



Today's discussion is from the
Miscellaneous Category.

After Action Review part 1

How to conduct an effective AAR

An AAR is a professional discussion of an event with the objective to identify successes and failures. It is a tool that leaders, teams, crews and units can use to get maximum benefit from every incident or project. It is essential for wildland firefighters to learn from our mistakes and to capitalize on our successes. It is considered a valuable tool in high-risk professions where the smallest mistakes can lead to disastrous results. ***FYI – an AAR is not a critique and not a forum to assign blame. It's an open, honest and professional discussion for purposes of improvement.***

Once you (the leader/facilitator) have demonstrated that the AAR works and that it will be part of your team's Standard Operating Procedures, the discussion will become more open. Finding out *what* they did is not nearly as important as *why* they did it. Good active listening skills are essential. Do not immediately try to solve or correct the issue, but let it play out. Try to get to the root of the issue. The leader must be a part of the AAR and will have to accept criticism. This is important because the team will be looking for affirmation of the AAR process.

- Have the AAR as soon after an event as possible with all the personnel involved if at all possible.
- The leader's role is to insure there is skilled facilitation of the AAR.
- Make sure everyone participates.
- Pay attention to time.
- Establish clear ground rules: encourage candor and openness, all participants have equal ownership, focus on improving performance, and keep all discussions confidential.
- End on a positive note.

1. What was planned?

Review the intent of the mission
Desired "End State" (what does "Right" look like).

2. What actually happened?

Establish the facts
Pool multiple perspectives to build a shared picture of what happened.

3. Why did it happen?

Analysis of cause and effect
Focus on WHAT not WHO.
Provide progressive refinement for drawing out explanations of what occurred.

4. What are we going to do next time?

Correct Weaknesses
Focus on items you can fix, rather than external forces outside of your control.

References: [The Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program website](#) has multiple additional references on conducting effective AARs, many designed specifically for wildland firefighters and leaders.

Have an idea? Have feedback? Share it.

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