

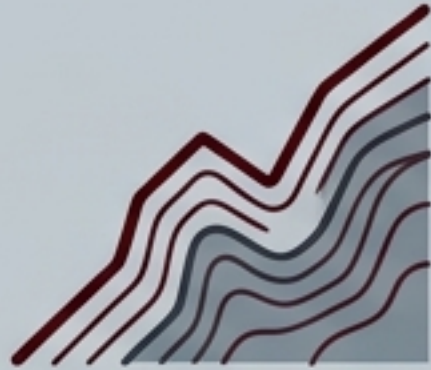


KINESIOLOGY &
SPORT MANAGEMENT

Leadership Practices and Strategies for Young Professionals

Dr. Alex Sullins, Clinical Assistant Professor

Navigating the current terrain of the parks and recreation industry



Steep Terrain: Structural Challenges



Waiting for structured promotion tracks.



Navigating rigid departmental budget constraints.



Overcoming unclear paths for upward mobility.



Open Trails: Industry Opportunities



Expansive potential for diverse skill application.



High capacity for direct, visible community impact.



Increasing avenues for cross-departmental mobility.

True career momentum requires taking action and learning on the fly.

(Korn Ferry, 2024)



THE REFLECTION STAGE

Before you can follow a trail, you must calibrate your internal compass. Learning on the fly isn't about guessing; about active reflection while in motion.

Pinpoint your current coordinates and define what you are looking for.

1. Capital or Resource

The relational network, funding, and time you currently possess.



GPS Triangulation

Recognizing
your situation

2. Types of Experience

The specific historical roles and operational projects under your belt.



3. Assessment

The raw evaluation of where your current role aligns with your long-term goals.



AUDIT YOUR CAREER BACKPACK BEFORE CHOOSING A PATH

TOP GEAR: Capital

Relational equity, strategic mentorships, and industry reputation.



SIDE POCKETS: Resources

Tangible assets like available time for training, financial flexibility, and geographic mobility.

MAIN COMPARTMENT: Types of Experience

Hard Skills: Budgeting, operations, safety protocols.

Soft Skills: Conflict resolution, team leadership, community engagement.

The strategic crossroads dictates your next move.



The eight-step elevation profile for strategic career planning.

(Kauffman, 2010)

Phase 1: Basecamp (Awareness)



Step 1: Proximity



Step 2: Being Proactive



Step 3: Thinking Evaluation

Phase 2: The Ascent (Building)



Step 4: Bridging



Step 5: Professional Networking



Step 6: Casing the Joint

Phase 3: The Summit (Action)



Step 7: One-on-One Interviewing



Step 8: Communicating

Establish basecamp through proximity and proactive intent.

PROXIMITY

Position yourself near the decision-makers and the core challenges of your department. You cannot lead from the periphery.

BEING PROACTIVE

Do not wait for assignments. Identify gaps in park operations or community programs and initiate solutions before being asked.



Filter opportunities using the trail-difficulty evaluation system



**Green
(Safe / Go)**

Green (Safe / Go)

High alignment with your current backpack (capital/resources).
Strong potential for career growth.

ACTION: Proceed with confidence.



**Yellow
(Caution /
Prepare)**

Yellow (Caution / Prepare)

Moderate alignment. Requires bridging gaps in experience or waiting for optimal timing.

ACTION: Prepare, gather resources, and hold position.



**Red
(Stop /
Re-evaluate)**

Red (Stop / Re-evaluate)

Poor alignment with goals or significant lack of required capital.
High risk of burnout or stagnation.

ACTION: Halt and redirect energy entirely.

Bridge the gaps between your current coordinates and the next elevation

**Current
Role**

**Target
Elevation**

CERTIFICATIONS



Formalizing your hard skills (e.g., CPR, CPRP, specialized equipment handling) to prove technical competence.

VOLUNTEERING



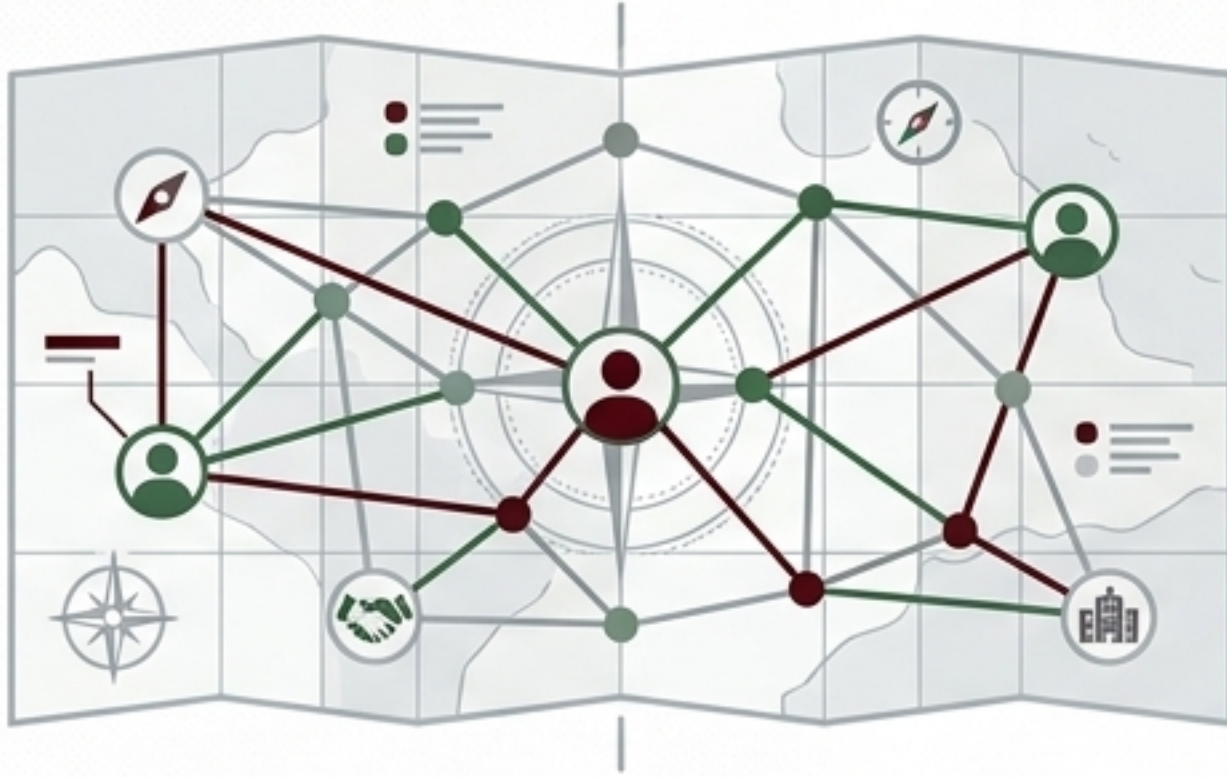
Gaining risk-free experience and expanding your internal/external network in adjacent departments.

ACADEMICS



Continual formal education and pedagogical grounding in kinesiology or recreation management.

Scout the route ahead before committing to the climb.



Professional Networking

Expand your relational topography. Connect actively with peers at TRAPS, seek out veteran mentors, and build bridges with adjacent city departments. A strong web of contacts ensures you never climb blind.



Casing the Joint

Conduct tactical research. Understand a target organization's internal culture, hidden budgetary constraints, and current leadership structure before you ever apply for the position.

Execute the final push through focused one-on-one interviewing.

Demonstrate the Scouting:

Prove you have “cased the joint” by referencing their specific structural challenges and cultural goals.

Face the Evaluation:

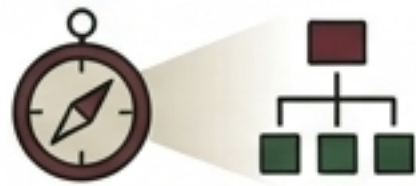
Approach the one-on-one as a two-way assessment. Are their coordinates aligned with yours?

Deploy the Backpack:

Translate your stored capital and bridged experiences into compelling, real-time answers.

Plant your flag by clearly communicating your professional value.

CLARITY



Translate parks and recreation experience into universal leadership traits. Speak the language of executive management.



EVIDENCE



Utilize your specific capital, resource inventory, and newly bridged experiences as undeniable proof of competence.



VISION



Project outward. Clearly articulate how your proactive nature will specifically solve problems in this new role.



The complete lifecycle of active career navigation



Stop waiting for a path to clear. Chart your own course.



The parks and recreation industry belongs to those who actively inventory their capital, critically evaluate their crossroads, and boldly bridge the gaps to move up.