

# Outdoor Ethics and Influencing Behavior

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## Outdoor Ethics

As more and more recreationists venture outdoors, the need to develop an outdoor ethic becomes more vital. With an increasing number of people enjoying America's lands and waters, recreational impacts are magnified, leading to degraded recreational sites and in some cases limiting access to some areas. Positive outdoor ethics and the behaviors they motivate help to minimize both the environmental and social impacts of recreation.

### What Is an Ethic? Some Definitions

An ethic is a group of moral principles or set of values that guides behavior.

An ethic consists of socially imposed obligations over and above self-interest.

Conduct is right if it proceeds from good motive, through the use of the best available means, to consequences that are good (Titus).

The role of a system of ethics and morality is to expose and enlighten individuals about the consequences of their actions and to admonish them to assume responsibility for them (Gardner).

We might even think of an ethic as our conscience. What we do when no one is watching is a clear reflection of our value system.

*Some examples of statements that reflect an ethic or set of moral values are:*

Cheating on tests is wrong.

Helping someone in trouble is good.

Behave toward others as you would have them behave toward you.

Littering is wrong.

Trust is essential I always keep my word.

To expand the definition of ethics to incorporate the land, the community must include our natural resources. The lands and waters we need to survive must be treated with the same care and respect we treat our neighbors. Aldo Leopold said it best in his essay *The Land Ethic*.

All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in that community, but his ethics prompt him also to co-operate (perhaps in order that there may be a place to compete for).

The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land

In short, a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such. (Leopold, 203-204).

### Why Do We Need an Outdoor Ethic?

There are many ethics that guide our behavior in business, behavior in family, and behavior in society. *Tread Lightly!* provides an ethic for recreational behavior in the outdoors. But why do we need such an ethic for motorized recreation on public lands? Some reasons include:

Rights versus responsibilities: Public lands are common property; common property requires sharing. There is much discussion today about the right of access to public lands and about the right to recreate as we choose, but there is much less discussion about the responsibilities of users to share and protect the land and quality of outdoor experiences for everyone. We are all part of a community of people who enjoy the outdoors, and as such, have obligations to that community.

Use of motorized equipment for outdoor recreation has potential to substantially impact the land and others who recreate. The combination of speed, noise, weight, footprint, and range puts motorized recreation in a different class in terms of potential impact.

Demand for access to public lands is increasing for all types of use, and we must share and limit our use to minimize impacts on the land and conflicts with other users.

In 2005 161.1 million Americans participated in outdoor recreation.

Federal, state and local regulations are not enough. Regulations can set limitations, but they will not fit all circumstances or situations that will arise. Understanding and internalizing the reasons why certain behaviors are good or bad is necessary for good decision-making.

We often act without thinking about the consequences of our actions. The goal of an outdoor ethic should be to provide recreationists with the knowledge and values that will empower them to make wise decisions: decisions that will conserve resources in all recreational situations.

Tread Lightly! principles are a guide to responsible action, a guide to decision making that will help define actions that will have good consequences. When we internalize these principles they become our conscience.

## Influencing Behavior

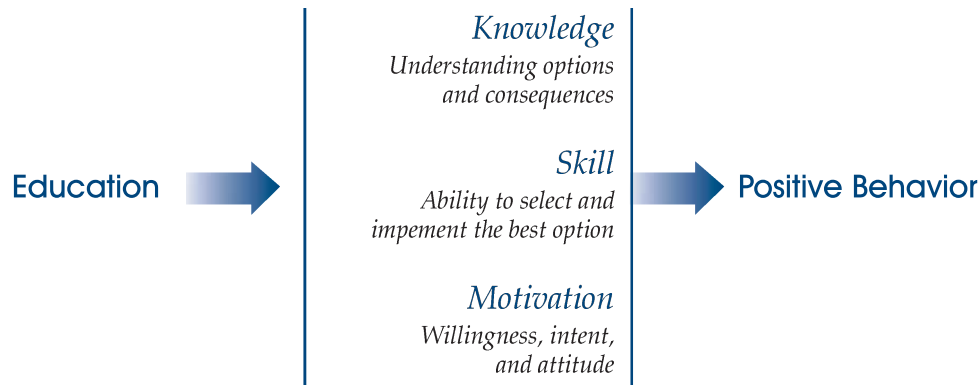
One of the prime concerns of outdoor education must be to affect the behavior of those who recreate so they have a constant concern for land and water resources that are necessary for recreational activity to be performed (Ford).

Education programs are more effective with a well-planned component focusing on attitudes and values. Studies show that environmental education programs that only stress awareness, knowledge, and skills do not necessarily help students change attitudes and behaviors that have an adverse impact on the environment (Braus and Wood). To influence behavior for good consequences, we need to combine knowledge and skills with the value system of minimum impact. The good consequences that result will also increase awareness and positively affect motivation.

### How Can We Influence People's Behavior?

What is our objective as Tread Trainers? Our ultimate objective is to influence people to behave in a responsible manner when they recreate in the outdoors, to adopt the ethic embodied in the Tread Lightly! Principles. For some folks, that means changing behavior. But how do we influence people to change their behavior? Let's start to answer that question by considering the three important factors that affect people's choices about how they behave: their knowledge, skills, and motivation.

Think of it as a three-legged stool. Responsible behavior is the seat; knowledge, skill, and motivation are the three legs. The lack of any one of the legs renders the stool ineffective. For responsible behavior to occur, people need to know and understand what behaviors are inappropriate for specific circumstances, and they need to know what options they have for improved behavior. They also require the skills to implement the appropriate behaviors. And they must have the attitude, beliefs, values, and will to carry appropriate behaviors out. Without all three legs in place, we cannot count on responsible behavior.



### All Three Elements Are Needed To Positively Affect Behavior

#### The Role of Education

Education is the platform upon which the stool rests. Knowledge and skills come directly from education and training. But motivation is the wild card. People may know what is considered the appropriate behavior and they may know how to carry it out, but if they don't have the attitude, the beliefs, the value set—the will—to behave responsibly, they will not.

Tread Lightly! is dedicated to educating the public about the ethic of treading lightly on land and water. The Tread Lightly! program helps people understand the need for an ethic of responsible outdoor recreation and what types of behavior are considered suitable. The Tread Lightly! program also defines some of the skills needed to behave responsibly and encourages people to learn those skills. Tread Trainers and Master Tread Trainers are the front line in this effort. But do these efforts help to motivate people?

#### How Effective Is Education as a Means of Influencing Behavior Change?

Psychologists have arrived at some conclusions based on the types of actions that might be encountered.

Classes of Actions	Effectiveness of Education for Changing Behavior
Deliberately Illegal	➡ LOW (Use deterrents)
Careless	➡ MODERATE
Unskilled	➡ HIGH
Uninformed	➡ VERY HIGH
Perceived Unavoidable	➡ LOW

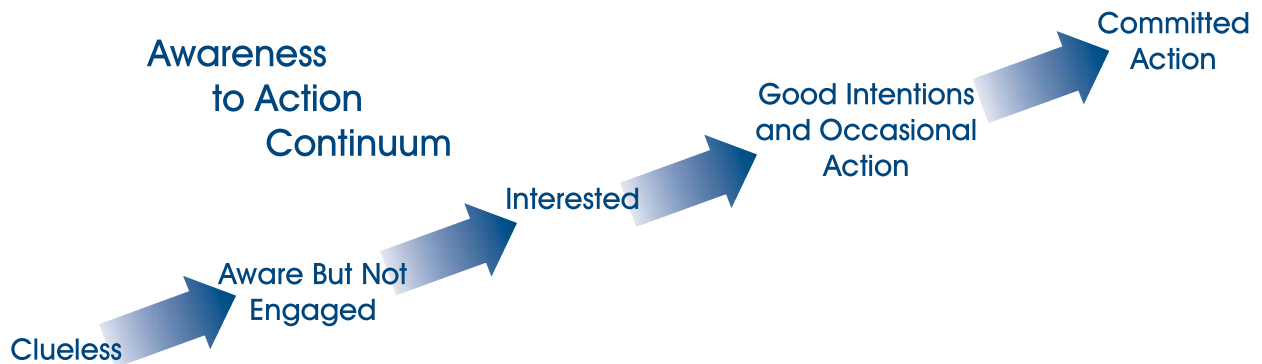
Using education as the means to change the behavior of people who deliberately act in violation of a law has a low probability of success. These people already know the law and they are deliberately ignoring it. But people violating a law in ignorance may well change their behavior once they are informed about the law, so education could be of some use in these circumstances.

To a degree, we can successfully educate people who are acting carelessly by making them aware of the benefits of more careful behavior and of the costs or impacts of their carelessness. People acting from lack of skill or lack of information are the most responsive to education. We can train them in the skills and provide them with the needed information that will help them adopt better behavior.

Psychologists indicate that people who perceive their actions as unavoidable are not very responsive to education as a means of altering their behavior. That seems like a reasonable conclusion for any specific action, but if we can help people to understand the options that they have (such as planning ahead and educating themselves before they go), we can help them make decisions that will avoid the otherwise unavoidable.

So education can play a significant role in influencing people to change behavior. To help us better understand the role of education in behavior change, it is important to consider where the people we are trying to influence might be in their journey to better behavior. The ideal world for us as Tread Trainers is that the people we reach become committed to the values and behaviors that reflect the Tread Lightly! philosophy. Think of it as a journey on the Pathway to Commitment. The people we are trying to reach are at various points along the journey, from clueless to committed.

This means that our audience is really several audiences. Each point on the pathway represents a different audience with different needs. The design of our messages and our efforts at persuasion need to take this fact into account. Our strategies for moving members of each audience to the next level will be different.



Pathway	Characteristics	Our Education Strategy for Moving Them to the Next Level
<b>Clueless</b>	These are people unfamiliar with the need for better behavior, or they don't know what responsible behavior is. (There is also a group of people who don't care—the "Negatives"—to be discussed later.)	<p><i>Communicate information.</i></p> <p>Tell them who we are and what values we represent. Explain what being responsible means, why being responsible is important, and what benefits they may get from responsible behavior. The right kind of information may create an interest on their part to learn more.</p>
<b>Aware but Not Engaged</b>	These are people who are familiar with the idea of treading lightly but are not following the principles. This may be because they don't see the relevance of the Tread Lightly! ethic to their world. It may be that they don't care, or they think they aren't causing any impacts—it's just not something they pay attention to.	<p><i>Communicate information.</i></p> <p>With this group, we would communicate the same information that we would to the Clueless group, with stronger emphasis on the benefits and the potential impacts. It is important with this group to tie the information to their world, to understand their value system and identify values in common with the need for treading lightly.</p>
<b>Interested</b>	These are people who are familiar with the need for responsible recreation and would profess an interest in it, but may not have fully grasped how their behavior needs to change.	<p><i>Communicate information and provide education.</i></p> <p>Reiterate the values and the importance of responsible behavior. Provide examples of specific behaviors and the negative impacts they cause. Engage them in helping to define how they might behave differently and how that new behavior would benefit them.</p> <p><i>Provide education, reinforce benefits, identify and remove barriers.</i></p>
<b>Good Intentions and Occasional Action</b>	These are people who know what responsible behavior means and why it is important. They will tell you that they have good intentions to behave responsibly. They may even behave responsibly from time to time when it is not an inconvenience.	<p>This group is generally motivated to act consistent with their attitudes, values, and beliefs—it feels good to them. People's actions are influenced by their intentions, and their intentions are influenced by facts, values (things or ideas to which they are emotionally attached), and norms (standards supported by important others). Facts can be provided by education. Values and norms come from people. Face to face contact and role modeling are important here. We need to help them understand the internal barriers they are allowing to deflect their behavior and help them understand how those barriers may be eliminated. We also need to engage with them to identify and minimize external barriers.</p> <p><i>Reinforcement of behaviors and values; expression of gratitude. Enlist their help to spread the message when possible.</i></p>
<b>Committed Action</b>	These are the people who know the importance of responsible recreation and routinely follow the principles. They share the values of the Tread Lightly! ethic.	<p>These are the people we need to thank when we see them behaving responsibly. Continued positive feedback will reinforce these positive behaviors. Keep in mind that the pipeline can flow both directions, and we want to do all we can to stop any backflow towards negative behavior. Keeping them engaged in a positive way will help.</p>

What we as teachers need to understand is that people must go through each of the points on the pathway. The journey may be rapid or slow, but either way we must first make a clueless person aware, then stimulate his or her interest, then create an intention before we can get committed action.

There is one other group of people that we may encounter. These are the Negatives. The Negatives are those folks that react negatively to the responsible behavior message. They probably see the message as infringing on their rights, or perhaps they have a gut-level reaction against environmentalists. Their value set or the group norm they subscribe to may be antithetical to the Tread Lightly! values. These folks will not be on the Pathway to Commitment unless we can persuade them otherwise. This is the most difficult group to reach. It may take significant time and effort to convince them that behavior change is in their best interest. We can look for common ground as the place to start—for example, similar recreation preferences or common enjoyment of the wildlands. When communicating with this group, remember emotions are contagious, so stay positive and friendly. Listen. Avoid anger and accusations. Smile!

The key to reaching all of these audiences is applying the art of persuasion. We can define the behaviors that create the norm for responsible recreation. We can inform people of the benefits of appropriate behavior and the costs of inappropriate behavior. But because people have different value sets, attitudes, and beliefs, we cannot demand compliance; we must persuade.

### The Art of Persuasion

A social science discipline called Social Marketing aims to understand what approaches work best in getting people to change behavior. The essential notion, based on research, is that behavior change rarely occurs as a result of providing information alone. The social marketing philosophy suggests that behavior change is most effectively achieved by focusing on removing barriers to the desired behavior while simultaneously enhancing and promoting the behavior's benefits.

One environmental psychologist puts it this way: People will act in an environmentally-responsible way unless

1. There is a lack of awareness
2. There is a lack of skills
3. There are stronger motivations for acting in non-sustainable ways
4. Outside forces block attempts at sustainable and environmentally-responsible actions.

We can think of all four of these conditions as barriers that need to be overcome. Information can remove the awareness barrier. The skill barrier can be removed through training. The presence of other, stronger motivations is less clear-cut. Here we are dealing with values, beliefs, and attitudes. These motivational conflicts can be considered as internal barriers and might include, for example, conflicting group norms, the desire to take the shortest route, the desire for more speed, the desire for a greater challenge off-trail.

### Addressing Internal Barriers

Internal barriers include those other factors that lead to stronger motivations that cause irresponsible behavior. There are several tools we can use to help overcome these other motivations.

*Promote more responsible norms.* Norms are social constructs that if adopted and supported by social leaders can be spread throughout the social group. They are guides to how we should behave. The norm of responsible behavior can be promoted by making it visible through behavior modeling and publicity, and by making personal contact to reinforce it. Use and publicize activities at which the norm is reinforced—for example, trail rides or restoration projects.

*Communicate* captivating information that connects with your audiences. This means of course that you

need to know and understand your audiences. Make your message easy to remember. Use credible sources. Experts in the art of persuasion often apply three concepts in their messages: they try to appeal to the human universal desire of being liked or respected, they try to arouse emotions that will promote and support the desired behavior (empathy, pleasure, fear of loss, etc.), and they may try to use reasoning to lead their audience in the desired direction.

*Use prompts* to help people remember the desired behaviors. Tread Lightly! s hang tags are a good example.

*Use incentives*, but cautiously. Make sure the incentive rewards appropriate behavior. Be careful about removing incentives that can create negative reactions. Incentives don't need to be monetary social approval can be an incentive.

*Seek commitment* from those people who have expressed an interest or intention. Commitments work best if they are written, offered as part of group involvement, and help people see themselves as making a positive contribution. Above all, commitments should always be voluntary, not coerced.

## External Barriers

External barriers (such as poor trail maintenance or the absence of authorized riding areas) need to be identified. As Tread Lightly! Trainers, it is part of our role to work with our audiences to identify such barriers and generate ideas and activities (for example stewardship projects) to remove or minimize them.

## Enhancing and Promoting the Benefits of Responsible Behavior

There are several levels of benefits that flow from responsible recreation. There are ecosystem benefits from avoiding damage to the non-human components of wildlands. There are social benefits from avoiding conflict among people who prefer alternative modes of recreation. There are also social benefits from collaborating to optimize the positive experiences of all who recreate. And there are benefits for individuals. We all tend to be concerned with what's in it for us. While our cause is noble, most people respond more readily to personal benefits.

It is therefore important in crafting our messages and programs to identify and promote the benefits of responsible recreation for the specific audience we are addressing. Engaging our audiences to help identify those benefits that are important to them can be a useful tool in that effort.

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