

Proactive Risk Management: More Than Avoiding a Lawsuit

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Introduction

All too often risk management is viewed as either boring or simply an attempt to protect the organization from a lawsuit...what a wasted opportunity! The incorporation of a proactive risk management segment into any administration course has potential to revolutionize the thinking and planning process of organizations and specific program offerings. Described here are two components, a video-based mock trial and a collaborative risk management plan, that may be used separately or in concert with one another.

From the educational perspective, both components provide the powerful teaching tools of advance organizers and symbolic models. Advance organizers are presented prior to instruction and serve as an overview of the material and allow for more detailed information to be assimilated as the learning progresses. Ausubel (1968) describes two types of organizers, expository (used with unfamiliar content) and comparative (used to facilitate the integration of new content with previously learned concepts). Depending upon the role the components play in the class, they could represent either type of organizer. The collaborative risk management plan served as the expository organizer and framework for my course. The mock trial served as the comparative organizer to tie the risk management concepts into the proactive viewpoint approximately three-fourths of the way through the course. Bandura (1986) outlines the value of using models that will gain the attention of the learner. The mock trial offers symbolic models that allows viewers to imagine themselves on the witness stand, while the risk management plan allows for interaction with a live model in a professional setting. The modeled behaviors can serve as cues for appropriate behavior, encourage examination of restraints to behavior or demonstrate patterns for new behaviors. The introduction of context serves to motivate student interest and foster integration of the abstract concepts.

White Cloud Goes to Court Mock Trial Video

White Cloud Goes to Court is a video case study based upon the fictional death of a 12-year-old camper. The case illustrates a trail of negligence and provides opportunities to discuss how training, proactive program planning and hindsight evaluation could have influenced the outcome in a realistic context. It has enough ambiguity of responsibility to generate discussion that is relevant to a variety of administrative settings. There are several opportunities during the viewing of the video for student involvement such as:

...Imagine sitting in the witness stand and accounting for the decisions and actions made while leading an overnight canoe trip.

...Imagine being the director explaining why a trip went out without following accreditation-based policy.

...Imagine stopping the tape and asking students to play the role of attorney and pose questions of the witness.

...Imagine the discussion and perspective shifting that occurs after interacting with this type of content.

There are also several opportunities for student assignments that flow from this case study:

- Design an in-service staff training piece which would address the incorporation of near-miss and incident reports in future program planning.

- Create an organizational newsletter article to promote the active use of hindsight in future planning.

- Create a decision-making flow-chart for program operation to utilize existing policy

- In-Class Trial Participation: At the end of a segment of testimony, students are asked to suggest questions for the next witness, to make a motion to the judge, etc.

- Jury Deliberation: Break the class into jury groups, provide the judge's instructions, then ask them to reach a verdict. As a follow-up to the jury deliberation, place three categories on the board (parents, seasonal staff, year-round staff), provide lots of chalk and ask students to come up and write down which points of responsibility belong to which group. An amazing number of discussion points will come up!

Collaborative Risk Management Plan

The twist here is to move beyond an imaginary setting and demonstrate the power of teamwork and collaboration especially in the area of risk management (an area much too complex for just one perspective...in practice and in study)! The written plan contains content segments related to facility, human resources (employees), human resources (participants), programming, transportation, marketing and public relations. (For a complete outline of the assignment, contact the author.)

Project: Work with an agency to complete a risk management assessment and develop a written risk management handbook, oral presentation of the project, executive

summary for the community partner, and one other end-product depending upon segment completed.

Community Partners: The class will identify two agencies willing to serve as partners with the class in a risk management project.

Groups: Half the class works with each agency in sub-committees of three-four. Each group is responsible for a different segment of the risk management process, and upon completion will pass its portion on to the next sub-committee for further work. Students are able to rank their choices of agency, and segment of the plan they want to work on based upon the due dates (which are spread out through the semester) and end-product requirements.* The instructor then creates student committees based on these rankings. Each agency has a three-person executive committee to coordinate between the sub-committees and the community partner and to consolidate the segment assignments into a cohesive report. Each group discusses policies and develops firing criteria. If a group member is fired, s/he needs to identify an agency and complete the entire project alone. (In other words, incentive to work together and not get fired!)

Products which all students complete:

Segment of the risk management plan containing the requested items (posted to the university web-based user space, i.e. CLE, Web CT, etc.)

Field notes of the work and contact with the client

20-minute group presentation of segment to the class

Executive summary for the community partner

End Products which students complete depending upon his/her specific segment of risk management process:

Facility: detailed map and site assessment

Human resources (employees): staff training presentation video

Human resources (participants): policy and procedures manual

Programming and Transportation: accident/incident reports and programming/transportation plan

Marketing and Public Relations: press release and either public service announcement or newsletter articles or internal memos for employees

- In order to accommodate a greater variety of career interests, any student has the option of identifying his/her own agency, submitting a proposal (working alone or in pairs), but needs to complete the entire project rather than a segment.

Authors Note. The videotape and discussion guide are available from the American Camping Association: 1-800- 428-CAMP

References

Ausubel, D.P. (1968). Educational psychology: A cognitive view. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Bandura, A. (1986). Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall