

## RELATIONSHIP AWARENESS® Empowers Young Adults

One hundred AmeriCorps participants were recently introduced to Relationship Awareness theory when they completed the Strength Deployment Inventory® (SDI®) and learned about the motivational values. The young adults, ages 18 to 24, are working in California's local and state conservation corps projects through AmeriCorps — the national service program that sends members to work in community service projects and provides a stipend for living expenses and an

education grant upon completion. AmeriCorps members are high school graduates who are deferring college or taking a year off from school in order to work in projects that address the country's environmental, human service and public safety needs.

### Retreat Results:

- ▼ Participants communicated more effectively. They enjoyed sharing a common "language" that includes Hubs, Blues, Reds, Greens, strengths, rewards, and overdone strengths.
- ▼ Participants began to use their self-awareness to exercise greater control over their actions and make more rewarding choices.
- ▼ Participants demonstrated awareness that no orientation is inherently better than any other... that everyone wants a sense of personal worth... that every orientation can contribute to AmeriCorps' objective: *Getting Things Done.*

Throughout the United States, leadership development and conflict resolution training are integral components of the AmeriCorps experience. In California, the statewide coalition of conservation corps has addressed this mandate by developing two four-day retreats that will be meaningful and rewarding to our participants. A basic premise is that self-awareness and understanding of others are crucial elements of leadership and conflict resolution. Hence it was decided that the SDI would be administered and interpreted during the first session of the first retreat.

As the facilitator, I found the participants to be open and willing learners. It was gratifying to see their expressions and hear their exclamations as the results were discussed and they recognized themselves and others. During the remainder of the retreat, other facilitators joined conservation corps administrators and participants in noting the impact of the SDI and Relationship Awareness. Their observations are summarized in the table on the left.

This experience with AmeriCorps participants has validated my long-held belief that the SDI is especially well suited to young adults, because they can remain engaged long enough to complete the twenty items. As a result, there is a high degree of validity to their responses and their scores.

**A FINAL NOTE:** My session with AmeriCorps participants took place soon after I attended the two-day SDI Qualification workshop conducted by Personal Strengths Publishing. I had administered the SDI many times over the years, and I'd seen its efficacy confirmed time and time again. However, the workshop proved to be a valuable learning experience for me. I find that I am able to plot and interpret scores with greater ease, and I have a greater understanding of the conflict sequences. I heartily recommend the training.

**About the Author, Carol Cooley** *At the time of this publication, Carol Cooley was the Executive Director of the Orange County Conservation Corps and an adjunct faculty member in the Human Services Program at California State University, Fullerton.*