Spotlight on ILA Members
ILA Members are doing amazing leadership work around the world, from starting new degree programs to nurturing young people who make a difference, from running innovative workshops and seminars to fostering organizational change.

Spotlight on National Outdoor Leadership School:
NOLS Professional Training: Leadership Wilderness-Style

What do a NASA astronaut and a high school freshman have in common?

More than you might think.

They are both graduates of the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), which means they share a similar experience of gaining the skills and knowledge that are necessary to live in a wilderness setting. Whether they are applying their learning to space travel or the JV soccer team, they also share a common framework for effective leadership and decision-making.

For over 45 years NOLS, a nonprofit founded in by legendary mountaineer Paul Petzoldt, has offered wilderness-based courses ranging from fourteen to ninety days in length in some of the most remote areas of the world. The environment and technical skills taught in each of these courses vary from hiking in Patagonia to sea kayaking in Mexico’s Sea of Cortez to mountaineering in Washington’s North Cascades. The commonalities in each course include high-quality instruction, engaging classrooms, and a leadership model that is applicable to all aspects of life.

In the last ten years, NOLS Professional Training—a department within the school that works with businesses, schools, and organizations to create customized wilderness and classroom courses—has led engaging leadership expeditions for a wide-range of clients including, among others, Google, the U.S. Naval Academy, Harvard Business School, Uganda Wildlife Authority Rangers, the Nature Conservancy, and, don’t forget, NASA!

NOLS has trained more than 130 NASA astronauts to date, including all six of the astronauts on the 39th Discovery flight to space (March 2011), who completed a NOLS course as part of their training.

Customized training courses are typically seven to thirty days in length with advanced curriculum in leadership, communication, and decision-making. NOLS Professional Training also offers short classroom-based courses that include simulation activities, coaching, and discussion.

Through years of working with a unique client group in beautiful wilderness classrooms, NOLS Professional Training has gained expertise on the most effective ways to teach leadership to a variety of audiences.

NOLS Leadership Model: 4-7-1

Like many leadership models, the NOLS model came out of experience, application, and reflection. NOLS defines leadership as, “situationally appropriate action that directs or guides your group to set and achieve goals. Great leaders create an environment that inspires individuals and groups to achieve their full potential.” It is likely that the NASA astronaut and the high school freshman will receive a similar leadership curriculum, but NOLS Professional Training tailors the specifics to where they are in their leadership progression.

Seven Leadership Skills
Self-Awareness: Can you correctly identify your own abilities and...
emotions? Do you know how to pause an experience to determine what you are thinking, feeling, and seeking? Self-awareness is the foundation to all other aspects of leadership.

Communication: Taking PowerPoint and a podium out of the picture, can you effectively communicate a message or decision to a group of people? Can you facilitate discussion in a situation that holds both urgency and conflicting opinions?

Competence: On a NOLS course, competence relates to your ability to read a map, paddle a rapid, or climb a peak. In a professional setting it includes things such as conducting an excellent meeting, creating office systems that work, or properly training your staff.

Expedition Behavior: NOLS founder Paul Petzoldt, built his theory of leadership around the idea of "expedition behavior," meaning acting in a way that is the most beneficial to the members of the team. An example from the field would be hiking a half-mile to fill up the group’s water dromedary after a long day of travel with a heavy pack. Hauling water in the office setting is a bit easier, but the attitude is transferable to any setting.

Tolerance for Adversity and Uncertainty: Have you ever slept out in a snow shelter in the middle of a blizzard and -30 degree F temperatures?

NOLS graduates have! Knowing how to face physical, mental, and emotional challenges with resilience can help any leader address the obstacles that will inevitably arise.

Judgment and Decision Making: “Rules are for fools,” said Paul Petzoldt. While many organizations might not be ready to adopt this mantra, it is important to develop judgment and decision-making aptitude outside of policies and procedures.

Vision and Action: Do you have a vision for the future of your organization? Can you turn your ideas into action? Being able to make and enact appropriate action steps can take you from an average employee to being an outstanding leader.

Four Leadership Roles
Each of the seven skills can be used to effectively fulfill the roles identified below. This model suggests that any role within a group has the potential to be an aspect of leadership, and we encourage our students to engage in these ways:

Self-Leadership: Having the ability to take care of yourself and accomplish the tasks and decision-making necessary.

Active Follower: Participating in group discussion and decision-making in a way that is engaging and contributing to the goals of the group.

Peer Leadership: Think “influence.” Do you actively influence those around you in a positive way?

Designated Leader: This is the role we most commonly think of in relation to leadership. It means being the head architect and guardian of the group process, and with it comes authority through their position. However, it does not have to be the most important or most common form of leadership.

Signature Style
While each of the other categories of the NOLS Leadership Model is structured and contained by a definition, Signature Style refers to owning your unique leadership abilities and strengths. This allows individual personality to influence and inspire the group and organizational members.

How Can You Get Involved?
If you are interested in learning more about the courses and curriculum NOLS Professional Training offers, or interested in creating a course for your organization, please contact us at nolspro@nols.edu or 307.335.2220.

www.nols.edu/nolspro

*Picture Credits: John Grunsfeld (NASA); Deborah Sussex (Outdoor Classroom); Pascal Beauvais (Canoe); Ignacio Grez (Navigating)