

Discussion Guide - Deep Survival

1. We are introduced to the idea that emotions can hijack our brains and take over our behavior. What we choose to do and the way we make decisions is significantly altered in this process. What does this say about our belief in "free will"?
2. Discuss personal experiences you've had in which emotion was so high that you literally couldn't think. This could be either a very good or very bad experience.
3. Laughter quiets the amygdala, the area of the brain known as the centerpiece of the fear response. That's why dark humor evolves from the worst situations. Can you think of examples where the saddest or hardest time gave rise to the funniest humor?
4. In Chapter Two, two snowmobilers die in an avalanche caused by their sport of "hammer-heading." They had been warned of the danger, but one of them, overcome by emotion, impulsively ran up the hill anyway. Others followed, and the avalanche broke. Can you think of a situation in which you acted impulsively?
5. Do you think that we can learn to control emotion and use reason and emotion in a more balanced fashion? Or are we stuck with who we are? Put another way, can you shape your own emotional landscape?
6. Chapter four discusses mental models and the trouble they can cause. This is the phenomenon of not seeing something that's "right under your nose." When have you found yourself using the wrong mental model?
7. Debbie Kiley survived while two of her male companions perished. Do you think women are more adapted to survival than men? Would this make evolutionary sense? After all, in the prehistoric world, mothers were essential to the survival of the young, but men were expendable. Do you think this made women more adapted to surviving?
8. Gut feelings are an essential ingredient of being aware enough of your environment to survive. Do you think you follow your gut? Can you think of important decisions you've made based on intuition or gut feeling? Do you know immediately if you like or dislike someone, trust or do not trust someone? Do you think that gut feelings are nonsense and that reason and logic can carry you through if you're just deliberate and careful enough?
9. Since reading *Deep Survival*, do you feel more aware of the hazards around you? Do you think this is paranoia, or is it just being more usefully alert? How much should we worry about the dangers of getting into a real life-and-death situation? Should we just have the attitude that whatever happens will happen?
10. Some people believe that you are born with the traits of a survivor or else you are not. Which view do you think is more valid and why?
11. *Deep Survival* advises us not to celebrate the summit. When we reach the top of the mountain, we are only halfway through the journey. Can you think of other areas in life where this idea applies?
12. Likewise, the book discusses the concept of bending the map, those times when we deny the obvious evidence before us and plunge ahead with a heart full of hope that the world really hasn't changed. In the book, it's a hiker who is lost and knows it--he sees no lakes where they are supposed to be--but continues on anyway and becomes hopelessly lost. Can you apply this to other areas of life? Can you think of a specific instance when you "bent the map?"
13. In the appendix, the author discusses twelve traits of survivors. Go through each of those traits and ask: Do I practice this trait in my everyday life? How can I improve my ability to survive both the small and large events in my life by doing a better job of acting like a survivor?