

Skill Descriptions

Which skill below is the best gift you can give to keep your ego in check, until you can completely disappear:

[Skill #1: Self-management: Equip learners to answer their own questions](#)

[Skill #2 Praise; invest and ignore: Praise what you want repeated; invest in Sheepdogs and ignore the rest](#)

[Skill #3: Incentives to rhythms to learning arcs: Introduce incentives that build into rhythms that power strong learning arcs](#)

[Skill #4: Systems and Tools: Ask learners to evaluate the health of the studio and choose the next system or tool to introduce \(if needed.\)](#)

[Skill #5 Roles, recipes, rubrics and responsibilities: Ask learners to evaluate the health of the studio and choose whether new roles need to be introduced to make the studio more fun and productive.](#)

[Skill #6 Equip Game-makers: Inspire learners to craft and deliver engaging launches; examples and rubrics; recipes, maps and processes and rules, rewards and roles.](#)

[Skill #7 Become a learner again: Real masters become a beginner again. Ask learners to treat you as an equal when you are not in guide role.](#)

Skill #1: Self management: Equip learners to answer their own questions

Early in the life of a studio, you may find many learners coming to you for answers because in the past they've fed on the (sometimes cheap) applause of adult approval.

Likely you remember an adult who changed your life: a coach, parent, relative or teacher who took a genuine interest and affirmed at the right time in a powerful way. Traditional schools often will play on your nostalgia and gratitude to escape reform. At Acton we know adult mentors, while important, are best chosen by children and tend to be more a matter of personal chemistry and timing than institutional design.

So rather than believe an adult in a studio can know thirty six unique individuals well enough, to know exactly the right thing to say, at exactly the right moment – and to protect from his or her blind spots -- we respect that children have important work to do *with each other*, and prosper best when equipped and encouraged to build a self-governing tribe.

Guides may play an important role in launching a tribe, offering testimony and learning challenges or games to engage learners and leaders, and in equipping learners to find adult experts, role models and coaches they choose, and early in the life of a tribe, guides recognize and affirm learners who approach. However, it is a primary skill for guides to quickly redirect with a question, challenge or connection with another learner, so the process of delegation begins almost immediately, just as in a world class company of adults who also have important work to do.

If you haven't mastered this skill – it's a good place to start.

1. Recognize and affirm.

When a learner approaches with a question:

- Stop what you are doing. Look a learner in the eye, at his or her level or lower, even if this means dropping to your knee.
- Offer a challenge or choice in return:
 - **A choice:** “____, what a ____ question. Would you rather ____ or ____, in order to ____?”
 - **If caught off guard, be honest.** “____, what a ____ question. Please let me come back to you with a way you can answer it yourself in ____ minutes.”
 - **If possible, link the question to a positive character trait** before offering choices, like: “____. I would say a question about ____ shows ____.” Example: “Audrey, a question about how you could help Bob shows generosity.”

Real guides offer genuine, warm recognition and a choice. Fake guides offer a quick answer because it's easier; or an answer disguised as a question. The worst response of all is a question that dishonestly nudges, nags or forces a learner to do what a guide wants.

2. Equip learners to make their own decisions and begin to disappear by making your scarce attention expensive to earn;

Learners are smart. If it is easier to have an adult do all the thinking and work, they will ask question after question, rather than learn to think for themselves.

Therefore, Acton guides have the discipline to never answer a question. Never. Ever. For any reason. Instead, after acknowledging and affirming the learner who asked a question, they offer a choice; challenge or connection so a learner can answer the question herself.

If asking for help takes more time and effort than self-reliance, learners become self-reliant quickly. Other learners also have better instincts of when to offer a helping hand, and when it's better for a fellow learner to do the work.

A helpful recipe for self-reliance you can ask a learner to post on the wall is: **3 B's before G**:

If **3 B's before G** is posted, it's easy to deflect with: "I trust you to discover your own answer." Once a learner learns through trial and error that asking a guide requires more work than just going straight to 3 B's before G, he or she will stop asking.

Tip: Do not:

- Point to the 3B's before G chart and ask: "Is there a chart on the wall that might help?" *Anytime you ask a question where you know the answer, it comes off as condescending and fake.*
- Answer a question or immediately write an answer on the wall because you forgot to post information. Just In the real world, sometimes there are questions that can't be answered in the present, so allow some time before you post missing information that learners need.

3. Offer fair challenges and consequences instead of cheap answers.

When asked a question where there's no clear process or alternatives posted, offer fair choices and natural consequences:

For example: "Jim, I understand you are bored. You either can walk outside and lay in the grass and watch the clouds go by or set the Pomodoro timer and earn five Khan skills so you earn free time tomorrow." Notice how making "free time" scarce gives it more value?

Tip: Never "check in" and ask a question designed to get what you want, like: "Jimmy, I see you are behind in math. Would you rather do six Khan skills or seven today?" "Checking in" or "nudging" is the same as nagging – it's a dishonest, passive aggressive way to use your power as an adult to get what you want.

Challenges:

1. Ask learners which of your **3B before G** skills needs the most work:
 - Recognize and affirm in a warmer way, with Growth Mindset praise;
 - Turn responsibility back to the learners; or
 - Offer fair choices and consequences rather than a nudge or nagging?
2. Create a way for learners to measure your progress, for example a whiteboard where they can record each time you:
 - Answer a question (hopefully zero:)
 - Offer an affirming response or GM praise when asked a question:
 - Offer a challenge, choice or connection that helps learners can become more self-reliant:

Discussion questions:

- Which skill are you naturally the best at: recognition and affirmation; handing responsibility for decisions to others or providing fair choices not designed to nudge or nag?
- Which skill needs the most work?
- Is it mostly a matter of mindset or practice?
- With whom could you practice these skills outside of campus?

Extra credit: Master guides use a question from a learner as a chance to make the community stronger by forming [triads](#) that amplify the reach of each interaction. Even better are launches offering stories and tools to equip learners to be more self-reliant or help others become more self-reliant.

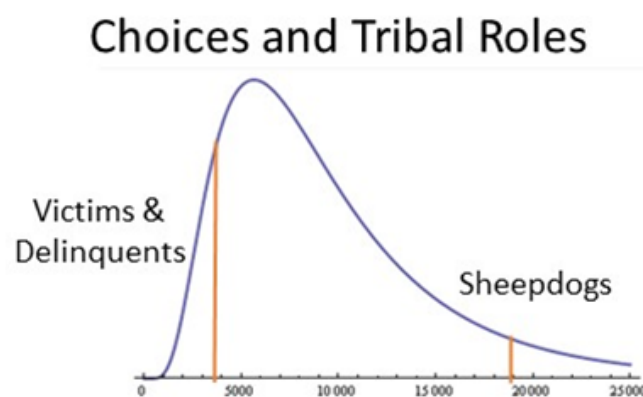
Skill #2 Praise what you want repeated, ignore the rest and invest early in Sheepdogs.

World class coaches, parents and spouses know the power of praising behaviors you want repeated, and ignoring (almost) all of the rest. Parents with three or more children also know the power of shifting to a “zone defense,” where siblings take on responsibility and learn from each other. Guides go one step further in a larger tribe, and invest in Sheepdog leaders to lift up an entire flock.

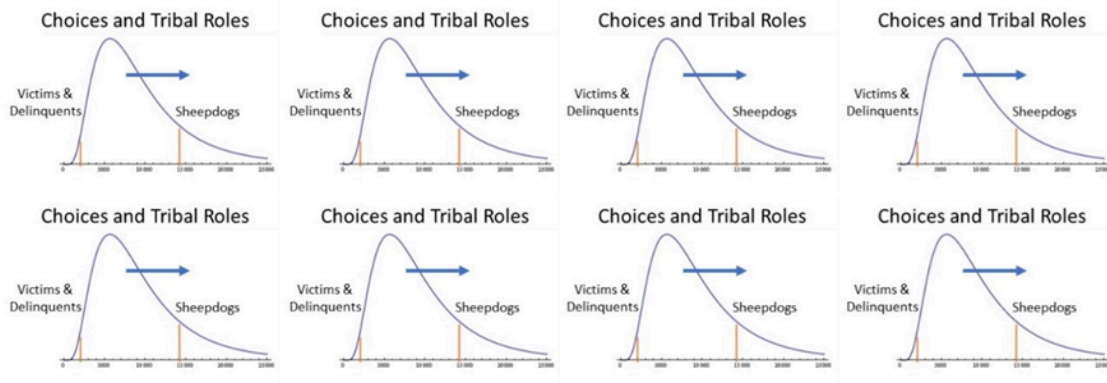
Guides model Growth Mindset praise early in the life of a studio and offer ways to make GM praise contagious, like character call-outs. Rather than reward negative behaviors with attention, they learn to set up natural consequences that deliver real world lessons – and especially follow this discipline when a behavior acts as a personal emotional trigger (which likely signals a deeper personality issue an adult guide needs to work through.)

It is basic human kindness to want to help someone who is struggling or in pain. However, in many cases help becomes enablement when a rescue robs an individual of an important life lesson better learned through trial, error and real-world consequences. For the hardest cases, Dave Logan in *Tribal Leadership* makes a strong case the kindest for someone stuck in Level One (Delinquent) or Level 2 (Victim) is to hold clear boundaries until the individual decides to make healthier choices towards Level 3 (Hero) and beyond.

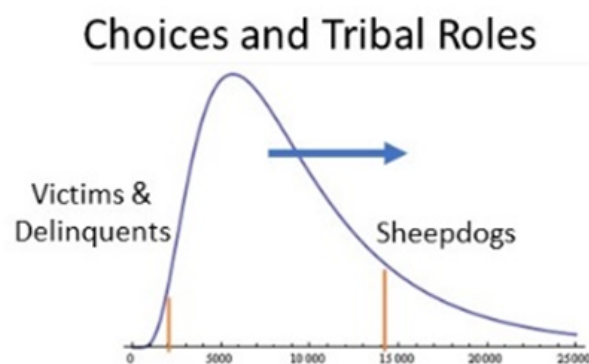
So instead of a traditional classroom where an adult with limited knowledge pours into a few struggling individuals, in an Acton studio guides equip Sheepdogs to become studio leaders, who then invest in struggling tribe members with compassion or clear boundaries and consequences within the due process of studio contracts. Instead of one adult making decisions about 36 learners he or she may not know well, a team of Sheepdogs, closer to the problem and better to match with the personalities of different individuals who can respond or ignore as needed.



The image above shows a distribution with increasing amounts of achievement to the right on the X-axis, and the number of Stage 1 and 2 (delinquents and victims) versus the Sheepdogs on the Y-axis. Since there are few Sheepdogs, the distribution could be viewed as elitist, favoring only those with exceptional powers. But this is only if you view the world in a Fixed Mindset way, with those struggling as incapable of helping themselves, with one immovable trait like IQ that pre-determines success.



If instead you believe every person is a genius with a special gift, and that Sheepdogs can improve the tribe by creating more Sheepdogs, then the studio becomes the sum of many distributions of genius like the ones above, that when combined in a studio as shown in the larger image below, moves to the right as new skills are honed and shared.



Those who choose to act like Victims or Delinquents either begin to make better choices or leave the community until they are prepared to re audition and commit to make better choices. In other words, the distribution of effort and outcomes makes the entire tribe stronger so a series of distributions of talent, effort and outcome moves to the right.

Challenges:

1. Use Growth Mindset praise and character callouts to spotlight all behaviors you want to encourage and create opportunities and incentives so leaders can take over this task.
2. Make a list of the learners whose choices and behaviors worry or annoy you the most. Promise not to focus attention on the choices that concern you or to spend any time nagging, nudging or “checking up” on behaviors that bother you. The harder it is for you to turn away, the more important it is to examine where the desire to “help” or “shape” is coming from, because any unconscious drive powerful enough for you to be willing to sacrifice a learner’s long term growth just to salve your own emotional needs, deserves attention.

3. Conduct a Tribal 360 to measure the tribe's sense of each individual's warm hearted and tough minded nature.
4. Ask learners for a set of behaviors they would like to encourage and ask for ways to keep score in a transparent way, visible to all.
5. Make a list of Sheepdogs whose hard work has been recognized by the tribe. Make every effort to use triads and squads with elected Sheepdog leaders to inspire, equip and inspire other tribe members.

Discussion Questions

1. Which learner or behavioral issue bothered you the most? Why do you think this bothered you so?
2. Was it easy or hard to completely ignore the poor choices or your own emotions? Explain.
3. What was the best suggestion made by learners as to a behavior to spotlight and how to keep score?
4. What will you do differently next time?

Skill #3: From daily incentives to weekly rhythms to longer learning arcs

One of the most important measures of growth at Acton Academy is watching young learners become more self-managing and self-governing as they move from living moment to moment, driven by emotion to setting goals for an hour; then a day; then a session and finally for an entire Hero's Journey. During this time, attention shifts from self-centered emotions to considering the needs and rights of a Running Partner; squad, studio and campus. In other words, learners learn to lift their eyes to the horizon by moving from "me, my emotions and now" to more thoughtful, personal and tribal, long term goals.

Gamemakers learn to support the move towards self-management and self-governance by layering daily short term incentives to create weekly rhythms that result in even longer learning arcs. For example, the learning arc for a MS day usually begins with launch, the momentum of which can carry learners for an hour or more of focused individual Core Skill work.



After working hard at Core Skills for an hour or so, around 10 am it often helps to have outdoor free play for learners to burn off energy, before a mini-launch refocuses the rest of the morning until lunch.

The break for lunch and afternoon launch usually supplies momentum to the daily learning arc to propel learners through quest time, until studio maintenance around 2:45 pm and then closing group.



Just as learning arcs during the day can be layered, a weekly learning arc can be created by using the momentum created each day to power the next, until learners begin to think longer term for weeks, sessions, the year and beyond.

Challenges

1. **Announce a mysterious Friday event to lift the eyes of learners to the horizon.**

Incentives to Rhythms to Learning Arcs					
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Measure	Khan skills	Khan skills	Khan skills	Khan skills	Khan skills
Amount	100 pts	200 pts cumulative Mon+Tuesday	100 pts Wednesday morning	100 pts Thursday morning	500 pts for the week
Reward					Game time at 2 pm!
Comment	Announce a special event on Friday, but keep the event a secret until 3 pm Wednesday		Announce details for the Friday event at 3 pm.		

On Monday, set the learning arc for the week by announcing a mysterious fun event on Friday, the specifics of which will not be announced until Wednesday. Ask the studio to choose an area like math skills or total studio points where progress easily can be measured day by day, and ask learners to set a reasonable daily reach goal for each member of the studio to earn to take part in the special event.

The mystery about the prize will keep most learners focused from Monday through Wednesday. By late Wednesday when the specifics are announced, even if the event isn't every learner's favorite, it's likely worth working hard on Thursday and Friday so as not to be left out. If it is someone's favorite prize, she or he will work even harder to catch up.

2. Add daily rewards for short term motivation

Incentives to Rhythms to Learning Arcs					
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Measure	Khan skills	Khan skills	Khan skills	Khan skills	Khan skills
Amount	100 pts	200 pts cumulative Mon+Tuesday	100 pts Wednesday morning	100 pts Thursday morning	500 pts for the week
Reward	Free time at 10:30 am	Free time at 10:30 am	Free time at 10:30 am	Free time at 10:30 am	Game time at 2 pm!
Comment	Announce a special event on Friday, but keep the event a secret until 3 pm Wednesday	Rewards for two days of work but allows for a catch up	Reset for those behind - anyone who works just today can earn free time. Announce details for the Friday event at 3 pm.	Reset for those behind - anyone who works just today can earn	

Reward learners who earn a set number points on Monday morning with 15 minutes of free play that morning. On Tuesdays, offer free play to those who have scored enough points on Monday and Tuesday combined.

On Wednesday, offer a reset for those who have fallen behind by allowing any learner who earns enough points Wednesday morning alone to take part in free time. On Thursday and Friday, even those who are too far behind to earn attendance at the Friday may work hard to earn free play that day.

3. Create a wall poster like the one above that makes it easy for learners to keep score and track the rewards for each day, leading to Friday's event.

4. On Friday at closing, ask for suggestions to improve the system and offer a new version for Monday.

Discussion Questions:

1. What was more powerful, positive incentives or consequences? Explain.
2. What were the most effective modifications suggested by learners?
3. What would you do differently next time?

Tips

1. **Interweave narrative themes; heroes and overarching questions.**

Incentives are only one way to build momentum for learning arcs. Narrative themes and heroes used during launches add energy; as will a compelling overarching question. Note that the energy in a three act play, moving from a launch through successive challenges and leading to a change in character, mimic the way you want to layer shorter term incentives to move to a climax at about the same time as an exhibition. The key is to intelligently spread each energy booster in a smaller narrative arc to give energy to a longer term one.

2. Tie to quests.

Your Friday event can be tied to a quest, for example earning the right to watch a (carefully screened) episode of House on Friday for the Medical Quest. Likewise, the excitement of a looming exhibition can boost energy.

3. Social encouragement: all versus some; individual vs squads vs the studio.

Experiment with the impact of social encouragement by changing how rewards are earned. For example, perhaps every learner must achieve his or her individual goal or no one gets a reward; or perhaps rewards can be based on the success of a squad versus an individual.

4. Let learners choose!

Above all, give learners a chance to choose between the incentives you offer. At the very least, allow individuals NOT to compete to participate for the Friday event.

A Fake Guide Warning

Real guides make a deal and keep it – they do not move the goalposts. It can be heartbreaking to see only one learner left out of a Friday event because he or she missed the goal by a single point. However difficult to watch, however, a real guide is an honest referee and doesn't take away from a learner or the studio's lessons just because of a personal emotion.

Skill #4: System and tools: Ask learners to evaluate the health of the studio and choose the next system or tool to introduce (if needed.)

It's tempting for a guide to spot what seems to be a problem in the studio and reach for a ready-made Acton system. However, this robs learners of the opportunity to diagnose a cultural issue and recommend a solution.

Challenge:

1. Rate your studio from 1 "very low" to 10 "very high" on each of the following: Intentionality; Civility; Energy and Excellence.
2. Without sharing your observation, ask learners to rate the same parameters from 1 to 10.
3. Depending on the learner's answer, use the [Guide Tribal Decision Framework](#) and [Systems Handbook](#) offer at least two systems that might help with the problem and ask if the problem is serious enough to warrant a new system or tool.
4. Offer ways for learners to track progress in a public way on this metric for a day; week or the rest of the session.

Extra-credit.

Ask learners during a launch to make a list of all systems learned to date and post them on a wall so there's a sense of institutional memory in the studio OR ask provide a list of possible new systems and invite each learner to choose and research a system and present it to the studio in a launch.

In a more mature studio where systems have grown more complex, ask leaders to choose a system or tool to discontinue before adding another.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did everyone in the studio sense the same problem as you did? How would you explain?
2. Were you surprised by how many systems and tools from which to choose or how few?
3. Have you ever caught yourself wasting time trying to solve a problem instead of just asking the learners? Why does this happen?

Tip:

Fake guides are impatient and install systems they believe the studio needs. Real guides allow learner to diagnose problems and offer systems and tools, or even better, allow learners to create their own systems and tools. The fewer the systems and tools, the better.

Skill #5: Roles, Recipes. Rubrics and responsibilities: Ask learners to evaluate the effectiveness of studio governance and decide whether new roles need to be introduced to make the studio more fun and productive.

A key to a self-governing studio is allowing learners to add roles and responsibilities one step at a time, so a guide's job becomes smaller and smaller. These roles can be related to overall governance, like adding a Council; Squad Leaders or Running Partners OR more functional, like roles for studio maintenance or handing over launches to discussion leaders.

Challenge:

1. Rate your studio from 1 "very low" to 10 "very high" in each of the following Energy; Intentionality; Civility and Excellence.
2. Without sharing your observation, ask learners to rate the studio from 1 to 10 using the same parameters.
3. Depending on the learner's answer, use the [Guide Tribal Decision Framework](#) and the roles on page 26 of the [Systems Handbook](#) to offer at least two new roles that could be created to address the problem.
4. Launch on the keys to delegation and work with Sheepdogs to create simple recipes and measures for each role, giving the studio as many choices as possible to help shape the role.
5. Offer ways for learners to track progress for the governance experiment to see if it should be continued, modified or scrapped.

Extra-credit.

Post all studio contracts to encourage learners to refer to them as needed. Include a learner created list of all systems and tools introduced and a graphic showing the rights and responsibilities of different parties so there's more transparency and an institutional memory.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did learners sense the same issues in the studio you did or not? Explain.
2. How were learners chosen for different roles – using a draft with squad leaders chosen based on a popular vote or some studio metric or in some other way?
3. Have you ever caught yourself wasting time trying to solve a problem instead of just asking the learners? Why does this happen?

Skill #6 Equip Game-makers: Inspire learners to craft and deliver engaging launches; examples and rubrics; recipes, maps and processes and rules, rewards and roles.

A key skill for leading a studio is game making. The sooner learners can build their own games, the sooner you can make yourself smaller.

Game making consists of:

- **Powerful launches** that make a case for WHY? a particular skill or tool will help a learner overcome a challenge he or she will face during a Hero's Journey, often following a narrative and overarching question.
- **Examples and rubrics** for what will be created.
- **A recipe, map or process** to help in creation.
- **Gamification** – who will play; in what teams; with what rewards and consequences.

The challenge:

1. Decide which part of the Game making rubric you believe needs the most work.
2. Deliver a compelling launch about the basics of Game making.
3. Ask learners which area needs the most improvement and why.
4. Gather suggestions from learners, and if appropriate allow learners to make the improvement.
5. Run the experiment and collect lessons learners for next time.

Discussion questions:

1. Which part of the game making rubric did you believe needed the most work.
2. Which part of the game making rubric needed the most work, according to learners.
3. Did the experiment succeed or fail?
4. What would you do differently next time?

Skill #7 Become a learner again:

Real masters become a beginner again. Ask learners to treat you as an equal, when not acting specifically in a guide role, which becomes smaller and smaller.

The Challenge:

1. Set your learning/work goals.

Set your SMART goals to work on the Guide Onboarding; Guide Squads; outside work or read a book – anything that keeps you from “checking in” on the studio.

2. Deflect

If a learner asks for hugs or to talk or to tattle, kindly tell them you hate to be distracted from your work and will need to focus until free time.

3. Earn Hero Bucks

Value your deliverables so you can earn Hero Bucks at the same pace as the studio, for an equivalent amount of focus or ask the studio if you can run an experiment for a week to earn a Hero Buck for a character call out for:

- Delegating a task;
- Disappearing for an hour/day;
- Holding up a mirror without judgement.
- Forming a triad.
- Asking learners to choose a new system/path.

Discussion questions:

1. Where did you earn the most Hero Bucks? The least?
2. Did the experiment succeed or fail?
3. What do you need to do to make the game work better next week and