

Captain's Tips

From Susan Tank of Bookin Babes

If you are the one who is putting the team together, one of the most important things you can do is be sure that everyone on the team has the same goal. If half the team is very competitive and has a goal of winning medals or setting new land speed records, and the other half just wants to walk for fun, you'll end up with a very divided team and possibly a lot of acrimony. So choose your teammates carefully!

Have everyone on the team set personal training goals and talk about them together. If everyone on the team is working towards attaining their own personal goals, and even if everyone trains totally separately, when it comes time to compete in the relay AS A TEAM, that training should pay off.

My overall goal for my team has always been to have fun during the relay. That being said, the only way I feel we **CAN** have fun is if we are fully prepared through our training prior to the relay. I want everyone to **know** that they can go their distances and then some, because it is no fun if you have to struggle when you are out there, or if you are risking injury because you didn't do your training up front. So during my team's training "season", I act as coach/cheerleader/facilitator/organizer, regularly checking to see how everyone's training is going. I try to ensure that everyone gets in endurance, strength, speed, and form walks throughout, and heat training when it finally warms up. Anything can happen during the relay and there are a lot of things we have no control over, but we **can** control how prepared we are through our training. As my team's captain, I know that by the time of the relay we are physically and mentally prepared and as a result, can go out, do our best, and most importantly, enjoy the fun and camaraderie of the event.

From Vintage Whine Walkers

1. Have walkers do some timed miles as practice.
2. Stay cool, drink enough water.
3. No new is good new -- no new shoes, new food, new drugs. Test everything before you get in the van.
4. As a captain you have to keep it fun.

Having a group of people who see it as fun, even if they are competitive. It's a TEAM!

I think doing pot lucks, packing the van the night before, agreeing about some of the common food, and having a garage sale to raise funds help build the team.

Don't beat yourself up not meeting your expectations or it won't be fun. I definitely think the "bizarre" things we do help it go smoothly. Part of the fun thing!

Practice is always the most important. Most of us prefer to do it with a partner. Our team is exceptional in always inviting each other to walk. That is how we help each other.

Get plenty of sleep the week before. Cut your toe nails, and don't wear new shoes. Stretch before, and after your "leg". Have more than one pair of shoes for walking and during the time between legs. Eat properly the week before and while on the route: protein is best; not fiber!

Get your team psyched

From Stroke Stompers:

As a captain I don't oversee team training anymore. I have experienced relay walkers on the team and they are all great about making sure that they are fit and ready to walk come relay weekend. The first couple of years we did train a lot more with Judy. I think getting training in proper technique is very important. Our first couple of years of relays we had more training sessions to learn how to walk as well as a lot more group walks to practice what we had learned. I attribute our team's lack of any serious injuries to our early training in walk technique. For any group of walkers just starting out I would highly recommend technique training. Technique training for us is now on a smaller group or individual basis. Some of the team members are dropping in to the group training drop in clinics that Judy offers. Training for last year's relay we were at an all time low for having group walks. It was too little and all the team members requested more this year. Due to scheduling problems we are at about one group walk per month but it seems to help everyone get motivated to do their individual training. Group walks are also a great time to check in with everyone and see how they are feeling about their legs, their fitness level, and any possible injuries I may need to accommodate when assigning legs.

I have a team with great people on it. They all pitch in to take care of all the things that need doing for the relay. We have a couple people who take care of the time keeping and filling out the time sheets. Another two members take care of the first aid kit and medical matters. Another team member takes care of keeping the van organized and neat. So, we have a great team where everyone pitches in to help. This leaves me with general organizing, leg assignments, and the financial aspects. Don't be afraid to ask for help and delegate. It keeps "Captaining" enjoyable when the work load can be shared.

Making sure that leg assignments match the team member's fitness level, natural abilities, and wants is very important. We are lucky enough to have people who like the various types of terrain. We have a couple of hill climbers (Those rare people who go faster up than flat or down). We have long distance and short distance people as well. The team members are also quite flexible and willing to take on extra miles if someone else needs to switch to shorter legs due to injury.

Very important to make sure that at least a few members of the team (include a separate driver if you have one) drive the course together prior to the relay. Plan on who will be driving when and know where the exchanges and parking areas are. It will look different at night so take another drive to do the dark portion at night. All team members should know the route of their own legs. This is more important on the WVR than some other relays since there aren't as many volunteers and the turns may not be clearly marked.

Van to van communication if teams are using two vans is very important. WVR has good cell phone reception so it is not a problem. We used to also carry the 5 mile range walkie talkies on other relays when using two vans. Now we use just one fifteen passenger van for a team of eight so we don't have to worry too much.

For our team, since we have only one van, we decided last year to go to having a designated driver who only drives. This has helped our team members be able to focus on just walking. We give the driver a couple hour break in the middle of the night for napping in the back row.

One thing I think all of our team members will agree with is that we really appreciate our volunteers and our driver. We have a wrap up party usually by the end of summer where we give our volunteers and driver gift cards as well as some recognition for helping support the team. Without them we couldn't do it. We have a few loyal volunteers who we can count on to help us every year. The wrap up party is a good time to go over final relay results, get lost and found items back to their owners, talk about the next year, and see what we could have done better and what we might do in the future.

Food and hydration on the course are key. After five or six years I think most of our team members have finally figured out what they need to eat and when. Last year was our best year as far as everyone having the right amount of energy at the right time. This is an individual thing for most but it really helps to take the time to talk about all the food and fluid issues, to bounce things that work and don't work off your team mates. It helps a lot! We keep extra water and sports drinks always available. We also bring some fun group food that we all like and share. For some reason boiled eggs are a special relay treat-as long as we don't lose the salt.

Keeping the right focus for team goals keeps the relay fun. Our team doesn't do the relay to win it. We all want to be in as good a shape as possible personally and we all support each team member to help them reach whatever goal they have. For some it is making it to the end of a long leg, for another it may be a faster time than last year, for others, just making it through one of those middle of the day hot sun sessions. We focus on the FUN of the relay and being together. It is fun to see what we can accomplish as a team and how well we can support each other. We all know that somewhere around 3:00 in the morning we will all be goofy from lack of sleep and we all wonder what we will be giggling about. Keep it fun.