

Take a Hike: How to Earn Your Trail Name



By Kitty Holt

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Each summer my extended family goes camping for a long weekend, and a family activity is built into the camping trip, such as river rafting, canoeing, etc. During last year's camping trip, the plan was to go on a short hike, one that family members of all ages could enjoy. My brother billed the hike as "just a couple of miles on an easy trail." Unfortunately, the trail was not easy for my mildly asthmatic daughter, who had forgotten to bring her inhaler.

With my daughter's shallow breathing, we fell way behind the rest of the family. We finally came to a fork in the path and no family members were there to direct us, so we were unsure which way to go. We ended up going the wrong way and our "easy" hike turned into five hours of mountain climbing. Our path led us to scramble straight uphill over huge boulders; hours later, we had to scamper back down the boulders while exhausted.

The rest of the family returned to the campground hours before us, not knowing where we were and unable to contact us due to poor cell phone service. The journey made for great campfire conversation and many laughs that evening, plus I learned some lessons that apply to hiking and risk management:

1. **Don't rely on someone else to be prepared** – We all learned to be prepared in Scouts, but it's so easy to ignore, especially when you believe that *someone else* will be prepared. Since we were hiking in a pack of more than 20 people, we weren't too concerned about food and water since everyone else was carrying some. After being separated, we shared our last sip of water and a single granola bar. In that moment, we regretted our lack of preparedness.
2. **Don't go with the crowd** – While hiking, we blindly followed the crowd without knowing where our destination was. In many ethics situations, people don't think for themselves – they do the wrong thing because "everyone else is doing it." One of my favorite sayings, attributed to Saint Augustine, is "Right is right even if no one is doing it; wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it." Be sure to think for yourself and don't blindly follow the crowd.
3. **Have a sense of humor** – Even while clambering over giant rocks, we were able to see the humor in our situation. We laughed a lot, although we were frustrated, tired, and hungry. Though it is not possible to have a sense of humor in every situation, it sure helps when you can extract something positive from a negative experience.
4. **Know your trail name** – NRMCM Director of Consulting Services Erin Gloeckner tells me that avid hikers often adopt a unique "trail name." According to Erin, these names can be self-given or created by friends, but each name tells a story about a hiker's most inspiring trail experiences. These names speak to a hiker's strengths—they help each hiker recognize and advance their strengths rather than focusing on their weaknesses. In my daughter's case, you could joke that her trail name is "Wheezer," but she

conquered her asthma to complete our hike, so I would name her "Fire Breather." Every team member in an entity should think about the strengths they bring to the organization: wear those strengths on your sleeve (or in your trail name).

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