

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 479 324

RC 024 158

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TITLE The Paul Petzoldt Trivia Quiz: His Philosophy and Teaching Methods.  
PUB DATE 2003-01-00  
NOTE 9p.; In: Celebrating the Past--Creating Our Future. Wilderness Education Association National Conference on Outdoor Leadership Proceedings (Paul Smith, NY, January 23-25, 2003); see RC 024 156.  
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)  
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS Decision Making; \*Educational Philosophy; Group Behavior; Leadership Qualities; \*Leadership Training; Outdoor Education; \*Outdoor Leadership; Planning; Risk Management; Safety; \*Teaching Methods; \*Tests  
IDENTIFIERS Wilderness Education Association

## ABSTRACT

Paul Petzoldt, co-founder of the Wilderness Education Association (WEA), helped mold the profession of outdoor leadership as we know it today. After his death in 1999, numerous field journals, old speeches, and personal correspondence were salvaged in order to refresh, clarify, and preserve Petzoldt's philosophy and teaching methods. The information was presented in the form of a trivia quiz at the 2003 National WEA Conference. The quiz is presented here in its entirety. The 31 questions present key phrases and concepts that Petzoldt used when he trained outdoor leaders. For ease of interpretation, questions/concepts were placed under the topics of backcountry travel, decision making and judgment, environmental ethics, expedition behavior, general outdoor philosophy, safety, teaching methods, leadership, and certification. Readers of this quiz should keep in mind that the phrases and concepts were transformed into entertaining lessons through Petzoldt's charismatic ability to tell stories and engage learners. Anyone in the business of training outdoor leaders is encouraged to draw from the Petzoldt trivia quiz to teach these essential concepts. (TD)

# The Paul Petzoldt Trivia Quiz: His Philosophy and Teaching Methods

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## The Paul Petzoldt Trivia Quiz: His Philosophy and Teaching Methods

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### Introduction

Paul Petzoldt, co-founder of the Wilderness Education Association (WEA), helped mold the profession of outdoor leadership, as we know it today. Petzoldt left behind a rich tradition of outdoor leadership training techniques practiced by several generations of WEA instructors. His methods and philosophy continue to be passed down each time a WEA course enters the field. After his death in 1999, numerous field journals, old speeches and personal correspondence were salvaged for research. To interpret of the meaning of these primary documents, seven veteran WEA instructors and students were surveyed. Finally, the presenter's personal experience played a part in compiling the data. This conference workshop was designed to test, refresh and clarify our interpretation of Petzoldt's philosophy and teaching methods. The information was presented in the form of a trivia quiz at the 2003 National WEA Conference.

### The Petzoldt Quiz

The following information represents key phrases and concepts that Petzoldt used when he trained outdoor leaders. For ease of interpretation, each question/concept has been placed under a specific topic. Workshop participants were divided into teams and were tested by being asked the following thirty-one questions. See quiz questions and corresponding answers below:

#### Backcountry Travel

1. **Question:** "Use heartbeat like a speedometer" or "No hurry when you're in the woods" were statements that Paul used to teach what concept?

**Answer:** These are sayings Paul typically used when trying to explain the concept of energy control.

2. **Question:** Complete the statement: "What good is a map? When \_\_\_\_\_!"

**Answer:** "You don't know where you are!"

#### Decision-making and Judgment

3. **Question:** What are 20-20 vision decisions?

**Answer:** Before participating in an activity, Paul would have the students make judgment decisions concerning the forthcoming event. After the event, students compare judgments they made before the event with the judgments they make after the event with past 20-20 vision. This was the term he liked to use to explain the process of reflection in order to develop judgment.

4. **Question:** What is a "must" decision?

**Answer:** These are the decisions that must be made before each day's activities. "What are the dangers inherent in the activity? What are the accidents most likely

to take place with these activities with these people in this environment? What must I do what decisions will I make to lower the odds of such accidents from happening? What harm is most likely to happen to the equipment and what judgment decisions need to be made? What is most likely to occur to cause expedition behavior problems or violations? What judgment decisions need to be made” (Petzoldt, n.d.)?

5. **Question:** What was Paul’s point when he referred to the Masai Chief?

**Answer:** Paul would draw from his experiences in Africa and his knowledge of the Masai people as an example of autocratic leadership. Basically, it is a Masai Chief decision when a leader makes a proclamation that her/his decision is final and not to be questioned.

6. **Question:** He referred to “Camp Hoochie Coochie” to teach what concept?

**Answer:** He used Camp Hoochie Coochie along with other examples to make the point that we do not always learn from experience. Just because you have worked somewhere or done certain things, this does not mean you have developed appropriate leadership skills. Sometimes we don’t learn from our experiences and continue practicing poor or dangerous habits. Experience is not the prerequisite to quality leadership. We must process, reflect and at times be guided by others to learn from the experience. Paul would also use the story of cowboys (horse packers) who wore jeans into the backcountry time and time again as an example of not learning from experience.

7. **Question:** “Rules are for fools” was used frequently by Paul to make what point?

**Answer:** A good outdoor leader always knows why she or he is doing something. To blindly follow rules or enforce rules is not educational and could result in harm to the group or the environment. Outdoor leaders must know the “whys” in order to make good judgment decisions. For example, a “so called rule” in one situation may not be appropriate in another.

#### Environmental Ethics:

8. **Question:** Paul preferred to use what term instead of “Leave No Trace”? and Why?

**Answer:** He preferred the term “practical conservation”. He knew that it was impossible to leave no trace no matter how diligent a group practiced state of the art techniques. Users will always leave an impact in a natural setting.

9. **Question:** Can you fill in the blank? “Educate don’t \_\_\_\_\_.”

**Answer:** “Legislate.” Teaching the “whys” of appropriate low impact practices is fundamental in the development of an outdoor leader or any outdoor user.

10. **Question:** Why did Paul push the concept of learning about each specific environment you enter as an outdoor user?

**Answer:** Paul integrated natural and cultural history into every course and made it an important part of the WEA curriculum. He believed that if we obtained this

knowledge, we would from a more appreciative, caring attitude toward the environment that would translate into practicing appropriate user behaviors.

### Expedition Behavior

11. **Question:** Why chew cud? To what does this piece of advice refer?  
**Answer:** Paul explained that expedition members must take on a “cow like attitude”. Be like the cow! Hang out, relax, sit back, let things roll off your back, don’t get excited, don’t let little things bother you; operate from an internal locus of control. Taking on this type of attitude helps create a healthier, small group living environment.

### General Outdoor Philosophy

12. **Question:** What did Paul mean by: “If you are not comfortable, you are not doing it right!”  
**Answer:** He stated that going camping should not be a miserable, painful experience (i.e. blisters, hunger, cold, poor night’s sleep, etc.). He told countless audiences and students that if they are not comfortable when going out, then they were not doing it right. The average, uneducated outdoor user could identify with this statement. It was an effective recruitment tool for his courses.
13. **Question:** When asked what to do in a survival situation, Paul would reply by saying: ....?  
**Answer:** *“avoid it”*. It was impossible to engage him on a “what if survival situation” He was training outdoor leaders to avoid such situations. If the outdoor leader used all the appropriate skills of trip planning, expedition behavior, abilities and limitations assessment, etc. the survival situation will not present itself. He also told a well know story of a big radio station on the East coast trying to interview him. They wanted the great Paul Petzoldt to tell the audience what to do in a survival situation. In the initial interview before the show, they asked him what he would do in a survival situation. He replied by saying, “I don’t know”. They asked if he was Paul Petzoldt? He said, “yes and I still don’t know”. He never did the radio show. His point was that it was impossible to answer because there are 100’s of variables to consider before an appropriate decision could be made. He would have to be in the situation and experience all the factors in order to come up with an answer. His point was that each outdoor situation is different. No factors are ever the same. So the answer will be different each time depending on the situation. One must make decisions based on the situation and not a generic code of survival.

### Safety

14. **Question:** Can you explain the “Cigarette Theory?”  
**Answer:** The first thing you do in an emergency situation is sit back and light your cigarette. In his later years he would qualify this statement by saying: *“when smoking was socially acceptable”* to appease the health conscious student. Nevertheless, his point was that in a true emergency the leader needs to stop and think before acting.

15. **Question:** According to Paul, what two things can happen in an emergency? 1. \_\_\_\_\_ or 2. \_\_\_\_\_

**Answer:** “*Live*” or “*Die*.” He used this powerful black and white statement to accentuate the seriousness of this topic when he taught.

16. **Question:** Why did Paul refer to “Nick the Greek?”

**Answer:** This was an important part of his philosophy. Nick the Greek (fictional spin off of Jimmy the Greek) was famous for his ability to predict major sporting event outcomes. According to Petzoldt, Nick the Greek was often called upon when setting the Las Vegas point spreads. Paul often spoke of Nick the Greek and reducing the Las Vegas odds. Paul’s philosophy and teaching approach pushed the student to consciously calculate the risk potential and then work towards reducing risks of injury through decision making and quality leadership. He would round the students up to engage in a Nick the Greek session to assess the risks.

17. **Question:** Who predicts the weather?

**Answer:** “*Only fools and dudes predict the weather.*” When students would ask Paul what the weather was going to be - He would reply with this statement. He would agree on some level that forecasting could be done. But his point was – the weather can change at the blink of an eye in the mountains. If the elements catch you off guard and unprepared because you based your preparation on a forecast – you are a fool! “Be prepared for the worst and you will probably survive in the once in 50 year storm”

18. **Question:** Fill in the blanks: No matter how blue the sky, don’t ask why, \_\_\_\_\_ !

**Answer:** “put up your fly”

19. **Question:** What is the “New England booby trap?”

**Answer:** “*Mount Washington*”. He said this because the mountain entices all sorts of people, experts and novices alike. Folks go up in their cotton t-shirts and shorts for a little day hike, yet the weather can change in an instant up on top and people would end up totally unprepared when cold temperatures or rain struck.

### Teaching Methods

20. **Question:** What is the “grasshopper method”?

**Answer:** This method was the essence of Petzoldt’s approach to teaching. Rather than sit the students down and teach a topic in full, he hopped from subject to subject throughout an educational expedition. He taught only the skill or knowledge needed in the moment. He would return to the topic later and expand, as student’s needed the information or skill. He stated this was a difficult technique to perfect. There is a burden on the instructor to remember what has been taught and a responsibility to present the full body of knowledge. (Note this is not the same thing as opportunity teaching or a teachable moment.) The grasshopper method was planned and deliberate.

**21. Question:** Explain how Paul would set students up in order to teach a “Quality Judgment Decision.”

**Answer:** Paul would purposefully make a mistake or violate a course norm once established. He waited to see which students would address or confront his behavior. For example, after teaching campsite selection, he would set his tent on top of a trail after teaching students this was poor user behavior. He waited to be confronted then challenged the student. Of course he was waiting to see if the student could explain why rather than blindly stating a rule. If the student explained why, Paul felt the student was developing quality judgment. There are also stories of the cocky student who needed to be knocked down a notch. Paul would allow the student to engage in the inappropriate behavior (i.e. go climbing unsupervised) then publicly berate them in front of the group. While this negatively affected group dynamics at times, the student never forgot the decision.

**22. Question:** What is a “College Answer?”

**Answer:** A pet peeve that would elicit a response from Paul without exception was a college answer. When answering a question or making a comment, if the student started with “I think” before the statement, Paul would intervene. Paul wanted to hear a specific statement of “why”. He translated “I think” as “I’m not sure”. He stated this was dangerous and usually led to misinformation. He always told his students, “Know what you know, and know what you don’t know.”

**23. Question:** Finish this statement used by Paul; “Don’t move for the sake of moving...”

**Answer:** *“Groups move from one teaching site to the next teaching site.”* This message is critical in the context of course design and implementation. Too many instructors are programmed to move students as a function or expectation of the activity, i.e. backpacking trip, climbing trip, canoeing trip, etc... His point was, on an educational expedition to teach outdoor leaders; too much movement stifles learning.

**24. Question:** The purpose of a shakedown?

**Answer:** The shakedown was a critical course element designed to maximize leadership development. Original courses were a single 28 to 35-day experience for novice leaders. The shakedown was the first 5 or 7 days of the trip where much teaching, learning and experimentation occurred. Students learned first hand how much food they needed. What equipment was useful or excessive? After the shakedown was over, students went back to a base and re-supplied themselves for the remainder of the expedition. This was an important teaching tool for the trip planning aspect of the curriculum based on the course model of the times.

**25. Question:** What type of answers does the typical college student look for when she or he first takes a course?



**Answer:** “The right way Vs the wrong way” to lead! Paul saw that most students were very black and white in their thinking. Therefore, he taught judgment and decision-making so that a leader would chose an “appropriate way” depending on the context of the situation. He taught that no one way would work in every situation.

### Leadership

**26. Question:** Fill in the blanks “Don’t take someone into the backcountry unless you are willing to \_\_\_\_\_!”

**Answer:** “*face death*” Paul would use this powerful statement to impress upon the aspiring outdoor leader the magnitude of their responsibility.

**27. Question:** “Of the top ten characteristics to be a good leader what was number one?”

**Answer:** “*Selflessness*” This was a characteristic or quality that Paul integrated into most of his writings and teachings.

**28. Question:** How did Paul explain the relationship between skill level and outdoor leadership?

**Answer:** He felt that he was fighting a battle of misperception by the public and existing outdoor leaders. He noticed that most people equated high skill level with good leadership. His philosophy redirected many people by convincing them that quality leadership is first based on quality judgment and decision-making. “Just because someone is an expert rock climber does not mean they are a good outdoor leader” (Petzoldt, n.d.). He learned this very early on when he watched his guides come off the Grand Teton with clients. The best guides were not always the best climbers. The best guides were selfless, had good judgment and decision-making skills, knew how to facilitate good expedition behavior etc.

### **Certification**

**29. Question:** What does WEA certification mean?

**Answer:** “Graduating from a WEA program carries no guarantee of competence but it does guarantee a person has been exposed to a standard curriculum in the wild outdoors under realistic experiences in a realistic environment with actual people. It does guarantee that a graduate has been evaluated by his peers and instructors and judged by them to have a standard level of competency” (Petzoldt, Draft Report to WEA Board of Directors, 1984).

**30. Question:** Who are outdoor idiots?

**Answer:** “They are great people – leaders of church groups, Boy Scout groups, YMCA groups, camp groups and school groups. Their volunteers are sacrificing their time, their business, and their money to help the community and the welfare of their youth. This sterling character and self sacrifice does not mean they know how to plan and execute a trip into the wild outdoors with safety to the group – conservation to the environment and respect to the environment and respect and cooperation with the administering agencies and other users of our wild outdoors.” (Petzoldt, n.d.)



**31. Question:** Would you trust this person with your child? (How did Paul use this statement?)

**Answer:** This was the ultimate barometer when evaluating a potential (certifiable) outdoor leader. You should ask yourself while looking deep into your gut if you would trust this person with someone close to you.

### **Closing Comments**

While the above information represents many of the concepts Petzoldt taught in the field, his charismatic ability to tell stories and engage the learner is now a memory. The readers of this quiz should keep in mind that the phrases and concepts were transformed into entertaining lessons through Petzoldt's teaching style. He had a unique way of making these points by exercising his skills as a master storyteller and teacher. Anyone in the business of training outdoor leaders is encouraged to draw from the Petzoldt trivia quiz to teach these essential concepts. For more information or to add to this quiz, please feel free to contact the author.



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