



# THE TRACKER

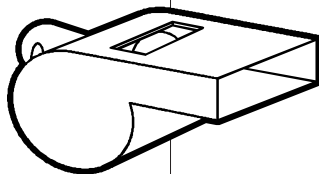
Monthly Newsletter of the Inland Empire Search and Rescue Council

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## Coaching For Competency

John Gookin, NOLS Curriculum Manager



Competency is something that develops with experience and training. Different people need different experiences to become competent and some learn faster than others. There are natural steps that learners move through as they develop: these five descriptions describe competency levels in general terms. The first and last stages are well-supported by the scientific community: the middle three are fuzzier. We all probably display each of these levels of expertise, every day. An important part of self-awareness is a grasp of our own competencies in the skills we need to perform.

**Coaching notes:** Help people become more aware of their own competency levels so they can see what their greatest contributions to teams are and so they can develop action plans for their continued growth. Use developmentally appropriate training strategies for different levels and expect different people to be more efficient using their own preferred learning styles.

### Stage 1: Novice

A novice uses objective facts and applies them using **over-simplified rules**. These rules are initially applied to these facts without any situational judgment, so they are called *context free rules*.

- Novices apply these rules in a simple methodical way where they recite every little detail to themselves rather than recognizing patterns. For most people this

gets tedious after a few experiences. A novice reader might identify the first letter of this sentence by using the fact that an A has two diagonal lines in a specific orientation to each other, with a shorter horizontal line crossing them about half way up; then they would read the next letter.

- General rules, like “Wear your seatbelt to stay safer” that are true most of the time, but not always, are called *heuristics*. Novices often **treat heuristics as dogma**.

- A novice **doesn't know what it is that they don't know**. The fact that they are clueless isn't a comment on their character, or education habits, just on their lack of specific experience.

- A novice's first glimpses of a new discipline teach them simple lessons that frame their expertise in this specific realm. A novice assumes that what they have seen is **normal** and that it predicts what they will see the next time.

**Coaching notes:** Novices usually perform better if a competent person just tells them what to do and when to do it. Novices need to experience “normal” situations, not the exceptions to the norms. They need simple situations to practice applying their simple rules. Novices need guided experiences and basic instruction at the “one reason why” level of understanding. A guide needs to keep them out of harm's way since they lack situational judgment. A guide may have to just tell them what to do in some complicated situations, or what complications to avoid dealing with, and the novice usually appreciates these clear directions. Clear

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# What's New in Volunteer Forces?

Lt. Virgil Merrett, Volunteer Forces Unit

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On April 26<sup>th</sup> the San Bernardino County Coroner's Office recovered a body from the Santa Ana Creek South of I-10 and East of Riverside Ave. Colton. The body was that of a juvenile male victim.

Dental comparisons were conducted and the body was positively identified as that of our missing juvenile victim from the Christmas days floods in Old Waterman Canyon. The family was contacted by the Coroner's Office and advised of this information. He was the last remaining missing victim from the St. Sophie's camp flood and there will be no additional planned searches regarding this case.

I have requested Darren Goodman to scout and develop a search plan for the South Fork Canyon area of Lytle Creek for the Katz airplane. During the next few weeks that area will be evaluated and a search grid map will be developed. The overall plan will be to request the SAR Teams to conduct their training days in South Fork Canyon covering an assigned grid area. This will occur over the next several months until we have covered all of the searchable grids. The search will mostly be in

the creek bed bottom and the upper ridge lines where it is safe to search. We will continue to conduct aerial helicopter searches of the walls of the canyon.

There is updated budget information regarding your equipment wish lists. I have had several meetings with Deputy Chief Nobles and Undersheriff Peppler concerning this matter. The discussions resulted in the approval to purchase some safety related items for the teams. These items include rope, carbiners, helmets, cord, webbing, Garmin ETrek handheld GPS, litter, etc.

The higher dollar items like unit and base stations radios will not be purchased this year. The overall County and Sheriff's Department budget is tight and they are attempting to make it to July 1<sup>st</sup>.

I am awaiting the purchase orders numbers now and will soon order the safety items. We will advise when the equipment comes in for your teams.

The Annual Volunteer Forces Picnic went well with about 475 volunteers there that day. I hope all had a good time.

*Take Care,  
Virgil Merrett*

# Mutual Aid Resource Typing Guidelines

Jeff Lehman, Cave Rescue Team



The beginning of this year, and end of the previous, was one of the busiest on record for San Bernardino County search and rescue teams. There were missions in the Mt. Baldy area, San Gorgonio, Devore, Waterman Canyon, and Wrightwood. This coupled with some treacherous weather conditions made for a difficult search and rescue environment. For the most part, the weather required that searchers in the field have current snow and ice certification. This fact, and the sheer number of missions, meant that we were required to rely upon our colleagues from other counties to help us out. Teams from all over Southern and Northern California descended upon San Bernardino to fill holes in our rosters. What is the process by which these teams are summoned? How do we ensure that teams from out of the county have the required expertise for the mission at hand?

To help fellow jurisdictions, California has a mutual aid system whereby counties can request additional resources, when theirs are exhausted or unable to cope with an incident, from neighboring jurisdictions. If you have travelled out of county for a SAR mission, then you have

been part of a mutual aid effort.

In order to respond to a mutual aid request, the requesting county must make the

request via the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES). OES then notifies the county from which the resources are requested, and the callout begins.

Many of you are familiar (maybe too familiar) with the Incident Command System (ICS). ICS is a method by which disasters and other incidents are managed. California uses the Incident Command System as part of, what they call, the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS). One of the key features of ICS is common terminology. This is especially important when ordering resources from mutual aid sources. For example, if you are searching for a lost hiker and require a helicopter of a certain size and capacity, then you need to tell the agencies to which you are making the request. There may be several makes and models that fit your requirements, but you are not familiar with each of these. This is where a series of standard helicopter types would be handy. In fact, that is what is done. OES has typed a number of resources to aid in mutual aid requests. Incident managers that require a helicopter that carries 5 people can order a Type 3 helicopter. If they need a 16 person capacity, then they would order a Type 1 helicopter. What about SAR resources?

Recently the state has typed search and rescue resources. This helps define the capabilities of SAR teams when they are summoned to help other counties. The recently released guidelines cover SAR Dog, Ground Search, Technical Rope, and Mounted resources. The guidelines can be found at [www.thetracker.info/SAR\\_typing](http://www.thetracker.info/SAR_typing).

The federal government is also sorting out its mutual aid SAR resource typing. These guidelines are available at the same URL as the state guidelines mentioned above.

Take a look at the guidelines and discuss it with your team.

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*"The guidelines can be found at [www.thetracker.info/SAR\\_typing](http://www.thetracker.info/SAR_typing)"*

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# Coaching

Continued from page 1

directions and guidance help a novice to succeed at the task at hand, and to give them what they need most: experience. One of the most important things to teach a novice is to ask for help when they need it.

## Stage 2: Advanced Beginner

With experience and intelligence, people can usually move quickly to the advanced beginner stage.

- Repeated experience helps beginners become **more familiar with patterns**.
- Repeated experience dealing with real situations fosters the **beginning of situational judgment** where beginners start to identify patterns when certain rules become relevant. They start to learn some exceptions to the rules they initially thought were more concrete.
- But the advanced beginner still **lacks a big picture perspective**. They need a mentor to guide them into situations where they can apply their rules and situational judgment, so don't expect them to notice the roar of the approaching waterfall while you are having them evaluate the small rapids immediately in front of them.

**Coaching notes:** Don't tell beginners to become competent; give them so much real world experience that they will naturally crave competency. Provide live coaching to help them succeed. Let them start to risk making mistakes, within boundaries, so they learn their own lessons. Set them up for success with clear instructions, but don't bail them out as readily as you would aid a novice. Help them learn situational judgment, both specifically and generally.

## Stage 3: Competence

- An advanced beginner eventually becomes overwhelmed with possibilities. Our brains can usually handle 7 +/- 2 sensory factors when judging a situation (Miller, 1954). Stress diminishes the number of factors we can keep in our highest level of consciousness. Competent performers can slowly put options in

**hierarchical order**, like eventually dropping their cell phone to deal with avoiding the oncoming cement truck.

- Competent performers know **solutions to common problems**. This helps them shortcut extensive analysis.
- Competency includes a **big picture perspective with simple priorities**. Once a priority is set, an action plan is developed to use the above rules and judgment to deal with the situation. If more than one priority is chosen to deal with, **multi-tasks are treated as sub-problems** and dealt with individually (higher levels of expertise deal with multiple sub-problems more holistically.)
- Competent people have used a typical *forgetting curve* regression to forget many of the facts they once knew, but they subconsciously still access them and allow them to shape their **intuitive feelings about decisions**.
- **Choosing priorities is more intuitive and less objective** than the above rules, because of its complexity, and because of the natural need for speed in priority-setting. Intuition is the use of subconscious thought, where you access much more information than your conscious brain can ever afford to manage. It takes a lot of real world experience to become competent. Some people become better at this than others: chess players say that practicing making quick decisions helps this skill develop better.

- Competency is stymied by a slow and detached decision-making process that involves a lot of conscious reasoning. But on a learning expedition, this is often the highest standard we usually can have for our students because we want the safety factor of small groups discussing key decisions.

**Coaching notes:** Competency is developed from lots of experience, and from diverse experiences. Good coaching can increase what is learned from those quality experiences. The competent leader can be cut

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# Got Hurt?

Shirley Keebaugh, Sgt. Dennis Shaffer, and Cpl. Darren Goodman



While debriefing teams coming in from the field on a recent mission, a search team leader mentioned that a member of his team had sustained a minor injury, had it checked out by medical personnel on that team, and was fine. He was advised by the debriefer that although his team member seemed fine, he should be sure to document the injury when he got back to his station. What may seem like a minor injury on the day of the mission may develop days or weeks later into a major health issue. It is better to document all injuries to be safe rather than dismiss it as minor and then wish later on that you had documented the incident when you find that you have to be treated or receive therapy for the injury.

The following is the procedure that

volunteers should follow when you are injured on duty or if you are exposed to

poison oak or communicable pathogens:  
Any volunteer that sustains an injury that requires medical treatment while on duty

must notify his/her coordinator. The coordinator will complete all appropriate paperwork and give the volunteer a medical service order for treatment. Even if the injury is minor and does not require medical treatment, the volunteer should notify his/her coordinator as soon as possible after the incident. The injury should be documented in the station Injury Logbook. In addition, each station should have a fill-in-the-blank memo to be completed and signed by the volunteer and the watch commander. A copy of that memo will be placed in the volunteer's personnel file for further reference.

If members of Volunteer Forces are present when a volunteer is injured and the volunteer's immediate coordinator is not present, the volunteer should report any injuries to the Volunteer Forces staff. Volunteer Forces will complete the appropriate paperwork, ensure treatment is rendered, and forward necessary documentation to the associated station.

*"Any volunteer that sustains an injury that requires medical treatment while on duty must notify his/her coordinator"*

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loose to make independent decisions in terrain and circumstances that allow them the time they need for their low-speed decision-making process. In fact, it can be argued that at this point, they *need* independence to learn enough from their decisions to develop proficiency.

The scientists that argue that important decisions are mainly analytical say that training and schooling increases competency at this point. The scientists in the naturalistic decision making school say learners mainly need experience. Obviously both schooling and experience need to happen in a reasonable combination for that specific person in that specific field.

It is fine to occasionally ask folks for objective reasons for why they made a certain choice, but don't expect them to remember later why they intuitively felt a certain way.

#### Stage 4: Proficiency

- The proficient performer is deeply imbedded in the activity, personally. **They are *one with the activity*** in the sense explained in our Environmental Educator Notebook: They see themselves as part of the system; they aren't operating a car, they are just driving. They have done the activity so often that **routine tasks, decisions, and priority-setting are subconscious habit**, rather than consciously deliberate. Intuition shortcuts the laborious process of consciously addressing every little factor. This adds tremendous efficiency that leads to **rapid and fluid decisions**.
- Proficiency is usually good but it has its traps. One pitfall is when the proficient person hasn't consulted larger datasets than their own past luck: this develops short-sighted complacency. Another potential pitfall is if someone views their own experience-based intuition as actually a newly developed mystical ESP ability (the entertainment industry sends us this message) that transfers to other disciplines. Statistics show that in judging avalanches, people who are proficient in assessing avalanche

hazard still have a high rate of accidents (McCammon, 2003.)

- Proficiency gets interesting when more than one proficient person makes a decision. Quick agreement is common, either because they both agree, or because the dissenting person understands the priority of the decision. Because of their competency, they don't tend to argue about trivialities. Disagreement is a yellow flag that forces the team to drop to the slower but more objective decision-making strategies explained above. Proficient people can become bored and tired by this slower and more tedious process. But interactions with other proficient people add a deeper understanding that helps the proficient person develop even greater convictions about the rules they already intuitively knew.

- The proficient performer is **still making decisions analytically. They are just using a lot of heuristics, intuitive shortcuts, and easy prioritization** to speed up the analytical process.

**Coaching notes:** To gain expertise, these people can work on teams with peers who will display different competencies, they can work with diverse teams, they can push their limits, and they can just improve by having fun doing what they are good at.

#### Stage 5: Expertise

- People only become expert when they have an extensive experience base and behave as a **student of that discipline**. They are learning new material faster than they are forgetting the old material. Expert performers generally just know intuitively what to do.
- Experts are more comfortable winging it, because **they intuitively know when they can wing it**. They don't question their abilities: **they intuitively know their abilities and boundaries**. At the same time, when experts need to keep track of more than about 7 items, like a pre-flight safety check or packing for an expedition, they

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# Calendar

For information or to submit an event, contact the editor at [editor@thetracker.info](mailto:editor@thetracker.info). Appearance of items in this section does not necessarily imply endorsement by the SAR Council or the County of San Bernardino. Call if you have any questions about a particular listing. To save space, persons to contact and numbers for multiple listings of *Department-approved training providers* are consolidated in one place at the bottom of this page.

## May

### May 15-16—National Cave Rescue Commission (NCRC) Basic Cave Rescue Orientation Course

Contact Mark Kinsey ([mkinsey@caverescue.net](mailto:mkinsey@caverescue.net)) for details or visit [www.caverescue.net](http://www.caverescue.net) for a registration form.

### May 15-16—West Valley SAR Rope Training

At Hole-in-the-Wall. Contact Bob Gattas at [rgattas@earthlink.net](mailto:rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

### May 19—Inland Empire SAR Council

19:00 in the Main Conference Room at SBSB HQ

### May 19-23—Direction and Control of the Search Function, Search and Rescue Management Course.

Hosted by L.A. Co. Sheriff. Sierra Madre, CA. See [www.thetracker.info/calendar](http://www.thetracker.info/calendar) for a flyer.

## June

### June 12-13 & 26-27—Technical Rescue Basics Course (TRBC)

Contact Don Welch (760-244-7340) for more information.

### June 4-6—Swiftwater Team Leaders Course, National Outdoor Leadership School

Thermopolis, WY. You need to either be a boater or in excellent shape to take this course. Contact [john\\_gookin@nols.edu](mailto:john_gookin@nols.edu) for more information.

### June 2-5—NASAR '04 Conference & Expo

"Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Lost People", Lansdowne, VA. Visit [www.nasar.org](http://www.nasar.org) for more information.

### June 5—West Valley SAR ELT Training

Night operation. Contact Bob Gattas ([rgattas@earthlink.net](mailto:rgattas@earthlink.net)) for more information.

### June 19—West Valley SAR Rope Training

Contact Bob Gattas ([rgattas@earthlink.net](mailto:rgattas@earthlink.net)) for more information.

## July

### July 21—Inland Empire SAR Council

19:00 in the Main Conference Room at SBSB HQ

### July 25—Personal Vertical Skills Check-off

Hosted by West Valley SAR at Rialto Airport. Contact Bob Gattas ([rgattas@earthlink.net](mailto:rgattas@earthlink.net)) for more information.

## August

### Aug. 21—Rope Training

Contact Bob Gattas ([rgattas@earthlink.net](mailto:rgattas@earthlink.net)) for more information.

### Aug. 25—Central SAR Fundraiser

An evening at the Improv. See [www.thetracker.info/calendar](http://www.thetracker.info/calendar) for flyer.

## September

### Sep. 15—Inland Empire SAR Council

19:00 in the main conference room at SBSB HQ.

### Sep. 18—West Valley SAR Search Scenario

Contact Bob Gattas ([rgattas@earthlink.net](mailto:rgattas@earthlink.net)) for more information.

### Sep. 22-26—Direction and Control of the Search Function

Hosted in Yosemite. See [www.thetracker.info/calendar](http://www.thetracker.info/calendar) for a flyer.

## October

### Oct. 1-3—Morongo Basin Search and Rescue Desert Run

For more information call 760-369-9999, or visit [www.desertrun.org](http://www.desertrun.org)

### Oct. 9-11—SAR City

### Oct. 16-23—National Cave Rescue Commission (NCRC) Level I and Level II Cave Rescue Seminar

Week-long NCRC seminar at California Caverns, CA. Contact Mark Kinsey ([mkinsey@caverescue.net](mailto:mkinsey@caverescue.net)) for more information.

### Oct. 16-17—West Valley SAR Map & Compass Training

Contact Bob Gattas ([rgattas@earthlink.net](mailto:rgattas@earthlink.net)) for more information.

## November

### Nov. 17—Inland Empire SAR Council

19:00 in the main conference room at SBSB HQ.

### Nov. 20—West Valley SAR Night Scenario

Contact Bob Gattas ([rgattas@earthlink.net](mailto:rgattas@earthlink.net)) for more information.

### \*Course / Provider

BSAR / Vol Forces  
CMC Rescue School  
On Rope1  
Rigging For Rescue  
Ropes That Rescue  
TRBC, PVSC, NCRC / Vol Forces  
Mountaineering / Vol Forces  
West Valley SAR Training

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[www.ropesthatrescue.com/](http://www.ropesthatrescue.com/)  
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tend to use lists so they don't burden their brain with remembering so many details.

- Following experts might not teach a novice to develop objective judgment, but it models excellent judgment. It is important that experts explain situations carefully to novices or they may apply the experience to later situations blindly.
- Most of us are expert at bike-riding, driving, hiking, and talking, and would have a hard time explaining how we do these tasks. If we are expert at other tasks like paddling or climbing, it takes a deliberate and tedious process to develop a progression for others to learn to be a good novice, then a beginner, then competent. This education skill is one that many technical experts are actually novices at.
- At the same time, an expert is always an excellent mentor, if it is role modeling you want. They often can't be bothered by details like why they made certain decisions, because the whole point is to let their intuition use their experience base to just let decisions flow (citation: Chick.)
- There is probably a reason that Paul Petzoldt didn't begin NOLS during his prime years in his 20's-30's. He was an expert mountaineer then. He waited until at 51 years old he had been an expert mountaineer and leader of people for so long that he could help novices develop into competent wilderness travelers and leaders. He waited until he was an expert educator.

**Coaching notes:** The challenge for experts is to maintain their expertise through experience and proactive learning. Resting on their laurels is an easier alternative that erodes expertise.

## References

- 1 Jackson, Susan & Csikszentmihaly, Mihaly (1999) *Flow In Sports* by Human Kinetics.
- 2 Miller, G. 1954. "The magical number seven, plus or minus two: Some limits on our capacity for processing information", *Psychological Review*, 63(2):81-97
- 3 Dreyfus, Stuart E. & Dreyfus, Hubert L. 1986. *Mind Over Machine*. Blackwell Publishers.
- 4 McCammon, Ian, 2003. "Heuristic traps in recreational avalanche accidents: Evidence and implications", *Avalanche Review*, 22(2&3).
- 5 Williamson, John (Jed), *Accidents In North American Mountaineering*

## About the Author

John Gookin is the Curriculum Manager at the National Outdoor Leadership School, and has been an NCRC Instructor, a SAR Ops Chief, a High School Science Teacher, and a USMC Special Operations Instructor Trainer. This article will be in the next edition of NOLS' Leadership Educator Notebook.

# Classified Section

Contact the Editor to place or remove any item.

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**SBSD Search and Rescue decals.** \$5. The decals are 3.5" X 3.5" and can be stuck on the outside of just about anything or on the inside of a window. The price is \$5.00 each and can be purchased by contacting SarDesertRun@aol.com or calling 760-369-9999.

**Earrings (1/2")** \$10 and **Lapel Pin/Tie Tacks (5/8")** \$8. Fund-raiser for Morongo Mounted SAR Team. For ordering info contact Kim Miller at millerkm@29palms.usmc.mil or call Kim at (760) 367-1148 or (760) 367-1148 evenings.



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**Granite Gear Nimbus Ozone Backpack.** Size regular. Highly adjustable, and brand new. Comes with large shoulder straps, but Granite Gear will swap them for one your size is they don't fit. \$105. Contact Jeff Lehman at jlehman@caverescue.net.

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