

# Black Bear

Case Study





# Using a Survival Simulation in Teamwork to Beat the Competition

## What is Black Bear?

Black Bear is a fun and memorable way to demonstrate team synergy — the phenomenon that occurs when a team achieves greater results than the sum of its parts. Black Bear provides a safe, open environment in which participants learn and practice key process skills that lead to synergy, including problem solving, communicating effectively, consensus decision-making and managing and resolving conflict.

The group in Black Bear is faced with some life or death decisions. Although most organizational decisions do not have such dire implications, high-pressure situations are certainly common. Crucial decisions are made under less than ideal circumstances.

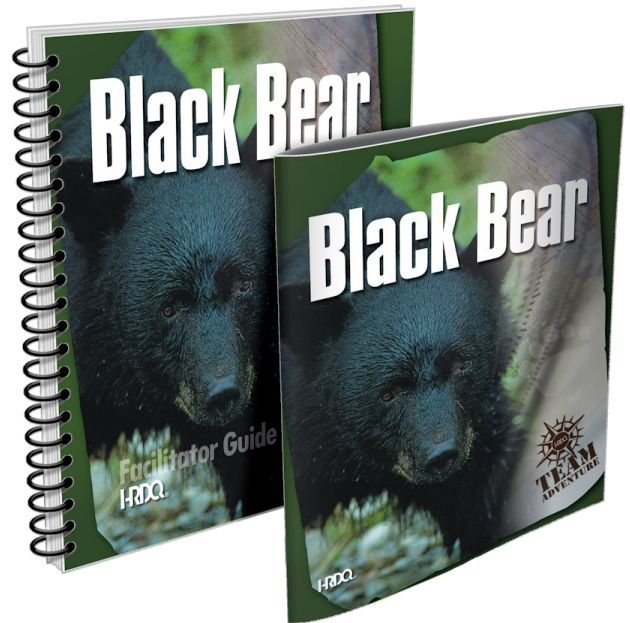
Here's the specific imaginary scenario. On an early-morning hike in the Great Smoky Mountains, your group surprises a mother black bear — with near-fatal results. Your scout leader is attacked and left lying on the ground, unconscious and bleeding steadily from deep lacerations. Now the team must work together to make critical decisions and find the best way to rescue the scout leader.

Survival exercises remain popular training tools because of their flexibility and generally predictable results. This means that the facilitator can depend on the exercises to help them achieve whatever learning goals or objectives have been set.



## Learning Outcomes

- ⇒ Learn 7 behaviors of effective consensus decision making
- ⇒ Hone group problem-solving skills
- ⇒ Practice a model for consensus decision making
- ⇒ Learn how to work as a team under pressure
- ⇒ Experience the concept of team synergy



## Uses and Applications

Use Black Bear and other Team Adventure Series survival simulations to:

- Illustrate the concept of team synergy
- "Break the ice" among new or conflicted teams
- Give teams a nonthreatening opportunity to work together
- Help teams practice consensus decision making
- Improve active listening, probing, and confronting behaviors in a realistic setting
- Train team leaders in team facilitation skills
- Open or close a learning session
- Introduce an organizational change
- Interject a fun activity into an otherwise serious agenda
- Supplement outdoor experiential learning

## Black Bear Case Study

Many organizations face pressure and crisis points. It is difficult under the best of circumstances to practice good decision-making skills. Having to make a decision under pressure only makes things more difficult. Some know how to handle pressure – others do not. The temptation to make and implement a hurried decision is strong. Learning to engage in effective decision-making under pressure is a crucial skill in today's constantly changing, fast-paced business environment.

Several years ago a fast food restaurant chain was having difficulty beating the competition and wanted their managers to do two things – build teamwork in their crews, and know what to do when a service or product challenge arose in their restaurant.

We explored the option of doing Black Bear to train over 3000 of their managers. Each session had from 200 to 700 managers attending. The Black Bear lesson plan is for an approximately two-hour session, but we had two more hours of “tag-along” learning we needed to provide.



*"Every company has opportunities for improving the way people work together. The company simply needs a tool to ignite the fire. The Black Bear survival simulation is that tool."*

*~ Gary Turner ~*

## What Did We Do in Our Sessions?

In our 11 sessions, we wanted to make it an exceptional experience. We decorated with pine cones, sprayed the room with pine scent, and had “woody” music playing in the background. We also presented a slideshow of the Appalachian Trail and provided tabletop burners to make smores. When ready to start, I stomped onto the stage wearing hiking boots, shorts and carrying a huge backpack. This caught their attention, setting it up to make the learning fun.

We ran Black Bear just as the Facilitator Guide clearly instructs. Managers read the scenario, individually make choices, discuss the choices as a team, and then have the team make the same choices. Once they completed it, they could see their results were better by working as a team. They also learned the keys to crisis decision-making.

And what did we do for two more hours that made a difference for “tomorrow?”



## First We Taught Managers to Handle a Crisis

Black Bear has seven key factors in handling pressure for action. Those include the processes of loading up on information, pushing for creativity, insisting on full participation, seriously consider alternatives, playing devil's advocate, dividing complex problems into smaller problems, and finally, when finished, reconsidering decisions.

When restaurant managers are in their “get-it-done-now” environment, these seven processes are very tough to do. So we discussed how to implement them given the warp speed in which they work. We used tips like always asking for more information, asking if there were better ways to do a job from those that do it, and other great leadership skills. After the sessions, many managers approached me saying that the tips to do the seven processes were extremely helpful.

## Secondly We Taught Managers How to Develop Teamwork on Crews

We reviewed how to have quick periodic crew meetings before shifts and engage the crew in problem-solving, how to improve on those “survival” elements similar to our Black Bear meeting -- getting everyone's opinion and coming to a consensus on solutions.

This is a sure fire way to come up with solutions and to increase the crew's commitment to ensuring that the solutions work. We also asked managers to reward teamwork and follow-up on team decisions.

## The Tool that Ignites the Fire

It became obvious that linking teambuilding to bottom line factors for success is important. Every company has opportunities for improving the way people work together. The company simply needs a tool to ignite the fire. The Black Bear survival simulation is that tool.

The experiential learning provided by Black Bear engages the senses, the emotions, and the visions of managers and teams. It isn't just fun – it's a life changing event.



### **Gary Turner, Turner Consulting**

*An award-winning trainer and consultant, Gary Turner has over 30 years of professional experience with major corporations such as M&M Mars, Aramark, and AT&T. His diverse area of expertise includes consulting on leadership, team development, organizational improvement, communication, conflict management, and collaboration.*

## Team Adventure Series

A collection of nine survival simulations designed for classroom training, the HRDQ Team Adventure Series starts with a suspense-filled scenario that challenges teams to work together to escape danger with only limited resources—and each other. While most people can rest assured knowing they'll never encounter these life-threatening situations, they do experience the similar feelings of stress and conflict that accompany everyday organizational life.

Each two-hour workshop explores the concept of synergy and helps teams to develop vital group-process skills. A comprehensive Facilitator Guide that includes everything trainers need to lead the simulation and classroom training workshop, from comprehensive background information and expert rationale to a step-by-step workshop outline, alternative training designs, and a Microsoft® PowerPoint® presentation.



### Learning Outcomes

- Hone group problem-solving skills using a five-step process
- Understand the critical interpersonal skills
- Learn how groups make decisions
- Discover the advantages of consensus decision making
- Learn the three elements of synergy

