



Leadership as Expedition

Mark Haeussler, CEO

One of the endeavors I delight in is leading Land Rover expeditions, where I scout the trail, manage boulders, and navigate the trail. Some drivers are experienced, and many are novices to taking their trucks onto rough terrain. After twenty years of being an expedition leader, I have learned much and recognize many metaphors that illustrate leadership.

The rugged American Southwest is a treasure trove of amazing backcountry that is accessible only with the right truck and a competent driver. Even as we enjoy the scenery of slot canyons to alpine mountain passes, there needs to be care in not getting stuck, staying together so no one misses a turn, and in taking care of our equipment.

One of the trickiest balances is sensing how much time I spend looking forward at the obstacles and turns ahead versus how much time I spend looking backward at the rest of the group. As I began leading expeditions, I would sometimes spend too much time looking back to make sure the group was doing well. Only when I was finding myself busy looking backwards would I create a challenge for myself – such as making a loud scraping sound as a boulder struck the undercarriage of my truck. Where was my attention! That grinding sound does not engender confidence in those following me.

I wondered to myself, “How much is enough?” Then it struck me: maybe automotive engineers might answer that for me. I scrounged for a tape measure, and measured the surface area of the windshield of my Rover. I then measured the area of the three mirrors, the one attached to the windshield and the two side mirrors. Of the total surface area, the windshield accounted for 94% of the surface area, and the mirrors represented only 6%. I was surprised. I started paying attention myself to how I led expeditions and applying that ratio of attention to my expedition leadership. To my surprise, that ratio works very well: 94% forward, 6% backward. That said, I also recognized as time well spent for newer drivers when we encountered very tough obstacles, was stopping, getting out of my truck, and guiding people over the tough obstacles, as it taught them enough to master future obstacles by mid-day the first day. The more the drivers could self-manage over rough spots, the more delighted they were with the expedition, and the less time I needed those mirrors.



In your own leadership, as you lead your teams, how much of your focus is forward, and how much of it is looking in the rear-view mirrors, caretaking those behind you? How much can you rely on those in your expedition to radio when they find encounter a significant challenge? Certainly, we do not want to lose others, but we also do not want an environment where there is a great deal of attention to the ground already covered. When others in the expedition get overly focused on using their own rear-view mirrors, what more can you do to help them reorient to the large windshield that is looking into the future? Who are new and need some coaching early in the expedition? And what are those few, significant obstacles, where you may really need to stop the caravan, suspend forward motion for a bit, get out of your truck (office), and guide the team sufficiently, and then help advance the team forward again?

Use those mirrors, even use the door to get out once and a while, but mostly, look forward.

Mark Haeussler has been leading four-wheel expeditions for Land Rover owners and leadership teams for 20 years. Call if you want to learn more about taking your team out for an extraordinary adventure.