

One Way to Develop  
an Adventure or Outdoor Program



*10 Steps to turn Adventure / Outdoor  
Programming from Pawns to Queens*



W. Keith Dodson II



*This is a book for the Adventure  
program, outdoor programmer, or  
any outdoor leader. This book will  
even help with logistical  
information that is needed to get  
your adventure program and / or  
adventure activity up and running.*

## One Way to Develop an Adventure or Outdoor Program

By W. Keith Dodson II

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# One Way to Develop an Adventure or Outdoor Program



## *10 Steps to turn Adventure / Outdoor Programming from Pawns to Queens*



*W. Keith Dodson II*



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## **About the Author**

I have worked in many different Parks and Recreation agencies, to include Durham Parks and Recreation, Raleigh Parks, Recreation and Culture, Cary Parks, Recreation and Culture, Creedmoor Parks and Recreation, and Chapel Hill Parks and Recreation. I am also currently working with U.N.C. at Chapel Hill event management team and guest teach in the Sports and Management classes. I am an ARMY combat veteran, a former School Resource Officer and Gang Officer with the Durham County Sheriff's Office, which decided to use his college degree in Recreation Management and Administration from the University of North Carolina. at Pembroke. Where I was a two sport varsity athlete, in Wrestling and Track and Field. Also the captain of the field team. I was the intermural director for all club sports at UNC Pembroke for six semesters I worked as a recreation correction officer at Polk Youth Prison, and Sports Coordinator for the YMCA. I was the assistant pool manager for a local swim club for seven summers. I have taken graduate level class in outdoor adventure and outdoor education from Liberty University and Allison University in Queens Australia. I am certified and/ or a member of ACA member, ACA trip guide assessment, and a level one instructor, USA Climbing member and level 1 route setter, SCUBA, Wilderness First Aid, Red Cross CPR and First aid instructor, Life guard, Walk With Ease Instructor for the Arthritis Foundation, Safes sports trained, Certified Pool Operator, Mountain Bike trip assessment certified, and USA Archery member and level 2 instructor. I have presented at many different conferences and for many different groups to include the NCRPA state conference in 2021 where I presented in two sessions, The virtual WORKS conference in 2021, NC and SC Gang conference, The national gang conference in

Chicago, the State SRO Conference in NC, Tar Hill Challenge, to UNC Event management Team, the UNC hospital risk Management team, The NC School of Science and Math a mini semester, and for many different school systems across the state. I was awarded the national gang officer for outstanding gang training, and the School Resource Officer of the year for NC. I have been on the NCRPA education and marketing committees in the past years. I have been interviewed by GP Red, Green play LLC., Blue Ridge Outdoors, and local news outlets on adventure programs. I am currently the World's largest certified USA Climbing level 1 route setter.



*Selfie of me on the Neuse River*

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All the above in the bio, will at least show I kind of know what I am trying to talk about in this book. These are just my opinions with some facts at the end. Even if you do not learn anything or even try to implement the process, I hope you were at least entertained a little with the read. So after bragging about me lets jump in to it.



*This is one of my favorite signs along the trail at the lower falls. A good over all warning for adventure trips*



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## Step One: The Adventure Idea

How to come up with the idea. What I would suggest is looking to see what is trending in the world or even on the internet. Then imagine an adventure based from what is trending that time. This is the start of some of the research that will help you add it all up. At the time BIGFOOT was trending and there were even a few movies that came out in theaters, some shows on the history and discovery channels that were about Bigfoot or even mythical like creatures. So I picked a basic adventure. I picked hiking as my basic adventure, then I needed to develop the adventure idea. How can I now relate the hiking idea to Bigfoot? Well BIGFOOT is in the woods or forest, so I am thinking at least a hike in the woods looking for Bigfoot as my adventure idea as a whole. This came down to wording because I had originally wanted to call it “Bigfoot hunt”. I wanted to hunt for Bigfoot while on the hike in the woods by looking for Bigfoot signs that he has left behind. But the town I work in was not real good with hunting Bigfoot or really anything hunted related. There are a few hippies in the town I work in that do not like any type of hunting, but they eat meat. Why ask why. I digress, so I came up with a Bigfoot track or search. So we are not hunting Bigfoot in the woods, but trying to track Bigfoot’s movements in the woods while on the trail. So the adventure idea is, we are going on a hike on a trail looking for Bigfoot in the woods. So this was my idea but now I need to add a little “kick” to it and then add a little more kick, to it to make it the whole adventure idea.

What always helps with the marketing of the adventure idea? It is Theming, I found theming helps with the idea and getting people to sign up for the program as well. The theming can be the “kick”. For example if I said we are having a night

paddle adventure program, would you sign up? Maybe if you like to paddle a lot at night. But if I said we are going on an alien paddle, now that would get your attention with a good description to go along with it, that would really get you to sign up. An example of a description could be: *Join us as we paddle down the Eno River looking for alien life forms overhead in the night sky. We will paddle around a possible landing site on an island in the river. Paddle under the night sky as we star gaze at the different consolation above.* When in fact it is a simple night paddle down a flat river and back to the put in. But if you sale the program experience as an exciting alien adventure paddle, people will sign up. “If you theme it they will come” if your older you will get that statement from an old movie. I changed one word of the quote. So I did not take out all the corny jokes. With the theme you will need to go all in, such as dressing for the part, having props, even take a ways from the adventure program, and or make and takes items. An example again with the Alien Paddle Adventure, we had alien head antennas that they could wear and take home, green alien glow sticks they could keep, and put some alumina foil in the trees on the island where the aliens possibly landed. We also suggested a free star gazing app for the participants to down load and use on the adventure. We got a very powerful laser pointer to point out different stars and constellations. I did go a little further and found where and when satellites would pass over head while we were on the river. We suggested that they were spaceships in the sky flying over us. We added a little more to the adventure with some education aspect to it. We had our environmental educator come out and explain the different bugs that look like aliens. The participants got to pick one of the bugs to attach to their canoe or kayak. Last thing is we purchased some alien blow up figures to put in the boats to watch over us as we paddled to the possible landing site on the

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island. I feel that this could be a little over kill but as we will discuss in step nine the small details make the difference for the adventure experience as a whole. They also can be your “kick” for this step.

One resource you could try would be [www.nationaltoday.com](http://www.nationaltoday.com) or a web site like this one. It will show you what “holiday” is on what day. We used it for speak like a pirate day to theme our Pirate Paddle on stand up paddle boards and Treasure Hunt. We used the theme for about a week so we could get in our Pirate Teacher Workday in as well. You will find all kinds of crazy days or holidays to theme your programs with, and to be your “kick”. You can even use real holidays as a theme as we have. Such as Climb with Santa, Sweet Heart Cupid Shoot, Archery Turkey Shoot and St Patrick’s Day lucky clover shoot. One thing that is coming back is glow in the dark, but we don’t use glow in the dark climb or glow in the dark archery in the name its self. We use Light up the Rock and Light up the Target for our glow programs, but this way gets people looking at the details in the description to understand it is a glow in the dark program. It seems to work like miss direction and or reading to discover.



*The start of the Bigfoot Float and River Float with Adventure Club*

Write your idea, or theming idea down below:

An Example: Bigfoot, pirates, mermaids, treasure quest, glowing activity, holiday, alien, zombies, K9, loch ness monster, medieval, space, nature, Robin Hood (These are just a few to get you going)

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Research Notes on trends: (please use lines for trend notes in case you have to back track to this step)

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*Some kids on an adventure near Tory's Den*



*Playing in the Lower Fall with the Adventure Club*

## **Step Two: Developing the Idea**

The first question in this step is confirming what we are even going to do and if we are going to theme the adventure program. For the purpose of the process, we know we are using a hiking, but how to develop the adventure idea in to more. Not more theming but more of an adventure for the activity. Research is a big key on different adventures in developing the idea. Without scout trips and research you cannot make good decisions for your participants that you will be leading or guiding. Some questions I had to ask for the BIGFOOT track and river float are: What technology we will use during the hike? Will we have Bigfoot out in the woods (someone dressed as Bigfoot)? What trail we will hike on? What time of the year? What day of the week? How much to charge participants for the trip? And what will be the time frame (length of the trip / activity)? These are some of the question I had to ask in developing the idea of the hike. There are more questions that you can ask yourself. The more you ask the easier it will be in the long run. Please don't get stuck on just my few questions that I used as an example. Many of the question that you will have to ask, you will not know to ask until a scout trip is taken or some more of the research and logistical things are worked out. Please ask as many question as you can in this step and it will cut down on some work in the long run. The above questions are simply general ones to ask yourself. I will use them for the general outline that you can write in.

So the first question I addressed is the use of technology. I feel technology is not needed outside and should be kept inside, but if you can use it to keep participants outside and active, then go for it. So I decided to use some tech. We prerecorded different signs of Bigfoot in the woods along the hiking trail we



final picked. We researched signs and went into the woods and recorded the signs like a foot print, stacked rocks, claw marks, and bent branches high up. We left the signs out there on the off chance they still may be there as the group walked by, but if they were gone it was not a big deal. The idea was for the participants to see the video, which we recorded in a warning style video, and look for the area that we recorded as they hiked along the trail. For an example Joe would watch the video and while on the trail they would see the area of the sign and stop and look more closely for Bigfoot signs along the trail in that area we recorded in. They would even see signs or symbols that we didn't even put up, because we had gave them the video to reference. It was now in their mind and subconsciously they were seeing signs along the trail. We would also make way points along the trail in the areas where we put the signs at so the participants could use GPS to locate the sign or where the sign was supposed to be located. Last on the tech. we used digital compasses for the participants to track the trail and to show the distances they had traveled. They could even mark "signs of Bigfoot" they found along the trail. The ones we put out and even the ones they though they saw. The next question is will we have a "Bigfoot" in the woods along the trail. We did! It made the trip cost a little more, do to staffing cost for three staff instead of two staff. But the overall experience for the participants was better and more of an adventure style hike. I simply had a staff member dress like a Bigfoot and gave them a radio as they followed along the trail beside us. They would make Bigfoot sounds that we researched and would stay just out of sight the whole way while we were hiking the trail. It made the experience of tracking Bigfoot more of an adventure. During this question I had to take in the consideration of hunting season. Staff are hard to come by so I didn't want any one picked off in the woods. I did not want that hunter to think

they had got Bigfoot as trophy. So we did find during spring and summer it was pretty safe to have staff running around like Bigfoot. Now the early fall was not. Even though we were not on game lands I didn't really want to take that chance of the rouge hunter shooting at one of my staff or even being close to the participants with a gun. We do this adventure in the early fall but without Bigfoot in the woods, but with more symbols and signs for the participants to find. The question of what trail will we hike was hard as I had picked one trail but had to change because of the combo step. Now you may have to come back to this question as I did. Due to the combo element I added. I picked another trail but once I decided to add the other element I had to change it. That also had to do with time of day and time of year this also played a factor in how we chose the area and trail. Like I said during hunting season, the location of the trail can have factors when answering some of the developmental idea questions.

The adventure idea is a Bigfoot track while on a hike in the woods along a trail. We will use tech (video, GPS, compasses) for the participants during and before the hike. We will use extra staff to have a Bigfoot walking around in the woods and making noises while the participants hike and track. We will try for early spring. No Bigfoot as staff for the fall season, possibly early Sept but will have to check hunting season and weather. Summer season would also be an ideally time to run the program. We would need to check on heat and plan the time of day accordingly. We will run the program on a Saturday or Sunday and we will try to schedule for one of those days. The program could be ran on a week day as a private adventure during the summer months. Remember these are not all the question you should ask yourself, please come up with more and it will help you in the long run of this process. I would even suggest asking off the wall questions like; what is the rain

plain? What if it is to hot the day the trip is scheduled? What if something is going on that day on the trail you have picked? What if you don't have a signal for the GPS in the woods on the trail? What if a storm comes out of nowhere? What is the emergency plan if someone gets hurt? What if the trails gone? Who you going to call? (Ghostbusters!! Sorry had too).



*(above) Glow climbing and archery (below) Chris and kids on Bigfoot Float*



*Picture by Chris Ferguson*

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These are the questions we asked and explained earlier.  
Use the spaces to write in how you want the adventure to go.

Technology question: Will we use it? What kind will we use?

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Staffing usage: How many staff? What will there roll be on the adventure?

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Time of year: fall, spring, summer, winter

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Time of day: early, mid-day, afternoon and Day of the Week

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*(above) sunset paddle (below) fishing at a local pond*



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