

**Mountain School Tech Tips:
Yes We Can with Apologies to Barack Obama**



A Cohesive Group of KMC'ers

In 2008, Obama's US presidential campaign was focused around the slogan "Yes We Can". This catchy slogan got a black man with a name strikingly similar to US public enemy number one elected, so I figure it should pull some interest in this edition of the Mountain School Tech Tips.

Which brings me to the topic of this edition which could be titled either "How to have a hassle free trip" or "How to avoid the disparate group syndrome." The most frequent issue I hear from trip leaders is the problem of the disparate group: i.e. the KMC trip with some fast members and some slow members. These trips inevitably end up described as either a "clusterf**k" or a "gong show" depending on whether or not you use profanity (personally, I prefer "clusterf**k" as most descriptive). In any case, these trips with disparate groups are the number one reason that KMC members either refuse to lead trips or stop leading trips.

Trip leaders frequently express extreme frustration with their slower participants, usually in the form of "why can't these people accurately assess their own ability?" and "Why did they sign up for this trip that is obviously too much for them?" Well, answering those questions would require that we delve deep into psychological theory, an interesting area, but one which I have neither time nor space (nor your patience) to cover here. Suffice it to say, that over-estimating our ability is something almost all of us do, almost all of the time.

So, if we accept this precept, and accept also the common adage that we can't change someone else s'

behaviour, but we can change our own, there is much trip leaders can do to avoid the disparate group. The first thing you should do as a trip leader is TALK to all the people who are signing up for your trip if you have not hiked, climbed or skied with them in the previous three months. Yes, TALK to them, actually pick up the telephone (outmoded now by email) and talk to them in person. Ask them one question and listen carefully to the answer. "Tell me what trips you have done in the last three months?" If the person has NOT done any trips similar to the trip you are intending to run in a reasonable time frame (taking 10 hours to hike up John Carter for example would NOT be a reasonable time frame), seriously consider whether or not this person is a good fit for your trip.

If you are planning a relaxed day out with no particular summit to reach, you might consider taking someone with whom you have never hiked or climbed before or who is slower than you'd like. But, if you really want to reach the summit of Mount Asgard, Mount Loki, Mount Who-the-hell-ever, in a reasonable time frame, do NOT take people who cannot recount to you similar trips completed in a time frame that you consider reasonable. If you are not sure, ask the person for a reference or two. I have done this on multiple occasions with people I have not hiked or climbed with and have never had anyone express any offense. As Obama said "Yes we can."

Telling someone that your trip is not for them is difficult. There is no way to get around that. Unfortunately, life is full of difficult things we must do like visiting the dentist, bushwacking to get to summits and telling people "I'm sorry, but this trip is not a good fit for you." I'd like to be more sympathetic, but really, suck it up and do it, you will save both yourself and the rest of your trip participants a lot of grief later if you do it now.

If you don't take the time to talk to people and screen out unsuitable trip participants and you find your KMC group spread out like Startrek on the final frontier; instead of asking yourself "Why did this person sign up for this trip?" ask instead "Could I have prevented this from happening?" You might be surprised at the answer.