**Lost Person Search Strategy**

**Introduction:**

The following outline is derived from the book Analysis of Lost Person Behavior by William G. Syrotuck. The book is thin but packed with information that requires attention to detail.

The outline is directly relevant to those leading a search. However, the information will help you as a searcher to appreciate the purpose of each search decision made, whether good or poor.

There are at least two additional reasons for you to be familiar with this outline. First, recognizing how individuals end up being lost and in danger could help you be more alert to the risks to which you and those around you at any given time are exposed. Second, understanding the potential physical, mental, and emotional factors bearing on the condition of your lost person will help you to better appreciate how you are to be searching – i.e., the best police detectives put themselves “in the shoes” of their suspect.

Usually, time is of the essence in a search for a lost person. Therefore, with limited resources critical decisions need to be made to narrow the search area and make the most of searchers’ time. You could very well be the person who needs to initiate a search for an elderly person, young child, or other person who has wandered away from a picnic, back yard, hiking trail, etc.

The person who applies the methodology of this material will have better wisdom and understanding than most of the trained searchers in his community. Often trained searchers are sent out with little critical thinking having been done to plan the search.

As the end of the outline implies, you are encouraged to look through the outline for spiritual analogies relevant to how you communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ. May you be an effective warrior on both fronts.

**Need for a strategy:**

Three miles in any direction is as much as 28 square miles. That requires twelve days for 264 searchers to complete a thorough search! One to three days is the life expectancy of a lost person. Therefore we need a strategy based on probabilities by predicting the behavior of the lost person. (However do not ignore your intuition.)

**Six distinct categories of lost persons:**

Small children

Children 6-12 years old

Hunters

Hikers

Elderly persons

Miscellaneous adult persons: pickers, photographers, watchers, hounds, etc.

**Common fears of lost persons:**

Alone

Darkness

Animals

Suffering

Death (even the healthiest and most able persons)

(Any of these can create panic, depression, or “woods shock.”)

**Poor behavior due to the psychological trauma of being lost (“woods shock”):**

Failure to make a shelter or fire

Discarding equipment

Disrobing

Sense of abandonment

Undetectability from the failure to be upright, wear bright clothing, stay in the open, or

respond

Unlikely to use the travel aids of pathways, game trails, streams, old roadways, or

drainages

**Capabilities of lost persons as determined by:**

Background experience (However, individuals who have spent considerable time in

remote areas may be lulled into overlooking symptoms of fatigue, hypothermia, or

hyperthermia.)

Recent mood

Personality – aggressive, reserved, or pessimistic

Factors bearing on a person’s “will to live”

Biological cycles –synchrony (high) or change (low)

General state of health

Past experience

Heat, cold, and altitude (however euphoria or past experience may cause a person to

ignore these compromising conditions)

(Take into consideration who is providing the information.)

**Predictable behavior by category (example):**

Children do not push to exhaustion and have not learned to postpone immediate wants.

They rest when tired, shelter when cold, and consume food and water when needed.

**Circumstances (how and why) which bear on evaluating the scene:**

Left a known location (picnic)

Left the route being traveled (short-cut)

Wilderness destination (hunter)

**Helpful information about the lost persons:**

What clothes were they last wearing? (However they may have found dry clothes.)

Are they familiar with their environment?

Are they experienced with the terrain?

What is their physical health?

What is their most recent condition?

When did they last rest?

When did they last eat and what was eaten?

What was their most recent mental state?

What is their age?

Are they overweight?

Is there the likelihood of dehydration (vomiting or diarrhea)?

What was their activity prior to being lost?

What events led up to the separation and what was the reason for the separation?

What were their intentions?

Are they mentally challenged? (not as likely to respond to their name being called)

(Note: Family may tend to underate or over-rate certain abilities, or may be unwilling to be frank, about the lost person.)

**Terrain bearing of travel predictions:**

Flat

Mountainous – declining or inclining

Barriers – path of least resistance

Escape routes

Trail obliteration

Confusing ridges or drainages

(A hasty search will both reveal terrain and possible discover your victim.)

(Direction or right-handedness not a factor.)

(Look at maps and talk to “old timers.”)

**Weather bearing on travel predictions (example):**

Hypothermia or hyperthermia first bring impaired judgment, making prediction difficult,

except that their travel is restricted due to lack of water or food (energy)

**Conducting a search:**

Remember to continue calling out the name of the lost person

We must deal with what is and not what we want to be seeing

A search line with a spacing of 50 feet is optimal but can only be used when the victim is

rational and able to pursue detection

(In which direction would they disappear in the shortest time?)

**Kingdom parallels**