



Board Breaking Logistics

This video is specifically for the Director of RYLA. Your entire staff doesn't need to see this one, but there's no harm in showing it to them if you want to.

The first question you need to answer is: will you or won't you include a Board Breaking activity in your RYLA? I can tell you that it's one of the most powerful activities we do, and many of our participants say it's their favorite part of RYLA. They talk about it for years and many of them take their broken boards with them to college. They often write to us months later to tell us they accomplished their 'Board Goal'. So this is a great activity!

But it is not easy. Don't do it if you aren't committed to putting in a lot of effort to do it right and training your staff to do it safely and effectively. After doing this activity for almost 20 years, and building up a large number of experienced staff members who have all been coaching board breaking for at least 6 years, we now train the staff for about 4 hours each year to prepare for this one activity. But the first 2 years we hired an expert to lead it for us and we gradually added our own staff as they became more experienced. If you are going to add this activity, and facilitate it yourself without any outside expert, I recommend you devote about 8 hours to training your staff how to do it.

From here on I'll assume you've committed to including board breaking and doing it right. Congratulations! You are in for a wonderful experience! I look forward to hearing from you after your RYLA and listening to your stories about it.

I want to talk about

1. When to schedule this activity
2. Getting the wood and sorting it
3. Training
4. The Initial Demonstration
5. The Important Announcement
6. Breaking in Teams
7. Banging
8. In Case of Rain
9. Safety

1. WHEN to schedule this activity

We think the ideal time for this activity is first thing in the morning on the first FULL day of RYLA, after they have slept over the first night. By this point they are beginning to form strong bonds with their teammates and this activity will strengthen those bonds.

2. GETTING WOOD & Sorting it

We use inexpensive pine lumber for this activity. In the United States it is called one by twelve and comes in various lengths from 4 foot long to 16 feet long. It's called one by twelve, but it's really 11 ¼ inch wide by ¾ inch thick. It costs about a dollar per foot. This is NOT Plywood! It's regular lumber, cut from a pine tree.

We now cut it in 7 inch lengths. We used to cut it in 9 inch lengths, but found that this length is easier to break and still seems like a substantial piece of wood. You could cut it even shorter – maybe 6 inches, or even as small as 5 inches, but I think it would be too easy to break then, and the activity would lose a lot of its impact.

We have a Rotarian in our District who owns a lumber yard and he donates our wood for us each year. He even cuts it for us.

We think the wood is a little easier to break when it's dry, and when it first comes from the lumber yard it's often pretty wet, so we try to get it cut at least a month before RYLA so it has time to dry out a little.

Always get at least 20-25% more boards than you think you need. You'll use some for practice, and some will be too hard to break.

Once you have the wood sort it out. Any that seem too knotty or too heavy should be pulled out and put aside. Use them for firewood.

If you have 100 participants at your RYLA pull out 15 of the lightest, clearest boards and put them aside to use when someone BANGs a board. Swapping their board for a 'better' board will usually make a big difference.

Some boards have an obvious curve to them. If they do, it's a LOT harder to break them by hitting the HILL than by hitting the VALLEY. Use them for practice with your staff and make sure you hit the valley-side.

3. TRAINING

Since you are probably just introducing the Board Breaking activity at your RYLA, you won't have the benefit of a very experienced Coach for the first year or so. We didn't either, at first, but now we have Coaches with many years of experience. You will too, eventually. But in the meantime, start with most dynamic staff members you have and train them very well. Let them practice with each other for a few weeks until they become confident. Make sure all your coaches are well-trained and have practiced all the scripts and techniques.

4. INITIAL DEMONSTRATION

We always start with a very detailed demonstration of Board Breaking, conducted by our most experienced Coach, and a hand-picked breaker that we are confident will succeed. This demonstration usually lasts an hour or more. We make sure we explain every detail about Board Breaking carefully, several times.

5. IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

Make sure you give this **Important Announcement** so all the participants are fully prepared for what might happen. After the Initial Demonstration of board breaking, and before we split into groups to break the boards, the head board breaking coach tells the group this:

"Like all of our activities, this is a Challenge by Choice. You can break a board if you want to – it's up to you. If you follow the instructions carefully, fill yourself with confidence and determination, and give your best effort, MOST of you will break your board on the first attempt. But for various reasons some people don't. It might be their technique, or mental state, or it might just be a really, really HARD piece of wood! Some of them have knots, or they are extra dense, or come from an unusually tough tree. If you find one of those extra-hard boards we'll replace it with a normal one. It doesn't matter what the reason – if you do not break your board on your first attempt, you must wait a while for your hand to recover from the impact. You must NOT make two attempts back-to-back. You MUST wait a while."

This announcement let's everyone know 7 things:

1. The activity is optional and only people who WANT to break a board need to try.
2. The keys to BREAKING are: Technique, Confidence and Determination (effort).
3. BANGING the board is a possible outcome and its nothing to be ashamed of.
4. We have experience handling cases where someone needs to try again.
5. A VERY common reason for BANGING is an **abnormally hard** piece of wood
6. We will replace an **abnormally hard** piece of wood with a '**Normal**' piece of wood
7. If a person BANGs, they need to rest and regroup before trying again.

6. BREAKING IN TEAMS

We divide our RYLA into 10 teams of 14-16 participants in each Team. We have many team-building activities throughout RYLA but this is the best one. Teams love to cheer on their team members as they break their boards! Breaking into teams also helps get everyone through this activity faster. We allow 3 hours for this activity: 1 hour for the initial demonstration, 60-90 minutes for everyone to break boards, and 30-60 minutes to debrief the activity, which means talk about it and what it meant.

7. BANGING

Most people will break their board on the first attempt but some will not. We call this BANGING. See the Issues Video for more information about this.

The biggest problem with Banging is it feels like an emotional let-down to everyone around: Not just the would-be Board Breaker, but also the Coach and everyone on the team who was cheering them on and expecting them to break it. We need to manage that disappointment and prepare for it. Because it WILL happen!

8. IN CASE OF RAIN

It's very important to have firm, safe footing while breaking boards. If you are on wet grass you could slip and hurt yourself or someone else. If rain is at all possible, have a back-up location ready that will be dry.

9. SAFETY

I've saved the most important discussion for last. Safety is always the most important concern. Here are a few important points to make sure all of your participants, and staff, remain safe:

Each Team should make a big circle, with everyone at least 8 feet away from the breaker and holder.

Breakers and Holders must remove ALL jewelry from hands and wrists, and any hanging or loose jewelry from their necks, ears or hair. (Ear rings and small necklaces are OK.) Holders need to wear safety glasses. Pieces of wood OFTEN fly toward face of Holder. The Holder needs to keep their fingers curled so the breaker doesn't mash them. Breakers and Holders should wear sneakers/trainers/athletic shoes. Bare feet can be a hazard when walking around, but are safer than wobbly shoes when board breaking. Have a nurse or other medical practitioner nearby to handle any cuts, bruises or other emergencies.

Know where the nearest hospital or Emergency Room is located and have a driver ready to transport someone there, if necessary.

If you follow all of these suggestions you will have an amazing activity that your participants and staff will remember for the rest of their lives. Let me know how it goes!