



BOUNCE BACK

Values for Living—Cadet Character Development Forum

INTRODUCTION

Each Values for Living helps Civil Air Patrol members explore a virtue from multiple angles and practice that virtue through a hands-on activity. The combination of analysis and practice helps members internalize the virtue so it stays with them beyond the end of the squadron meeting.

Sometimes we make choices that either compromise our core values or that result in negative consequences. What do you do when faced with failure or a moral mistake? Many American POWs during the Vietnam War faced exactly this problem. This lesson explores **Bounce Back**, an idea they used to recover from such setbacks.

PRE-CLASS CHECKLIST

Prior preparation is essential to success. Please prepare the following well ahead of time:

- All media installed and checked out
- Phase Three cadet orientation/training completed
- Participation awards such as candy or granola bar treats available
- Room arrangements complete

ATTENTION GETTER

LARGE GROUP FACILITATED BY CHAPLAIN/CDI/COMMANDER (10 MINUTES.)

Option 1: Video Clip

US Prisoners of War suffered terribly at the hands of the North Vietnamese. They were tortured, locked into ankle restraints at night, forced to use a small can in their cell as a toilet, and denied medical care. This mistreatment aimed to psychologically break captured soldiers. Once broken, POWs might compromise their commitments and betray their fellow Americans.

The military Code of Conduct states that a prisoner will provide the enemy only name, rank, and serial number. Almost nobody faced with such torture and mistreatment was able to maintain the standards of the code. Many eventually provided more than their name, rank, and serial number. After violating his personal honor, a prisoner would become ashamed, depressed, and discouraged.

This video,¹ featuring some of the American prison camp leaders, explains the concept of "Bounce Back." After personal failure, "Bounce Back" helped the POWs regain their self-esteem and sense of honor.

Option 2: Read this in lieu of showing the video clip

Living with rats and bugs. Enduring no heat in the winter and sweltering humidity in the summer. Surviving torture. These are conditions that Lee Ellis endured as a prisoner of war and that he says taught him valuable lessons of leadership. Ellis is a retired Air Force Colonel and fighter pilot. After he was shot down over Vietnam, Ellis spent more than five years as a POW in a North Vietnamese prison.

"It's a French prison built in the early 1900s. It occupies an entire downtown block," Ellis said. "The walls are 15 feet high, 5 or 6 feet thick, guard towers at all the corners—so impossible to escape."

Ellis learned a powerful lesson after his first interrogation, which included torture. After almost 24 hours of agony, he agreed to fill out a biography. "I gave my name, rank, service number, date of birth, which is what we were supposed to do," Ellis said. "But I didn't give any more than what was accurate, except for my father's name. I did, however, write a fictitious biography."

Even so, Ellis felt broken for having given in to the torture. His morale hit an all-time low. "I felt like I was the weakest, poorest military person who had ever worn the uniform," Ellis said. "As it turned out later, I've learned that everybody had been through that type of thing and done about the same thing."

Ellis said his fellow POWs helped him recover and learn to deal with the torture. The senior ranking officer, Lt. Col. Robbie Risner, coined a term that helped them recover their honor. "He said we just need to Bounce Back. He said be a good American, live by the code of conduct. Take torture to resist only up to the point of where you don't lose physical or mental damage," Ellis said. "Give as little as possible and be ready to Bounce Back."

Option 3: Personal Story

Share a story where you experienced a personal failure of your beliefs or standards and were discouraged and depressed by your behavior. How did you "Bounce Back" and recover from that event?

¹ Video clip from the PBS production, *Return with Honor*, provided under fair use copyright law for limited and transformative educational purpose. Please do not distribute this clip to others.

UNDERSTANDING THE DESIRED BEHAVIOR

ONLINE GROUP OR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION LED BY CADET FACILITATORS (10 MINUTES)

Cadet facilitators should begin the small group discussion with the following introduction:

Nobody is perfect. We will all someday do something that violates our personal standards. You may be pressured by your peers to do something you know is wrong, perhaps even something you promised you would never do. You could try to rationalize, to pretend you didn't do anything wrong, or justify your behavior by pointing to other people who have done the same. You could try to run away and find a new group of friends who don't know what you've done. You could "beat yourself up" and say to yourself, "well, I am already a failure, so there's no sense in trying to change." Or you could choose a better way. You could admit your failure and say, "because I refuse to go down that road again, I am becoming a stronger person." Bounce Back is *choosing* your own stronger and more resilient moral character.

After reading the introduction, pose the following (or similar) questions to your small groups.

- Describe a situation in your world where you or others might be tempted to violate your own personal character standards.
- If someone violates his standards not once but twice; would he be more likely to give in a third and a fourth time? What might go through someone's mind while this happens?
- Can you recall a situation with someone you know, or know of, that developed serious problems because they did not Bounce Back?
- Have you ever had to Bounce Back? Would you be willing to share it with the group?

APPLICATION OF THE BEHAVIOR TO THEIR LIVES

LARGE GROUP FACILITATED BY CHAPLAIN/CDI/COMMANDER (15 MINUTES)

Adult facilitators should pose the following or similar questions to their groups. As always, please select and modify questions according to the needs of your units.

- What is the hardest thing about Bouncing Back?
- Why is it hard to admit to yourself that you are messing up?
- Why is it hard to admit your mistakes to others?
- Why was so important for the POWs in the Hanoi Hilton to admit their failures to one another?
- Whom do these confessions help?
- How does Bouncing Back relate to each of CAP's Core Values?

ACTIVITY

LED BY SMALL GROUP FACILITATORS OR ONLINE ADULT FACILITATOR (10-15 MINUTES)

In this exercise, units will imagine one or more scenarios in which the facilitator needs to Bounce Back from a failure. Participants must encourage the facilitator to admit the fault and then choose to identify with a renewed moral purpose. What can you say to a friend or teammate to help that person Bounce Back?

Please do not immediately reveal the fault or mistake. Instead, challenge the participants to discover the fault through gentle and tactful questions. Let them discover your fears and respond appropriately. Even small efforts in roleplaying will reap significant rewards in engagement and effectiveness.

As always, facilitators should modify the scenarios according to the needs and capabilities of your units.

Scenario One - Trouble at School: The facilitator sits alone in the hallway outside of the principal's office at your high school. Your friends (the other participants) approach and ask what you are doing there. You don't want to admit it, but you have been "busted" and are awaiting disciplinary action. You may choose the reason you are in trouble. Perhaps you were in a fight, caught with contraband, or attempted to cheat on an exam. You aren't necessarily ready to admit what you did and you're afraid of the consequences. Will the principal call your parents? Will you be suspended? Will you be kicked off the sports team or removed from the National Honor Society?

Scenario Two - Admissions Disappointment: The facilitator has just received some terrible news. You had set your heart on attending one of the service academies but just learned that you were rejected by all of them. Even worse, you weren't admitted to any of your "safety schools," so you aren't sure what you'll be doing next year. You are feeling defeated and depressed, convinced you will never be a success at anything and ashamed to face your college-bound friends.

Scenario Three - Called Out: The facilitator is the unit's cadet commander. Before tonight's meeting, you were making fun of a particular senior member with a bad attitude and a reputation for being hard on cadets. Your squadron commander heard your comments and was sorely disappointed. She has asked you to apologize to the senior member in front of the entire squadron before the end of the meeting. You aren't sure you want to apologize. That senior member is jerk and public apologies are unnecessarily humiliating. If you are forced to embarrass yourself in front of the squadron, how will you ever regain the respect you need to lead effectively?

LESSON SUMMARY AND WRAP-UP

LARGE GROUP FACILITATED BY CHAPLAIN/CDI/COMMANDER (5 MINUTES)

Our discussions revealed how much we need social support when trying to Bounce Back. The activity showed how much your facilitators needed your understanding and encouragement. In helping them, you may have also helped yourself. Sometimes, in learning what to say to others, we learn exactly the things we need to say to ourselves.

Something similar happened to the American POWs in Vietnam. They confessed to each other, encouraged each other, and helped each other Bounce Back from personal failures. These heroes refused to define themselves as victims or as failures. Rather than wearing down, they resolved to become stronger and “Return with Honor.” When they were finally released, they walked out of the prison with their heads held high.

Bouncing Back from failures produces men and women of solid character who became strong and effective leaders in our nation. You won't always win, but you are not a loser. You will sometimes be mistreated, but you are not a victim. You will sometimes fail, but you are not a failure. By learning to Bounce Back and to help others Bounce Back, you will become a person of stronger character. You will become the resolute and resilient leader our nation and our world so desperately need.

QUOTABLE QUOTES

“Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently.”

– Henry Ford

“It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all, in which case you have failed by default.”

– J.K. Rowling

“Failure isn't fatal, but failure to change might be.”

– Coach John Wooden

“I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”

– Michael Jordan

“The righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity.”

– Proverbs 24:16