



Biting Off More Than You Can Chew (or) How Do You Know How Much You Know?

What's the issue?

For too many off-duty and recreational activities, Sailors get in over their heads and try to do too much, too soon. When things go wrong, this is followed by doing too little, too late. There are too many preventable injuries during basketball, football, offroad and snow sports, and dozens of other activities.

What's going on?

Sailors don't recognize their limitations. As a result, activities that start out as fun and exciting (such as snowboarding or rock climbing) end up in painful and expensive trips to the E.R.

Inexperienced people learn the hard way. Formal training can be boring, ineffective, nonexistent, or hard to get. Some people don't bother to get it at all, because they don't understand the risks or underestimate them. If they have never fallen overboard from a fishing boat, and if they have never seen anyone fall overboard, they may not appreciate the need for life preservers.

When you are totally unfamiliar with an activity—say you've never ridden an ATV—you realize that you don't know anything. But after you have been doing something for a few months or even a couple years, it can get hard to tell how many more skills you need to acquire. Do you know 10% of what you need to know, or 90%?

What's the solution?

Take a class. If you learn from one of your buddies, try to make sure that person knows what he is talking about.

Keep acquiring knowledge. One of the Motorcycle Safety Foundation's five principles is, "Be a lifelong learner."

Learn about worst-case scenarios. The best way to avoid a mishap is to know exactly why specific mishaps have happened—what people did or didn't do, what they should have done.

Discussion Items and Open Questions

- What counts as "experience"? Bad habits, risky behaviors, and doing something wrong repeatedly shouldn't count. Some people get 10 years of experience; others get one year, repeated 10 times.
- Nobody starts out saying "I want to be crappy at this activity." They don't go snowboarding and think, "I want to be the lousiest snowboarder who ever lived." Everyone wants to do well. What gets in their way?

Supervisors: Use this page to guide safety discussions with your personnel