

## **Anderson, S. (1988). Thoughts on Stress Training in the African Context.**

### **OVERVIEW**

The author has worked for several years with youth and adults in [Sudan](#) and other African countries. This paper explores the "whys" and "hows" of adventure programs or (stress camping) in the African context.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Western world has, over the past fifty years, found a need for what they have called "stress camping" or "wilderness camping." Outward Bound has stimulated programs for youth, educators, and executives. Many organizations have adapted its techniques. Most of these programs teach some kind of survival skills while focusing on an individual's character and group interactions.

### **TRADITIONAL AFRICAN HERITAGE**

The author of this paper describes

components in traditional African culture that are similar to stress camping. It is well known that traditional life in Africa required many outdoor skills such as using spears, bows, arrows, hoes, finding wild animals, water, medicines, taking care of cows, goats, gardens, building homes, traps and memorials to one's ancestors.

From these observations, Anderson further comments:

But only occasionally do people think of the non-tangible skills and attributes traditional life developed—such as unselfishness, self-confidence, pride in one's identity, group sensitivity, cooperation, motivating others, accepting others, communications skills, perseverance, endurance, and self-control. It is this second group of skills...upon which I would like to focus.

### **DESCRIPTION OF SPECIFIC SKILL AREAS**

- **Independent thinking.** In an interdependent environment, it promotes values including self-confidence, selflessness, and

cooperation. In contrast, modern schools generally encourage the opposite—dependent thinking in an independent setting.

- **Self-sacrifice.** Traditional life espouses personal—often physical—sacrifice for the benefit of the group. Risks and pains from the sacrifice were tangible fears facing the boys and girls—but they were expected to confront and overcome these fears, for the good of the group. On the contrary, the physical pain and risks associated with modern schooling (failing or rejection from entrance into a desired school) are minimal. Additionally, consequences from academic risks are felt in the distant future, so they may not immediately affect the family and community.
- **Relationships.** Africans are noted for expressing more sensitivity and group interaction skills than Europeans. The author claims this to be learned—not innate—behavior. He points to requirements of traditional life that built such skills.
- **Appreciation of nature.** To the author, "...because time was spent mainly in God's created nature rather than man's created towns and buildings, (youth in traditional life) also had more understanding and wonder of...creation, of the questions of the life-death cycle, and often a greater understanding and awareness of the Creator himself."

Perceptive African leaders and youth workers lament the loss of critical traditional values through modernization and urbanization. Western youth leaders can appreciate how stress camping or training can renew values and attributes once found in now-eroding community activities, initiation rights, and family traditions.

This article describes how positive attributes of character may be enhanced through stress training within the African context. The writer describes specific activities that fulfill the stated and unspoken objectives found in this kind of leadership training.

Aspects of this training include group problem solving, facing physical hardship for the benefit of the group, experiencing creation in nature, and developing sensitivity and group interaction skills. The role of non-directive leadership is explained and illustrated. Also discussed are the importance of debriefing discussions and solo experiences.

The paper suggests specific and practical ways to incorporate elements of

stress training into teenage programs of the African church. Short and extended rural and urban examples of trips and projects producing experiential education are offered.

The author concludes, "The purpose of this paper is to encourage African church leaders to consider how principles of stress training may be adapted to help youth leaders develop maturity in their youth. This paper is just to start people thinking about this particular kind of training...I believe the concept of stress training is deep in African blood." The western or developed world needs to see how many principles of traditional society are helpful in bringing about human community and maturity.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

- There is not a parallel word for "camping" in the African context. There are reasons, in fact, to suspect the term. Perhaps "adventure programs" is a better designation. Modern young people need to experience new and challenging environments with age-mates. There, they can focus on critical skills and attitudes needed for nation-building and leadership. In a context of nature and such programs, faith decisions are often made and new attitudes and skills encouraged.
- A study should be conducted to compare the responses of urban and rural youth to such programs.
- Dr. Gatherer, a Nairobi psychiatrist, describes how modern African youth are led to sexual promiscuity to prove their manhood and womanhood and to fill their need for excitement and adventure. He emphasizes the need of such adventure programs to fill this void.
- An understanding of "stress leadership training" must take its place along with other basics of African youth work such as "relational ministry," the use of music and drama, study and sharing, prayer and worship, outreach, and service projects.

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