Nineteen students signed up for Johnson’s third annual Patagonia Leadership Expedition and made the trip to this beautiful, remote area in southern Chile with me. The trip is a chance to focus exclusively on personal leadership development in one of the world’s most incredible settings.

We partner with NOLS Patagonia to deliver a once-in-a-lifetime type experience for our students. The expedition is a ten-day backpacking course built around NOLS’ Leader of the Day construct. Students are taught basic wilderness skills on day one and then the entire expedition is turned over to them to lead. This is true experiential learning, or learning by doing. It’s a chance to practice leadership, and followership, in a highly challenging environment.

It’s been personally rewarding to watch students develop during each of our three expeditions. The most obvious change in students is an increased sense of self-confidence. This is not an easy trip. The rugged terrain and unpredictable weather ensure that no one completes the course without being uncomfortable, but our students consistently rise to the occasion and realize they are capable of much more than they ever imagined.

The other part of these expeditions that’s particularly enjoyable is watching the group come together to form a cohesive team. I learned during my career in the Marine Corps that the best way to bring a group together is to have them overcome shared adversity. In Patagonia, we depend on each other for everything: food, shelter, etc. It’s a true team environment and each year I’m amazed by the bonds of friendship that are formed during this course.

It’s been a true privilege for me to accompany Johnson students on these expeditions, and I’m already looking forward to next year!

— JERRY RIZZO, DIRECTOR, LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS
"Properly equipping yourself is one of the keys to a successful expedition," Jerry Rizzo informed students who signed up to participate in Johnson’s third annual Patagonia Leadership Expedition. "Personal equipment decisions all involve trade-offs between comfort, weight, and function. In addition to your personal gear, you will also be carrying a ten-day supply of food (about 18 pounds), as well as your share of the group gear (tents, cooking equipment, stoves, fuel, tarps, first aid kits, etc.). A good rule of thumb is that at least one third of the pack’s volume should be reserved for food and group gear."

**THINGS THEY CARRIED**

- **OUTERWEAR**: Synthetic insulating jacket — a top layer to keep you warm during the day and use as a pillow at night. Also, a mid-weight, long-sleeve base layer, a windbreaker/wind shirt, and a synthetic vest. "It doesn’t make sense to bring a bulky winter parka that you might only need once or twice. Instead, think about building a winter parka by wearing all of your layers."

- **FOOTWEAR**: Sturdy backpacking boots that are waterproof and broken in — “your most important piece of equipment, so make sure they fit well and are comfortable.” Shoes to wear in camp to give your feet a break from the hiking boots. Three pairs of medium-weight hiking socks.

- **ACCESSORIES**: Winter ski cap; sun hat; warm and waterproof gloves; gaiters for crossing numerous streams (essential for keeping your feet dry); and two bandanas — one for personal hygiene and the other to use as a buff that can be worn around the neck for extra warmth.

- **SYNTHETIC SLEEPING BAG WITH STUFF SACK**: "Synthetic bags are better than down bags when they get wet, so NOLS requires this type of bag on the course."

- **EXPEDITION-SIZE BACKPACK (75 liters or more)**: Rizzo recommends renting from NOLS "unless you are an avid outdoorsman/woman who routinely goes on extended expeditions (7–10+ days)."

- **A 3/4 or full-length sleeping pad**; water bottles for at least two liters of water carrying capacity (not stainless steel bottles; they get too hot when filled with boiling water).

- **STUFF SACK WITH A BOWL**: A Tupperware container with a snap-on lid works well — and metal spoon or spork; toiletry and first aid items: travel toothbrush, travel-size toothpaste, small plastic bottle with liquid soap, travel-size hand sanitizer, travel-size sunscreen, lip balm; and lighter for starting the camp stoves.

- **TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP**: Headlamp (with fresh batteries); water-resistant watch with an alarm (this one has a compass too); small notepad and mechanical pencil for journaling; pocket knife with folding blade; trowel (for personal hygiene).

- **RAIN GEAR**: Completely waterproof Gore-Tex rain jacket with a hood, large enough to wear over all of your other insulating layers for maximum warmth. Rain pants should also be completely waterproof Gore-Tex and large enough to wear over your long underwear bottoms and hiking pants.

Here are just a few of the things they carried for ten days through thick forests and steep scree-covered mountains, in rain and snow and sun, across streams and up and down steep mountainsides. [Source: Jerry Rizzo]
For me, I was always comfortable in Patagonia. I never thought twice about the hiking or the camping, and I thought I was pretty tough until one day when we hiked eight hours through the pouring rain and the snow. I had never been so cold in my entire life and my body shut down. I had to have other people help me out, which, for me, was the worst. I was humiliated. But, when my teammates Beatina and I became aware of that, I realized that it was okay to ask for help sometimes. The way they helped me and the strength they both showed while everyone else was miserable was really amazing to see. I think this was really important for me to go through. It really helped me grow and made me realize that I didn’t always have to be the one who helped out — it’s okay to have others do things for you.”

— DEREK MAYER, MBA ’15

“(On) the day we went over the highest peak, we didn’t know what the backside of the mountain looked like. We’re coming down this thing and everyone has these big packs on. We came to this open mountain rocky gravel crossing where if you slip, you’re dead. Allison Hamada was one of the leaders of the day. Allison stopped the team and said, “I’m going to go scout this with the NOLS instructor.” They were gone for 20 to 30 minutes. When she came back, she told us, “Here’s the situation, here’s how I feel about it, here’s what we should do.” Her presence was phenomenal. She fully stepped into her leadership style and the group followed her instinctively and without doubt.”

— JAMIE LANDI, MBA ’15

“I knew it would be challenging and difficult, but the things that I thought would challenge me the most weren’t that challenging. I thought roughing it and sharing a tent and going without creature comforts would be tough, but those things didn’t end up battering me. I loved my tent-mates. But it was things I didn’t even think about ahead of time, like being afraid of heights, which were hard. I also knew it would be physically difficult, but I didn’t realize how grueling it would be. But that was good. I wanted to be challenged and I got what I asked for.”

— MATT DALY, MBA ’15

“I felt we worked really well together as a team. There were obvious ups and downs, but we got into a groove of understanding where people’s strengths and weaknesses were and how we could support each other so that we could get beyond our daily operational tasks and really build our relationships. I don’t know exactly where it clicked, but there was a day when we went over a snowy pass. It was really hard because it was very cold and it was a scary mountain. We finally got to the top and someone made us stop to take a picture, even though we were all cold and exhausted. But getting to the top and taking that photo really made us feel like a team.”

— BEATINA THEOPOLD, MBA ’15

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