

The One Body Principle

a general theory of expedition behavior

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The One Body Principle recognizes that the success of the expedition is rooted in an ethic of mutual care, building on the physical and mental wellbeing of all members of the team. Team members share responsibility for one another and for the expedition as a whole.

A resilient body grows into itself. The One Body Principle is primarily embodied through everyday actions and behaviors. It is a principle that is enacted; it is realized in and through practice, as a child learns through practice how to move its legs and walk.

A resilient body retains internal cohesion. Regular check-ins on health and wellbeing are facilitated. Open and respectful communication is paramount: to walk down the trail a body must move its legs in sync.

A resilient body learns from experience. More experienced team members lead by example whenever possible. Expertise and knowledge are volunteered but not forced, and skills and best practices are openly discussed and shared.

A resilient body holds itself up. At different moments, different team members will feel better or worse; healthy team members actively seek out opportunities to lighten the burdens of others. Self-awareness and communication ensure that the body, even when injured or sick, is able to continue.

A resilient body is not a perfect body. All team members are empowered to speak up if the principle is violated. Mistakes will be made, but if these are handled properly, the body will emerge stronger.

Examples of the One Body Principle in action:

Pausing. After crossing a river, it can be tempting to immediately carry on. However, taking a moment to regroup after a river crossing or other difficult terrain feature ensures that the whole team makes it across safely. It also provides a level platform from which to continue the journey, ensuring no one gets left behind.

Reciprocity. Actively looking for team tasks that need to be done is empowering—everything gets done more quickly, and everyone appreciates the help: at the end of the day, going to fetch water for the group while others set up your tent is a classic case of one hand washing the other. If a team member doesn't have the strength or health to assist, however, or if there aren't any remaining team tasks, relaxation is encouraged—this prevents feelings of “uselessness” and maintains the overall fitness of the whole team.

Thinking Together. Over the course of any interesting expedition, no matter how well planned, numerous decisions will need to be made: Should we take this route up the snowfield, or that one across the scree? Is this river safe to cross on foot, or are we better off finding another way? Do we add yoghurt to our curry dinner, or should we leave it out considering a team member is feeling ill? Regardless of role, taking a moment to check in and discuss decisions with other the team members helps to ensure that the best possible decision for the entire team is made.

Keeping Company. The old adage that “misery loves company” forgets the fact that very often, good company can help alleviate misery. If a team member is feeling sick or otherwise unwell, caring for that person goes far beyond formal medical attention: Walk at their pace and have a conversation if they are open to it, or pick up a game of cards in camp. Conversely, allowing ample solo time for all team members can help alleviate stress. In either case, open communication helps keep team members on the same page.

Every healthy body operates according to a rhythm. The One Body Principle kicks in once the team has gone past the entry point and is maintained up through the closure of the expedition, whether or not that closure is planned, and whether or not the initial objectives of the expedition are attained. Regardless, by the end of the expedition, what began as a disparate assembly of individuals has the opportunity to forge itself into a cohesive team with an internal rhythm, culture, and way of moving through the world all its own.

The One Body Principle recognizes this intangible result—the formation of a resilient and effective team—as a crucial indicator of any successful expedition, and one that lies at the core of all other expedition outcomes.