



Vertex

at the heart of adventure

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Technical Advice

Ropes courses have been around for a very long time and in the last 10 years have exploded from their traditional world of education and development centres into all aspects of our society and culture.

Those owning and operating courses are no longer just outdoor education professionals but commercial leisure operators who see it as a complimentary addition to their main area of business whether that be a leisure centre, holiday / forest park, hotel, farm or amusement park. They are recognising and responding to our desire to seek “experiences” in our leisure time and have created activities that have become high impact, adrenaline fuelled, fast turnaround, complex operations where numbers and profits add a dimension of pressure to all involved.

Get in touch:

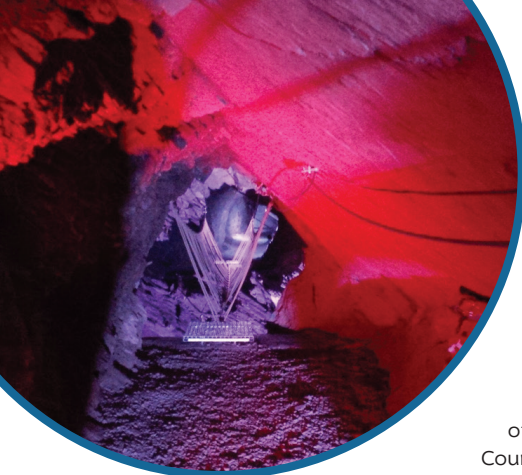
For more information on how we can support you contact Vertex on

01929 480 920 or
enquiries@vertex-training.co.uk

Vertex Instructor Training,
Burnbake Office, Rempstone,
Corfe Castle, Dorset, BH20 5JH

www.vertex-training.co.uk

“We all know that an adrenaline rush can be one of the best feelings in the world, that feeling of time slowing down, your whole attention narrowed to this one thing – ropes courses and adventure parks can pair this feeling of fear within a “protective frame” that assures people they are safe. Many agree this has its own reward with people often feeling refreshed, excited and empowered.”



Along with the accelerated growth in the number of customers and ropes courses, there has been the inevitable increase in accidents, incidents and near misses. This in turn has seen more criminal and civil cases.

We should all be proud to be part of an industry that is still predominately self-regulated. It has been successful in driving up standards in relation to builds, inspections, operation and training through the European Safety Standard EN15567:2007 and 2015 as well as the establishment of ERCA in 2003 and the publication of the UK Ropes Course Guide now into its 4th edition.



However, our industry moves as fast as some of your zip wires with new equipment, changes in standards, safe practice and new ideas. It has become very hard for anybody to ensure that they are up to date and running their ropes course facility the best way they can in order to protect their customers, their staff and their brand.

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974 as an owner and or operator you have a "duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of your employees and other people who might be affected by your business."

The Health and Safety Executive are clear that as an employer you must appoint a "competent" person to help you meet your health and safety duties to your employees and customers.

So who qualifies as a "competent" person? The HSE defines a competent person as someone who has



“sufficient training and experience or knowledge and other qualities that allow them to assist you properly. The level of competence required will depend on the complexity of the situation and the particular help that you need”

As an operator you may well have appropriately qualified staff who meet the definition from the HSE and remain current and competent in the relevant activities. You should be confident that there are no uncertainties around your venue, equipment, build and that you have robust operating procedures. We would encourage any operator to ensure that an internally appointed person is able to carry out this role “without fear or favour”.

For those of you that don't have this internal expertise or just want to have an external person to turn to you may want to appoint an external technical adviser (competent person) to advise you on safety, industry and operational matters.



You and Your Technical Adviser

If you decide you do need the services of a Technical Adviser then you need to be clear about what it is that you want them to do for you. It may be as simple as knowing there is someone that you can contact for ad hoc advice to establishing a more long term relationship which covers training, ops procedures, purchase of equipment, assessments etc.

A good technical adviser can have significant benefits to your operation as they can offer mentoring and support as well as improving operational decision making. We would suggest that when you're looking for a technical adviser that you consider the following – a kind of TA CV.

- Ensure they have extensive practical and theoretical and technical knowledge of a wide variety of ropes courses and/or adventure parks;
- They have knowledge and experience of your type of ropes course and how you run it;
- They should have strong analytical and excellent inter-personal skills. Their effectiveness will be dependent on their ability to build rapport, trust and credibility quickly within your operation and we would suggest that although, strict independence isn't always necessary, they should have sufficient freedom of action to evaluate the situation and provide advice freely;
- You're confident that you can work well together;
- They are currently involved in the industry and keep themselves abreast of developments;
- Proactive in their role;
- They have proven history in your client groups and therefore your ropes course activities

What can a technical adviser do for me and my operation?

The principal role of a technical advisor is to help you make relevant and informed management decisions.

In practical terms they should be able to offer useful and constructive advice on the activity including, amongst other things, staff competence, operating procedures, equipment, ratios, use of assistants, etc. They should be able to offer a breadth of support and expert knowledge including, but not limited to, the following:

- Creation, review and or development of operational procedures;
- Support and or approval of operational procedures;
- Be at the forefront of technological, equipment and industry advances;
- Offer a supporting role by helping you understand industry changes in the context of your own facility (i.e. Governmental, ERCA, European Standards etc);
- Audit & assess staff competencies – to include areas such as quality of delivery, engagement with spectators, presentation of self and session;
- Session Observations;
- Offer specialist technical advice on any problems associated with the activities;
- Offer advice on course design and construction;
- Act as an expert witness should the need arise;
- Support in the purchase of PPE and other equipment;
- Audit and review current practices.

The following is taken from the Adventure Activities Licensing Service's September 2010 document "Information and Guidance on Technical Advisers" : paras 4.3.13 and 4.4.3

“It is not the technical advisor's responsibility to ensure that advice given is followed. The role is an advisory one not a regulatory one.”

And don't forget that as the operator you still carry the ultimate responsibility and need to ensure:

- that employees have sufficient experience as well as qualifications
- that employees are properly inducted to site specific and/or company specific practices
- that employees are suitable in other ways
- on-going monitoring of the competence and performance of employees

Final thoughts

A good adviser wants to help you succeed – they aren't a competitor, they aren't the boss, you are, and they shouldn't have any hidden agenda. Don't forget if you succeed, they will be proud to be associated with your success. Remember it's your facility and you are ultimately responsible to and for your staff and customers.