BOUNCE BACK

Values for Living—Cadet Character Development Forum

INTRODUCTION

Each Values for Living lesson is designed to help cadets explore a life virtue from multiple angles, examine it in ways that touch on all five learning styles, and experience the virtue through a hands-on activity that helps them internalize the virtue so it "sticks" and stays with them beyond the end of the squadron meeting.

We’re all human and sometimes we make choices that either compromise our core values or that result in negative consequences. What do you do when you find that you’ve made a mistake and are headed down the wrong path? This lesson will explore Bounce Back, a concept developed by American POWs in the Hanoi Hilton during the Vietnam War to help them recover from just this situation.

Note: Be aware there are several songs by this title, including one by rapper Big Sean. While he sings about bouncing back from failure and loss, the lyrics are explicit and not appropriate for this lesson. Be aware that some cadets may be familiar with the song

PRE-CLASS CHECKLIST

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

☐ All media installed and checked out
☐ Handouts and materials prepared and available as per teacher instruction sheet
☐ Phase Three cadet orientation/training completed
☐ Participation awards such as candy or granola bar treats available
☐ Room arrangements complete

OBJECTIVE—BOUNCE BACK

The cadets should understand the concept of Bounce Back and why it should be an important part of their character. No one has perfect perspective. Sometimes we make choices that lead us down a path that will result in negative consequences. Bounce Back is the ability to come to terms with your choices, assess the direction those choices are taking your life, and, if the
choices are leading you down a road that has poor consequences, to “Bounce Back” by backing up and re-starting down a better path in life.

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

Option 1: Video Clip—Introduction

US pilots shot down over North Vietnam and captured were exposed to terrible treatment. They were tortured, locked into ankle restraints at night, forced to use a small can in their cell as a toilet, not provided medical care—the list is very long. Their captors’ purpose was to get them to violate their own Code of Conduct which states that a prisoner will provide the enemy only name, rank, and serial number when captured. Almost nobody faced with this situation was able to maintain the standards of the code. They eventually provided more than their name, rank, and serial number or were killed. Faced with this violation of personal honor, the prisoner would become ashamed, depressed, and discouraged. This video, by some of the American prison camp leaders, explains the concept of “Bounce Back.” After personal failure, this process helped the POWs regain their self-esteem and sense of honor.

(Clip is from Return with Honor, a PBS program produced with interviews of returning POWs. Video clip in file.)

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

Living with rats and bugs. Enduring no heat in the winter or cooling in the summer. Surviving torture. These are conditions that Lee Ellis endured as a prisoner of war and he says taught him leadership. Ellis is a retired Air Force Colonel, a fighter pilot who was shot down over Vietnam and spent more than five years as a POW in the North Vietnamese downtown prison nicknamed the “Hanoi Hilton.”

“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 from.” Likening their prison to a “hotel” was part of the gallows humor that Ellis said got him and others through their captivity and torture.

Ellis said his most powerful lesson came after his first interrogation that included torture. It lasted almost 24 hours before he agreed to fill out a biography. “I gave my name, rank, service number, date of birth, which that is what we were supposed to do,” Ellis said. “But I didn’t give any more that was accurate, except for my father’s name. I did, however, write a fictitious biography.”

Yet he felt broken 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 and the military leaders at the Hanoi Hilton like the senior ranking officer, Lt. Col. Robbie Risner, helped him recover and learn to deal with the torture. “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?

**Summary and Transition:** We will all someday do something that violates our personal character 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 really do anything wrong, or try to 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 moral person.” Bounce Back is choosing your own stronger and more resilient moral character.

In your first small group exercise, you’ll discuss some situations in which you or people you know might need to **Bounce Back** and what can happen if they don’t.

**UNDERSTANDING THE DESIRED BEHAVIOR**

**SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION LED BY PHASE 3 CADETS (3-5 PEOPLE IN EACH GROUP. 10 MINUTES.)**

**Small Group Exercise/Discussion** – (no more than 6 in each group including senior cadet moderator)

- Describe a situation in your world where you or others might be tempted to violate your own personal character standards. (Get several cadets to respond)

- If people violate their character standards and then give in a second time, would they be more likely to give in a third and a fourth time? What might be going on in their minds to make that happen?

- 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)

Discussion questions offered by facilitator:

● Think for a minute. What is the hardest thing about Bouncing Back? (Give them about 30 seconds to think – then if there is no response – try the following questions—if not in a circle, ask the respondents to stand and face the group, not you.)

● Who in here thinks it is easy to admit to yourself that you are messing up? Why do you think it’s hard to admit?

● Who in here, when you have violated your trust with parents or a friend, finds it easy to go to them and confess how wrong you were? Why do you think it’s hard to confess your mistakes?

● Why do you think it was so important for the POWs in the Hanoi Hilton to admit their failures to one another? How did those confessions help the person who had failed? How did those confessions help all the other prisoners?

● How does Bouncing Back help our cadets to live up to CAP’s Core Values? (Have them talk about each core value and how Bounce Back might apply.)

Summary and Transition: Most of the time, the hardest thing about bouncing back is admitting to ourselves and our teammates that we have made a mistake, especially when we see how our mistakes affect the people around us. Once we admit the mistake, the next challenge is refusing to let that mistake define us. In your next small group exercise, you’ll work with your facilitators to imagine a scenario in which someone is trying to Bounce Back from a failure. What can you say to a friend or teammate to help that person Bounce Back?

ACTIVITY

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION LED BY PHASE 3 CADETS (3-5 PEOPLE IN EACH GROUP. 10 MINUTES.)

Cadet facilitators will lead their small group in acting out a scenario. In each of these scenarios, the cadet facilitator will have committed some fault and is struggling to Bounce Back. The junior cadets should attempt to encourage the cadet facilitator to recognize or admit the fault and then choose to identify with a renewed moral purpose.

Scenario One - Trouble at School: You, the cadet facilitator, are sitting alone in the hallway outside of the principal’s office at your high school. Your friends, the junior cadets, 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? Junior cadets should help you Bounce Back and understand yourself as someone who can emerge from this challenge as a stronger and better person.

Scenario Two - Admissions Disappointment: You, the cadet facilitator, have just received some terrible news. You had set your heart on attending one of the service academies but just found out that you were rejected by all three. 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 really down, convinced you will never be a success at anything, and slightly ashamed to face the cadets at your squadron. One of the junior cadets starts the conversation by asking, “You look really down; what’s going on?” How do you respond? What can the junior cadets say to help you Bounce Back?

Scenario Three - Called Out: You, the cadet facilitator, are the cadet commander at your squadron. 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 a jerk anyway; public apologies are unnecessarily humiliating; if you have to embarrass yourself in front of the squadron, how will you ever regain the respect you need to lead effectively? Can the junior cadets convince you to do the right thing and assure you that they will respect you even more -- not less! -- if you have the courage to apologize?

LESSON SUMMARY AND WRAP-UP

Read to the group:

In your small groups, you saw first-hand how important social support is when we’re trying to Bounce Back. Your cadet facilitators imagined themselves in some tough situations and might not have been able to Bounce Back without 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 the “Hanoi Hilton.” During their captivity, the only way they could communicate with each other was to tap in code on cell walls, but they confessed to each other, encouraged each other, and helped each other Bounce Back from their personal failures. Amazingly, these heroes refused to define themselves as victims or as failures. Rather than wearing down, they became stronger and more determined to do the right thing and to “Return With Honor.”

When they were finally released, they were able to walk out of the prison with their heads held high, and they did return to the United States with honor. Their well-honed practice of helping each other Bounce Back from their failures and trials resulted in men of solid character who have gone on to be 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, too, will become a person of stronger character and the kind of 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

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.