

# **“MAXIMISE RESCUERS’ SAFETY AND EFFECTIVENESS THROUGH PRE-RESCUE COMMUNICATION.”**

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## **Abstract**

By adopting a well-structured and logical approach to questioning whatever bystanders are present, a rescuer should be able to gain the best quality information possible thus gaining a better picture of the emergency which allows a reduced exposure to risk. This makes the rescue as safe as possible. The reasoning behind each question and the order in which they are asked is of relevance. The phrasing of questions in such a stressful situation may also influence the ease with which the information in the resulting answers is assimilated and aid the rescuer in drawing the appropriate conclusions. In turn this improves the quality of the instruction to be given, which will result in a more organised and safer rescue. The question being considered might be paraphrased as “what questions and instructions should a lifesaver, a trained individual who happens upon an emergency, ask a bystander to gain maximum benefit from the responses.”

## **Summary**

The rescuer needs to ask questions and exchange information under the following headings to maximise their safety.

They need to: 1. Establishes if there is an emergency, 2. Assert that they have the necessary expertise to manage the situation, 3. Develop a relationship with the bystander, 4. Establish the reliability of the information, which is received from the bystander, 5. Find out about the emergency, casualties and the location, 6. Keep the bystander available until a plan is developed, 7. Gather equipment that will assist in the rescue, 8. Activate the emergency services if they are available, 9. Put the emergency plan into action

## **Introduction**

This paper was prompted by a number of realisations or suspicions. As a teacher of lifesaving and lifeguarding there is at least a moral responsibility, if not a duty, to train students to adopt techniques, which keep them as safe as possible. Candidates are instructed in the areas of water safety knowledge, lifesaving and life support skills. Reference material supplied in the manuals of various organisations provides information on these areas of knowledge. When consideration is given to how an individual deals with an emergency, broad principals are outlined but detailed steps are not given. None of the publications investigated provide a methodology for gathering information from others at the location of an incident.

Lifesaving is a dangerous activity. There are few activities where individuals deliberately train to risk their lives helping other who are in life threatening situations. Lifesavers happen upon emergencies and only have their training and whatever resources that are at the location to help them. Others who deal with such unknown emergencies and put their lives at risk, – fire fighters, ambulance crew, police officers, lifeguards and security service personnel operate in trained groups. They also have equipment and additional supporting resources available to them.

## **A review of lifesaving manuals**

A review of Lifesaving/Lifeguard manuals from United Kingdom, Ireland, South Africa and North America indicated that no information on how to construct a rescue plan is provided. A common approach exists in these publications of providing water safety knowledge, aquatic and land based lifesaving skills. The dangers associated with water, a compendium of skills and the order in which rescues should be attempted are listed. Pre planning is considered in the context of the lifeguard team implementing their operating plans (NOP) and Emergency Action Plan (EAP). Operations are developed within the context of these teams. Assistance and support is only considered as coming from other professional services – lifeboat, police, fire service, coastguard or other rescue service. Lifesavers need assistance to plan a response to an emergency. This paper aims to give a means of bringing more certainty to such emergencies.

## **The main actors in an emergency**

The rescuer, the casualty and the bystander are three main classifications of individuals who are considered in this enquiry as being involved in a rescue. Mainline vocational services, fire, police, ambulance, coastguard etc., are viewed as backup resources whose assistance may be called upon. The rescue is considered as the initial emergency in the aquatic environment that is happened upon.

**Rescuer:** For the purposes of this paper a rescuer is considered as an individual with lifesaving training who happens upon an aquatic emergency and is dependent for assistance on whatever resources, equipment or human, that are available in the immediate vicinity. This individual may be a member of a vocational emergency service who is away from their normal working supports. This may be a lifeguard going to or returning from duty, or where their training is not appropriate to the prevailing conditions.

**Casualty:** The casualty is considered as an individual who is in distress in an aquatic environment who needs assistance to have their safety ensured. They may be an individual or may be one of a group of individuals in need of help. The rescue of a group is viewed as a series of individual rescues.

**Bystander:** A bystander is taken to be an individual or one of a group of individuals who happen upon an incident or are at the scene of an emergency and lacking the skill or resources to attempt to get assistance to resolve the emergency.

**Needs and expectations of those involved**

Needs analysis of those involved, the casualty, rescuer and if available the bystander, is important as these needs and expectations will colour their reaction to the developing rescue situation. If they feel their needs are being met or someone is attempting to meet them they are more likely to assist or to co-operate in the proceedings. This would include answering questions about the existing situation or volunteering themselves to progress the rescue.

<b>Needs of those involved</b>		
<u>The needs of the casualty</u>	<u>The needs of the rescuer</u>	<u>The needs of the bystander</u>
To be rescued /got to a position of safety from a hazardous one.	To stay safe Whether to get involved or not To define the extent of the rescue situation To decide whether to continue with their involvement in the rescue attempt. To perform the rescue as effectively as possible	To get help/assistance for the casualty To be reassured To be given clear instructions To have confidence in the rescuer
<b>Expectations of those involved</b>		
<u>Expectations of casualty</u>	<u>Expectations of rescuer</u>	<u>Expectations of bystander</u>
To be rescued To be uninjured	To be safe To successfully complete rescue To expose themselves to as little danger as possible That their training would stand the test of the situation They would have the confidence to perform properly That they would perform properly To be able to feel satisfied with the job done To manage the situation To prevent the situation escalating.	To remain safe To have the casualty rescued To only be exposed to necessary risk To get away from the scene To be given proper instructions/directions To have them repeated if necessary To be given support during and after

### **Rescue skills sequence**

The rescuer can be expected to attempt to follow the recommended order of rescues advocated by all lifesaving organisations of firstly using methods with the lowest levels of risk. This order is often summed up as talk, reach, throw, wade, row, swim with support and swim and tow. The lower risk rescues by their nature require some equipment e.g. stick, ball, floating items etc. This equipment normally needs to be found in the vicinity of the emergency. The acquisition of these items is a task that the rescuer will need to perform or arrange to have carried out.

### **Problem solving and interrogation techniques to be employed by rescuers**

In an emergency situation rescuers have to resolve a problem of a very complex nature (Klein (1999 P125) citing Lipshitz and Bar-Ilan (1996)). Before action can be undertaken to bring those involved to safety the extent and nature of the emergency needs to be established, unfortunately elements of the situation change constantly. The research indicates that the ill-structured nature of the situation needs to be recognised. As knowledge about the situation develops there is a need to reconsider strategies and adjust to setbacks and problems as they arise. Finally there is a need to foster co-ordination among the impromptu team (Kayes C.D. 2006) dealing with the situation.

This matching of the needs and wishes of the individuals in a rescue create an impromptu team. The rescuer is the most likely leader. In this role the rescuer is able to support the needs and expectations of the bystander to be supported and helped. The rescuer's need to have a safer operating environment by having support is met to some extent. The situation is further improved as the bystander may have some knowledge of the emergency site.

The questioning of the bystanders can provide an opportunity to gain information about the emergency and it may also be a chance to build confident relationship between both parties. The questioning techniques necessary to maximise the quality of information available requires that they be purposeful, clear, brief and focused using simple and appropriate language (Lewis K.G. referencing (Groisser, P.L. 1964).

Finally the rescuer needs to arrange to have whatever equipment is likely to be of assistance in the rescue gathered and made available to them.

Every activity has its own lexicon or jargon and there is a danger that in the pressured atmosphere of an emergency a rescuer might use phrases or terms that might make communication more difficult or increase the possibility of a misunderstanding between participants in the rescue because of different training and backgrounds.

There is also an assumption of the good will of bystanders. This assumes a willingness of the bystander to provide the best possible information available to them to the rescuer and that there is no obstructiveness or mischievousness intent on the part of the bystander.

### **A review of the parameters of this enquiry**

The purpose of this enquiry is two fold, to establish a series of questions to fulfil the criteria set and to establish an order that best provides the rescuer with sufficient knowledge about the rescue to keep them as safe as possible. There is no intention to consider how these questions should be delivered, body language employed or any other subliminal means of communicating with people are not considered.

### **Establishing questions to be asked**

The rescuer needs to gain information, to establish what happened, to learn as much as possible about the incident , the site, the casualties and what assistance is available. This includes information to be communicated to the emergency services. The rescuer needs to assess the quality of the information relating to each of these areas as provided by a bystander.

Consideration of ways to gain the confidence of the bystander with a view to eliciting their help and continued support is desirable. The questions necessary have been structured under the headings of *people, places and things* for easier reference.

These paragraphs attempt to identify individual questions, which will help the rescuer. The paragraphs are structured with the general headings followed by the considerations that lead to the questions, which are shown at the end of the paragraph in italics.

#### **People,**

##### **Bystander**

By establishing a person's name this creates a contact with the bystander. The use of their name enables a greater personal relationship to develop. A response to the question establishes the bystander's ability with language and whether a speech defect exists. By getting the bystander into conversation there is the possibility a better working relationship will result in an easier and safer solution.

*What is your name?*

The bystander's knowledge of the area is important as this gives the rescuer more certainty. In establishing the level of local knowledge greater certainty is introduced to the situation. This also gives credence to the information, which may follow.

*Are you from this area (locality)?*

#### **Buy in by the bystander**

A volunteer is better than a conscript. If the bystander agrees to assist they are acknowledging the rescuer as a leader/organiser or expert. If they agree to help the probability is that they will work more readily.

*Will you help me?*

#### **Information from rescuer**

The rescuer needs to instil confidence in the bystander and casualty by telling the bystander of their training and capabilities as a rescuer. This indicates that further questions have a purpose and are not just prevarication. This hopefully will make further questions more acceptable and worthy of answers. Personalising the situation can reinforce this.

*My name is .....*

*I am a trained lifesaver*

#### **Knowledge of the Casualties**

Information is needed on the number and condition of casualties. Helping them is the primary aim of the rescue exercise. This attempts to establish information about the casualties.

*How many people (casualties) are in the water?*

*Did you see any people (casualties) in the water?*

*How many people (casualties) are on land?*

This considers the existence of hearsay knowledge or if calls for help or screams were heard.

*Are there any more people who need help?*

#### **Marshal assistance**

The bystander needs to remain at the scene while the extent of the emergency is assessed and options considered. This results in quality information when emergency services are summoned.

*Don't go away yet!*

#### **Skill set of bystander**

The rescuer needs to gather whatever assistance is available. Efforts need to be made to gather human resources and to establish the bystander's capability to give technical assist in an aquatic environment.

*Have you been trained in lifesaving or water rescue?*

*Have you been trained in rescue breathing or first aid?*

*Will you help the casualty out of the water and if they can't climb out keep them at the side.*

#### **Place**

##### **Accident site**

The accident site sets the physical boundary to the incident or the working area. It dictates the skills which may be used to perform the rescue. As the rescuer happens upon the incident their knowledge of the site and conditions are likely to be minimal. This needs to be gained with minimal risk.

#### **Knowledge of the location**

This will hopefully establish the individuals' knowledge of the area. It will also establish the quality and accuracy of the descriptions in the answers which result. This is important when summoning the emergency services.

*Do you know the locality?*

*Do you know the name of where we are?*

*Can you give directions to where we are?*

#### **Knowledge of the area**

This serves to establish the hazards, nature of the locality and options. These will serve to prompt the bystander for the type of information required or provide examples of hazards.

*Are there any hazards in the water? Rocks, holes, rapids or currents*

### Things

#### **What happened - an accident or not**

Has an accident occurred or are those involved playacting. This clarifies whether there is an issue to be resolved or not.

*Is something wrong, has an accident taken place?*

#### **Quality of knowledge**

Hopefully this question will serve to provide some knowledge of the extent of the incident and the bystander may give some information, which will establish the extent and accuracy of the description of the incident.

*Did you see what happened?*

#### **Gathering equipment or rescue aids**

Bring anything that can be used to help the casualties over here, to (a specific location).

*Will you bring any thing that floats, that can be used to reach any clothes to keep the casualty warm*

#### **Communication equipment**

This question is directed at mobilising the emergency services as effectively as possible. It is preferable if help can be summoned from within the rescue site rather than having to send an assistant away thus losing their help. This question may take a number of forms depending on where in the world the question is being asked.

*Do you have a mobile phone or do you know if there is a phone in the area?*

*Do you know where to get help?*

#### **Order in which questions should be asked**

Having established the most probable questions for a rescuer the order in which they are asked will depend to some extent on how the rescue develops. The following is a likely sequence.

#### **The rescuer needs to:**

Establishes if there is an emergency

Assert that they have the necessary expertise to manage the situation

Develop a relationship with the bystander

Establish the reliability of the information, which is received from the bystander

Find out about the emergency, casualties and the location

Keep the bystander available until a plan is developed

Gather equipment that will assist in the rescue

Activate the emergency services if they are available

Put the emergency plan into action

#### **Questions to be asked by a rescuer which should reduce their exposure to risk**

*Is something wrong, has an accident taken place?*

*I am a trained lifesaver*

*My name is .....*

*What is your name?*

*Will you help me?*

*Are you from this area (locality)?*

*Do you know the locality?*

*Don't go away yet!*

*Did you see what happened?*

*How many people (casualties) are in the water?*

*Did you see any people (casualties) in the water?*

*How many people (casualties) are on land?*

*Are there any more people who need help?*

*Will you bring any thing that floats, that can be used to reach or any clothes to keep the casualty warm*

*Are there any hazards in the water? Rocks, holes, rapids or currents*

*Do you know the name of where we are?*

*Can you give directions to where we are?*

*Do you have a mobile phone or do you know if there is a phone in the area?*

*Do you know where to get help?*

*Have you been trained in lifesaving or water rescue?*

*Have you been trained in resuscitation (rescue breathing) or first aid?*

*Will you help the casualty out of the water if they can't climb out or keep them at the side.*

*Come back and tell me if rescue services are on their way*

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