



WFLDP Leadership in Cinema: *The Rescue* (2021)

Submitted By	Brian Sebastian		
Film Title	<i>The Rescue</i>	Document Type	Facilitation Guide
Director(s)	Jimmy Chin and Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi	NWCG Committee	Leadership Committee
Primary Leadership Levels	Level 3, Leader of People and Level 4 Leader of Leaders	Focus Principles	Team Cohesion, Adaptive Leadership, Professional Integrity

Intent and Objective

Intent of Leadership in Cinema

The Leadership in Cinema program is designed to use powerful storytelling to support continuing education efforts within the wildland fire service. *The Rescue* provides a dynamic case study in incident management, adaptive leadership, and specialized resource utilization during a high-stakes incident.

Objective

Students will analyze and discuss the elements of team cohesion, risk management, and integrity demonstrated by a diverse group of international, national, and local personnel during a time-compressed and complex incident. Special emphasis will be placed on how "normal people" step up to a difficult challenge by leveraging expertise and improvising under extreme pressure.

Materials and Preparation

- A viewing of the documentary *The Rescue* (or selected clips).
- Wildland Fire Leadership Values and Principles (<https://www.nwcg.gov/values-and-principles>) handouts (Duty, Respect, Integrity).
- Notepads and writing utensils for students to record observations.

Basic Plot Summary

In the summer of 2018, twelve boys and their soccer coach are trapped deep within the flooded Tham Luang cave complex in Thailand. As global attention mounts, an unprecedented international effort is launched, requiring the collaboration of the Thai Navy SEALs, the U.S. Air Force, thousands of local volunteers, and a small, unconventional group of specialized European cave divers. The film documents the nearly three-week incident, the immense logistical and human factors involved, and the extreme, improvised rescue plan that ultimately saved all thirteen lives.

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Facilitation Options

The Rescue is an excellent film for illustrating complex, multi-agency problem-solving. It can be utilized in its entirety or through focused clips, depending on time and learning objective.

A. Clip Facilitation Suggestion (Key Scenes)

For a focused discussion on adaptive leadership and teamwork, use the specific moments below and assign a particular principle (Duty, Respect, or Integrity) to each small group for analysis.

Clip Topic	Leadership Principle Focus	Discussion Point Emphasis
The "Hand-Off" of Command (Initial Thai Navy SEAL response shifts to cave divers)	Respect, Deference to Expertise	Why did the Thai military leadership respect the specialized knowledge of the civilian divers enough to let them take the lead in the most critical area? How do you practice respect by listening to and yielding command to the true subject matter experts (SMEs), regardless of their rank or appearance?
Dr. Richard Harris's Arrival and Ethical Dilemma (The Australian Anesthesiologist)	Integrity, Duty (Stepping Up)	Harris, a civilian, puts his life and career at risk. Discuss the personal integrity required to commit to a plan that may have devastating career and personal consequences. How do professionals demonstrate duty by accepting responsibility for a task no one else can perform?
The Improvised Extraction Plan (The decision to use anesthesia)	Adaptive Leadership/Convey Intent	The team realizes the children won't survive the journey. Discuss the high-risk decision-making under pressure. How was trust quickly built between the divers (operators) and the doctors (planners) of a completely novel, life-or-death plan?

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Clip Topic	Leadership Principle Focus	Discussion Point Emphasis
The Divers' Humility and Motivation (Interview clips with John Volanthen and Rick Stanton)	Key Learning: Competence Over Ego	These individuals admit to being quirky, unpopular, and generally unsuited for the spotlight. Discuss the power of humble competence. Why were these "normal" cave-exploring hobbyists the perfect responders for this highly technical, low-glamour challenge?
The Pump Operation (The thousands of local volunteers draining water)	Team Cohesion/Duty (Followership)	The success hinges on the unseen efforts of non-certified local citizens diverting water. Discuss the importance of Level 1 Follower (Provide Action) . How can incident leaders motivate and integrate large numbers of diverse volunteers to achieve a single, shared goal?

Wrap-Up and Integration

- Have students share their key findings and highlight specific moments when leaders and followers demonstrated fire leadership values and principles.

Key Learning Point: The Triumph of the Humble Specialist

The Tham Luang Rescue demonstrates that the most effective leader in a dynamic situation is often not the highest-ranking or most charismatic person, but the SME with the specific, highly technical skill-set required for the unique problem.

Discuss: In the wildland fire service, what unique skills or expertise might be hidden among your team that could be the critical element for success on an unexpected incident? How can we better practice respect in our organization by valuing hidden competence over established popularity or traditional authority? How can leaders practice deference to expertise when delegating an assignment to a more experienced subordinate?

- Encourage students to apply the lessons — especially the value of adaptive planning and integrating outside expertise — to their roles in wildland fire suppression and all-hazard incident management.

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Be proficient in your job, both technically & as a leader.

- Take charge when in charge.
- Adhere to professional standard operating procedures.
- Develop a plan to accomplish given objectives.

Make sound & timely decisions.

- Maintain situation awareness in order to anticipate needed actions.
- Develop contingencies & consider consequences.
- Improvise within the commander's intent to handle a rapidly changing environment.

Ensure that tasks are understood, supervised, accomplished.

- Issue clear instructions.
- Observe & assess actions in progress without micro-managing.
- Use positive feedback to modify duties, tasks & assignments when appropriate.

Develop your subordinates for the future.

- Clearly state expectations.
- Delegate tasks that you are not required to do personally.
- Consider individual skill levels & developmental needs when assigning tasks.

Know your subordinates and look out for their well-being.

- Put the safety of your subordinates above all other objectives.
- Take care of your subordinate's needs.
- Resolve conflicts between individuals on the team.

Keep your subordinates informed.

- Provide accurate & timely briefings.
- Give the reason (intent) for assignments & tasks.
- Make yourself available to answer questions at appropriate times.

Build the team.

- Conduct frequent debriefings with the team to identify lessons learned.
- Recognize accomplishments & reward them appropriately.
- Apply disciplinary measures equally.

Employ your subordinates in accordance with their capabilities.

- Observe human behavior as well as fire behavior.
- Provide early warning to subordinates of tasks they will be responsible for.
- Consider team experience, fatigue & physical limitations when accepting assignments.

Know yourself and seek improvement.

- Know the strengths/weaknesses in your character & skill level.
- Ask questions of peers & supervisors.
- Actively listen to feedback from subordinates.

Seek responsibility and accept responsibility for your actions.

- Accept full responsibility for & correct poor team performance.
- Credit subordinates for good performance.
- Keep your superiors informed of your actions.

Set the example.

- Share the hazards & hardships with your subordinates.
- Don't show discouragement when facing setbacks.
- Choose the difficult right over the easy wrong.

DUTY

RESPECT

INTEGRITY