

## Grit

Day one. The base of Middle Sister. 30 miles from town. Sideways rain. Eight hours straight. Half a foot of snow on its way. One shovel. Trenches...I was going to have to dig so many trenches. Three tents and seven high school juniors zipped up in them. Spotty radio service. No adult leader. Just 17 year-old me, my map and compass, and the determination to not call Runco (trip organizer) for help.

None of this was supposed to happen. See I was actually incredibly prepared. I knew the Three Sisters Wilderness, I knew the navigation points, my camp and all of my students. I'd contacted my adult leader, my notes were nails, I had all my gear packed. I was ready. In my mind this backpacking trip was going to be perfect if it was the last thing I did.

Disaster. That's the only way to describe what unfolded just 24 hours later. First, my adult leader got COVID and I would now be the only intern without an adult with them. Second, due to a conflict with my soccer game I had to switch trips and leave a different day. That meant everything I had prepared went out the window two days before the trip. The generally cool demeanor I've learned to project as a leader began to crack.

At that point I had to do approximately 100 box breaths before I thought about anything. I spent the night before we left in the warehouse trying to prepare myself for an experience I had nothing I could compare it to. I needed to change my anxious self-talk and realize I was capable beyond my preparation.

Two days later we left the trailhead and it was relatively nice, but as soon as we got to camp a fog rolled in. Eight hours of rain was what came with it. I had two choices: crack under the pressure or pull myself together and rise to the occasion.

The only thing that mattered was keeping the students under my supervision dry, warm, and fed. Every skill I had learned as an intern became crucial. I spent hours in the rain digging trenches and tying guylines, determined to make this trip a success. Leaders from all over the mountain would swing by to check on us and I could tell they were under a lot of pressure too.

After an evening of misery, we woke up to half a foot of snow and were forced to cut the trip short and pack out. It would have been really easy to be discouraged after the whole ordeal, but I wasn't. I faced every adversity staying positive, never letting them see me sweat, because attitude is contagious and I needed my group to feel that. Throughout all of this, those juniors showed me a level of respect that was not only surprising, but greatly appreciated. Reflecting on the experience, I had an intense level of gratitude for Runco, who saw something in me that I didn't even know was possible, and for the students who genuinely put their trust in me.

I've always viewed myself as somebody who has a certain level of grit, but until this trip I hadn't had an opportunity to really put it to the test. I had done something most adults didn't have the skills or perseverance to get through. And I had done it with seven of my peers looking to me as a leader, holding the uncertainty of their whole experience.

Since then I have gone through some difficult times in my personal life but I've faced them with a new found assurance. I have faith that hard work pays off and that mindset matters because challenges are an opportunity to grow and push my boundaries. So, post-trip I'm looking for those challenges. Searching for another chance for my determination and grit to be put to the test.

