



COUNSEL

Values for Living—Cadet Character Development Forum (For Online Delivery)

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.

Counsel is the consideration that comes before deciding. We all know how easy it is to make decisions, even important decisions, without thinking things through. But how do we “think things through?” What questions should we ask to help ourselves make more informed and responsible decisions? How can we make a habit of asking ourselves these questions?

This lesson is suitable for either online or in-person delivery.

PRECLASS 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 (5-10 MINUTES.)

Option 1: Media Clip: **Decisions: The Cairo Flood** (with curriculum downloads).

Option 2: If multimedia resources are unavailable, please read the video transcript:

In 2011, the Army Corps of Engineers faced an impossible decision. The worst flood in a century swelled the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Floodwaters would soon overflow the levees built to protect communities along the rivers. The water had to go somewhere, which meant someone was going to get flooded. The Corps had to decide who would lose their homes.

Cairo (pronounced CARE-o), Illinois, sits at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. In the days of steamboat trade between New Orleans and Chicago, Cairo flourished. During the Civil War, Cairo provided a base of operations for training and supplying troops in the Mississippi

Theater. After the war, railways brought even more trade and prosperity to Cairo. Its population surged to 16,000. However, as automobiles replaced steamboats and railways found shorter routes around the town, Cairo's fortunes turned. Racial violence, boycotts, and civil unrest further ravaged the community. By 2011, Cairo had a population of 2,800, with many living in poverty.

Because flooding had long threatened Cairo, the Army Corps of Engineers built and maintained a floodwall to protect the town and a system of levees to protect surrounding farmland. The levees had a backup plan involving a "floodway." In the event of a catastrophic flood, the Corps could destroy part of the levees. This opening would release flood waters into an area of about 200 square miles across the river in Missouri. In 1928, the federal government paid the residents of these lands about \$17 per acre for the right to flood their lands in the event of an emergency. Meanwhile, as Cairo's fortunes fell, the Missouri farmlands flourished. Though only a few hundred people lived there, they tended some of the most fertile farmland in the region. The state of Missouri depended on these farmlands as a source of income.

Now, in the spring of 2011, floodwaters reached a record height of 61 feet. The levees showed signs of impending failure. The Army Corps of Engineers had to make a grave decision. If they opened the floodway, the Mississippi would cover hundreds of miles of Missouri farmland. The river would flood dozens of farmhouses and threaten the state's economy. If they didn't open the floodway and the waters continued to rise, Cairo could be submerged and 2,800 residents left homeless.

How would you decide?

When faced with a choice like this, most of us will stop to think through our options before deciding. In 2011 as the floodwaters rose, thousands of people's homes and livelihoods, and millions of dollars in property at were stake. A situation like this is, we hope, a once-in-a-lifetime decision. Yet we make thousands of decisions every day, often without careful consideration. Some decisions are routine and don't require much thought. A study from Cornell University estimated that we make almost 300 decisions each day just about food!

But many of the decisions we face result in consequences that affect our own lives and the lives of others. How often do you stop to think about your decisions? If you do stop to weigh your options, what questions do you ask yourself? What procedures do you follow before making a difficult choice?

Counsel is the activity of thinking before deciding. Developing the habit of good counsel requires asking illuminating questions. Strengthening the virtue of counsel requires improving and refining your questions.

In your small groups, you'll reflect on how you make decisions. Next, we'll explore several kinds of questions that can help you make better decisions. Use this discussion to start developing your own list of questions. Finally, we will return to our scenario. You will decide whether to flood the farmland or risk submerging the town.

NOTE: Please do not use a personal story as the attention getter for this lesson.

UNDERSTANDING THE DESIRED BEHAVIOR

ONLINE GROUP OR SMALL GROUP FACILITATED BY PHASE III CADET (15 MINUTES.)

Let's start by thinking generally about our decision-making.

- What is the greatest amount of time you have spent thinking before making an important decision? What did you have to decide?
- What questions do you ask yourself before making an important decision?
- What strategies have you used to avoid making decisions?

Now let's come back to the flooding scenario.

- We learned in a previous lesson that effective leaders need to be aware of their own perspectives. Before we get too far into this case study, let's get a gut check. Would you flood the farms or the town? Why?
- Our experiences shape our perspectives. What personal experiences might be affecting the way you understand this situation? For example, do you have any first-hand experience of floods?
- Do you think you're more like the farmers or the residents of Cairo?
- Do you trust the government to make this decision?
- What would it take to change your mind?

APPLICATION OF THE BEHAVIOR TO THEIR LIVES

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

For this discussion, all participants should have a piece of paper and a writing utensil. We will explore several **kinds of questions** that could help you make better decisions. Although we focus on the floods, you can easily adapt these questions to other contexts. Write down the questions that seem most revealing or helpful to you. They will be useful later!

Facilitators should choose questions appropriate to the needs and abilities of their units. You may use the questions below or propose your own. Adult leaders may also wish to refer to the "PLUS" model described in *CAPP 80-3 Core Values for Seniors*.

- The purpose of the character development program is to align our thoughts and behaviors with the Core Values. How do the **Core Values** apply to this situation?
- We learned in our lesson on humility that humble leaders know their **duties and priorities**. If you are a member of the Army Corps of Engineers, what are your duties in this situation? What are your priorities? Do the residents of Cairo have a duty to the farmers? Do the farmers have a duty to the residents of Cairo?
- Our understanding improves when we **define** relevant terms.
 - What exactly is a levee and what is a floodplain? What do they do and what are they for?
 - What exactly is "catastrophic flooding"?
- We can also ask questions of **comparison**.
 - How is Cairo like the farmland? How are they different?
 - How is this flood like earlier floods or floods yet to come?
 - How would you compare the future prospects of Cairo and the farmland?

- Does it matter that the floodway agreement between landowners and the government was made 83 years earlier when the land was far less valuable?
 - Does it matter that Cairo is mostly low-income and the surrounding farmland is mostly higher income?
 - Does it matter that Cairo is mostly African American and the farmers are mostly White?¹
- Questions of **circumstance** ask what else is happening at the same time that might inform our decision. How would you approach this decision differently...
 - ... if some leaders, recalling Hurricane Katrina, argued that the federal government had previously failed to protect African American communities from flood damage?
 - ... if the nation were in the midst of a food shortage?
 - ... if the state of Missouri faced bankruptcy?
- Questions of **relation** ask about causes and effects.
 - What led to this situation? Will it happen again?
 - What will happen if Cairo is flooded?
 - What will happen if the farmland is flooded?
 - How will this look in one month, one year, or one decade?
- Questions of **testimony** use the knowledge or insights of others to help us make informed decisions.
 - What are trustworthy or informed people saying about this situation?
 - Who would you choose to help you make this choice and what would that person say?
 - What laws or precedents should inform your decision?
 - What historical, scientific, or statistical information would help you decide?
- In our lesson on patience, we learned to be aware of negative emotions that come from hardships. Often, the principal negative emotion is **fear**. What are you afraid might happen? Is this a reasonable fear? When should we allow fear to influence our decisions?
- In our lesson on gratitude, we saw the importance of focusing on positives and **opportunities**. Is there any opportunity hidden in this looming tragedy? Are there options we haven't considered?

These questions may seem overwhelming. Start with a short list you can use. Practice and familiarity will make asking them second nature. Over time, you will refine your own list, adding and subtracting according to your experience and judgment. Remember, there is no perfect list of questions for making good decisions.

¹ Note to facilitators: Questions of racial justice are fundamental to this dilemma. In 2011, Cairo was overwhelmingly African American; the Missouri farmers were overwhelmingly White. Ideally, questions of racial justice are considered in discussing this dilemma. However, we recognize that not all units are prepared for such a discussion. Moreover, we understand that controversies about racial justice, given the current political climate, could derail the lesson and hinder the lesson's objectives. We strongly encourage you to introduce questions of race if your unit is prepared to discuss those questions fruitfully and trust you as a facilitator to know the needs and capabilities of your members.

ACTIVITY

LED BY SMALL GROUP FACILITATORS OR ONLINE INSTRUCTOR (10-15 MINUTES.)

Allow your participants to use their questions to address the dilemma facing the Army Corps of Engineers. Structure this activity to meet the needs of your unit. Here are two possibilities:

- Give each small group ten minutes to debate and decide whether to flood the farms or risk flooding Cairo. Each group will appoint a representative to address the unit. The representative should explain how the group reached its decision. Which questions had the greatest influence on the group?
- Divide participants into three groups. One group will represent the residents of Cairo. A second group will represent the Missouri farmers. A third group will assume the role of the Army Corps of Engineers. Allow the residents of Cairo and the farmers five minutes to make their case to the Engineers. Give the Engineers another five minutes to deliberate and decide.

In all cases, insist that participants articulate the reasons for their decisions. Which questions clarified the situation and helped them reach a decision? This lesson should help participants develop a process for considering difficult choices. A list of helpful questions is a first step toward developing that process.

LESSON SUMMARY AND WRAP-UP

LARGE GROUP FACILITATED BY CHAPLAIN/CDI/COMMANDER (2 MINUTES)

Option 1: Media Clip: **Wrap-up: The Cairo Flood** (with curriculum downloads).

Option 2: If multimedia resources are unavailable, please read the video transcript:

You are probably wondering what happened with the flood. By 02 May 2011, the waters reached nearly 62 feet and had already breached the levee in two places upstream of Cairo. Maj Gen Michael Walsh of the Army Corps of Engineers ordered three detonations to open the levees. Floodwaters covered hundreds of square miles of farmland. Instead of being praised for saving Cairo, General Walsh was criticized for failing to open the floodway sooner.

Today, Cairo remains a struggling small town. It has lost another 25% of its population since the 2011 flood. Over half of its children live in poverty. The surrounding farmland suffered millions of dollars in damages but less than 1% of the farmland was permanently damaged. Some farmers are still seeking compensation for their losses.

Although you may never have to make such a grave decision, you will make thousands of decisions every day. We all want to make better decisions. The key to making better decisions is practicing counsel, making a habit of asking deliberative questions. You can practice counsel even when facing simple, everyday decisions. Should I have dessert tonight? Should I send a thank you card? Should I seek a leadership position in the squadron? Should I wake earlier to exercise or stay up later to practice a musical instrument? Should I post this to a social media account? Use your questions from this lesson to improve your deliberation.

Practicing counsel doesn't guarantee that you'll make the right decision every time. However, as you practice asking questions, you'll tend to make better decisions and make them more consistently. You'll also be better prepared to explain your decisions. Practicing counsel will help you become a responsible and trustworthy leader.

QUOTABLE QUOTES

"Plans fail when there is no counsel." — Proverbs 15:22

"In the midst of shouting, the advantageous course is not to be seen, but as one reasons with oneself, it shines out clear." — Menander

"On an important decision one rarely has 100% of the information needed for a good decision no matter how much one spends or how long one waits." — Robert K. Greenleaf

"Not making a decision means forgoing an opportunity." — Oscar Auliq-Ice

"Counsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom." — Walter Benjamin

"Deliberation and debate is the way you stir the soul of our democracy." — Jesse Jackson