L-480 Coaching Guidelines

I. INTRODUCTION

The Coach looks at individual behavior versus team building and team behaviors. They must understand how an individual incorporates into a team, and recognize indicators that show someone may have trouble working in a team environment. The Coach can also help keep the group's performance up by serving as a subject matter expert based on their experience with Incident Management Teams.

II. LEAD AND GROUP COACHES

Coaches are selected by the agency Course Coordinator. Lead and Group Coaches are members of the L-480 faculty and will serve as Incident Management Team Subject Matter Experts. Coaches should provide the leadership lessons as they relate to the IMT Command and General Staff environment and provide pertinent lessons learned from experience.

Coaches serve as role models and demonstrate the culture of incident management leadership. Coaches must work rapidly to gain the trust of the students. Coaches need patience, tolerance for ambiguity, a sense of timing, and the ability to facilitate groups.

Coaching assignments begin with the opening of the course and continue through to the final evaluations.

A. Lead Coach

The required qualifications for the Lead Coach include successful completion of L-480, L-380 and/or L-381, Type 1 or Type 2 Command and/or General Staff experience, facilitative skills, knowledge of the leadership curriculum, and the desire to help others.

The Lead Coach is responsible for the coordinating the course, facilitating, mentoring, coaching, and supervising group coaches. Specifically, the Lead Coach facilitates and ensures that the coach's involvement and interaction with the group is effective for the overall success of the student and class experience. *The Lead Coach facilitates the interaction and coordination of instructor, students, and coaches throughout the presentation of the L-480 course.*

B. Group Coaches

The required qualifications for a group coach include Type 1 or Type 2 Command and/or General Staff experience, facilitative skills, knowledge of the leadership curriculum, and the desire to help others. The successful completion of L-380 and/or L-381 is desirable but not required.

**While it is a goal for all coaches to have successfully completed L-380 and/or L-381 courses, it is recognized that current Type 1 and Type 2 Command/General Staff personnel may not have had the opportunity to attend. It is strongly suggested that if the group coaches have not successfully completed L-380 or L-381, the Lead Coach should work with the group coaches to ensure that they have read Leading in the Wildland Fire Service (PMS 494-2) prior to the course.*

Group Coaches serve as group facilitators and subject matter experts. Their primary role is to assist in fostering positive interaction during group exercises and discussions.

III. STUDENT GROUPS

The students in L-480 will be divided into groups of 6 or 8 students. Even numbers are important to facilitate group exercises. Each group will be assigned a primary coach for the session. Coaches may also rotate from group to group during the training experience to offer different experiences and evaluations to all groups. The coach's involvement and interaction with the group is important to the overall success of the student and class experience. The coaches will assist with all identified exercise and scenarios.

IV. INSTRUCTIONS

The coach is responsible for assisting in individual performance and development. The coach should collaborate with the students to discuss individual leadership issues.

Coaching assignments begin on the opening of the course on Monday and can carry through for six months or more depending on individual student preferences. There will be an in-briefing scheduled for all coaches prior to commencement of class activities.

A. General

You will function as a coach. Identify areas needing improvement. Suggest possible ways to improve, **but** do not do it for them; help the group to develop the ability to do it for themselves. As needed, provide whatever assistance is necessary to correct any troubles the individual or group is having. By encouraging the group to overcome obstacles on their own, they experience success and build confidence in themselves to deal with situations in the future.

Although each coach will be assigned a primary group, coaches may move from group to group to encourage interaction between the groups. The coaches will be able to observe and evaluate all students.

In order to assist the individual student's development you will:

- Facilitate the learning process during the scheduled activities, assuring that the group carries out the activities as directed and providing feedback for the exercises.

- Serve as a resource person for the group providing information and guidance as requested and assuring logistical needs are met (materials, rooms, etc).

- Observe the group during all meetings, classes, and activities, noting behaviors, actions and interactions, which might influence individual development.

- Attend and participate in nightly coaches' meetings in conjunction with faculty meetings. Share ideas, observations, and suggestions with the lead instructor and the other coaches.

B. Specific

1. As early as possible, learn individual names and target IMT positions. You will receive a folder containing available background information on each member of your assigned group.

2. Attend all activities. Be in attendance during the opening session Monday. You will be introduced to the group you will be coaching during the course. During your meeting with the group, you should address the following as a minimum:

   a. Make sure you find out where the group members are housed and how to contact them. Give group members the same information about you.

   b. Share your schedule with the group, letting them know your availability due to faculty meetings, steering committee meetings, etc.

   c. Discuss your role as a coach.

   d. Answer any questions the group has concerning the course, facilities, etc.

V. <u>COACHING TIPS</u>

A. Symptoms of Ineffectual Group Behavior:

1. Failure to share information - when people hold back information or fail to offer assistance.

2. Misunderstanding of jobs or roles - when there is confusion and/or disagreement about who is to do what.

3. Low confidence in others - when there is concern about whether a group member will carry out their parts of the job or when others intervene to do the job of a group member.

4. Lack of disagreement - when there is little disagreement and members of the group seem unwilling to share their true feelings and ideas.

5. Cautious or guarded communication - when people fear some sort of punishment, ridicule or negative reaction, they may either say nothing or be guarded in what they do say.

6. Tension within the group - when people are uncomfortable together and the atmosphere is tense.

7. One-person decisions - when many decisions are made by the person(s) in power positions.

8. Poor leadership decisions, i.e. compromising fire fighter safety.

B. Coaching with Questions

The main tool of the coach is asking questions. However, these questions must be used in a non-threatening way. The following process can help in asking non-threatening questions:

1. Initially, ask the question of the entire group.

2. Pause and allow time for group members to consider the question. Don't be afraid of silence. Let the members think.

3. When a team member responds, acknowledge the remark and explore the response further.

4. If no one responds after a reasonable time, look for nonverbal signals from a team member who wants to be involved (eye contact, leaning forward, uplifted eyebrows, etc.) Then, go to that person by name.

5. If no one responds, consider rewording the question or asking if the question needs clarification.

Other hints to avoid threatening questions include:

- Avoid too many yes/no questions.
- Avoid questions that put team members on the defensive.
- Avoid initially asking by name questions to get people's attention. Such actions usually cause resentment and work against involvement.

C. Intervention Techniques

The coach must recognize that he or she cannot change a team member's behavior. The role of the coach is to assist the team member in changing his/her own behavior. In doing so, coaches must build trusting relationships with members by demonstrating respect, candor, kindness and a sense of the importance of teamwork.

When intervening, use a ***discovery*** mode. Rather than telling what to do or what the correct answer is, ask leading questions, suggest alternatives, explore possibilities. Use such statements as "have you considered...?" or "what are your objectives?" or "why do you think this might be happening?" Help the team discover on their own rather than telling them.

Be aware that it is most common to err on the side of too little intervention. Don't be afraid to help. Let them struggle (the struggle increases motivation), but intervene before the *struggle* begins to *strangle.* Be there to help them make progress.

Coaches must consistently provide immediate, specific, positive and supportive feedback to correct *inappropriate* and/or *nonstandard* activity. When the coach provides consistent corrective feedback, the team members receive the message that the subject of the feedback was important. Feedback should be observational and nonjudgmental.

D. Handling Difficult Team Members

A team member is troublesome when his or her behavior is directly and negatively affecting the team's productivity or hindering the team's cohesiveness in terms of openness, trust, commitment, and participation. Most coaches become alarmed *too early* about a team member's conduct.

Coaches should help to reduce or eliminate the undesirable behavior without hurting the self-esteem or ability to contribute of the team members. Do not embarrass the individual in front of the team. Be patient, direct, and tactful.

Options:

1. Talk with the person candidly about the behavior in private.
2. Use the team's informal leaders, those most respected for their knowledge and experience to talk candidly with the person.
3. Ask the team to evaluate their development as a means of bringing negative team behaviors to the surface for discussion.
4. If an individual's poor performance/behavior appears uncorrectable, and this behavior has a reasonable chance of adversely affecting the team's performance, you as the coach must bring it to the attention of the Unit Leader for resolution.