hills being soaked and cold. I also wasn't prepared with waterproof clothes. (Hey, I am a Southern California beach cruiser dude!) So for half of two days I rode in the back-up van, all the more humbled because only one other person joined me in retreat while the others soldiered on.

Still, the van driver happily picked me up and no one made me feel bad about needing a little help. Also, I had put out to the group at the outset that maps are not my thing. So everyone was cheerfully willing to wait for me at turns so I wouldn't get lost. Then there were some sunny days (well, lets not exaggerate; there were less overcast days) when the heat and the hills were exceedingly challenging for me but I learned how to change my gears to make peddling less intense. There were even times I needed to get off the bike altogether and push it, sometimes with assistance from the van driver or another person holding my map. It was often slow-going but I knew if I kept chugging along, there would be flatland soon and, best of all, there were downhill stretches when I could coast, enjoying the wind on my back and the fabulous scenery ahead.

Long story short (and analogies hopefully clear): I used various levels of accommodation, and was made to feel comfortable about whatever support I needed. I am grateful for the van, for the group, for everyone's patience, skill and encouragement. I'm also proud that I found the humility to check my ego back at those first highlands and accepted that I could not do it alone. Maybe I didn't technically cycle the entire route, but I nonetheless completed the course, as well as fulfilled a satisfying and altogether wonderful adventure.

Marc Purchin, Director of ADR Services

Suggested Tip on Practicing This Skill

1. Think of some examples (analogies) when you just have to push yourself; when you have to keep peddling.
2. Think about a team you are part of, and identify the strengths of each team member. Then say it out loud to everyone on the team.
3. What accommodation or support do you need? What is your equivalent to a back-up van or that special someone waiting up the hill to point you in the right direction?

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