

Decide to Return: A Strategy for Safe Sea Kayaking

Video Script

The video: Decide to Return is the story about Kate and Jack taking an ill-fated kayak trip along the coast. It is the story about how little non-decisions can become decisions. In addition, it depicts the typical accident process.

The following script was transcribed and reconstructed from the actual video.

Opening scene: Small dock along the ocean, coastline, and lastly fading to Jack's bedroom where he is awoken by the phone ringing. Katie narrates the story sitting on the coast with the ocean in the backdrop.

Katie: I'd like to tell you about a kayaking trip I took with my friend Jack. We made a lot of decisions that day; some good, some not so good. It's a day I'll never forget.

Brief cut to Lobsterman

Lobsterman: *Moving traps on his boat.* That gal is lucky to be alive.

Jack: This better be good.

Katie: *Standing next to kayak loaded on the roof-rack of her car.* I got it!

Jack: The boat?

Katie: Yeah, it's beautiful. How about you give me some pointers?

Jack: Right. Look, I'm maybe like a week ahead of you.

NP: That makes you my coach. Can you drag yourself out of bed by ten o'clock?

Scene changes as Jack hangs up the phone. Jack and Kate are now carrying their sea kayaks down to the water and preparing to leave shore.

Katie: Jack this is beautiful.

Jack: Alright!

Katie: Oh my gosh this is awesome.

Katie: Jack started paddling a few weeks ago and now I had a boat too! This cove seemed like the perfect spot to start our adventure.

Jack begins putting on his wetsuit.

Katie: You don't really think we're going to need that do you? I mean, we're just going to be paddling along the shore, right? Besides, uh, I forgot mine.

Jack: It won't take long to run back and get it. I'll get the rest of the stuff ready.

Katie: The days half over already. Besides, I'm not planning on going swimming.

Jack: Okie-dokey

Flash to a more ideal scenario with Kate leaving the house with her wetsuit in hand and zipping it up next to the ocean.

Katie: Patience isn't my strong suit. I knew the water was cold but it was slick-calm as they say around here. And besides, the plan was to hug the shore. So that's how our adventure began. Jack dressed for the water, which by the way was only 50 degrees. I dressed for the air. It was just one of a whole chain of decisions we'd made that day and though we didn't realize it at the time we'd also made some, um, well, non-decisions. You know, the stuff we'd never even thought about like: what do we know about the local waters? We hadn't brought a chart, checked the weather forecast, or even told anybody where we were going or when we'd return. All these things had escaped the scrutiny of our razor-sharp minds.

Flash to scenes of Jack and Kate packing maps, rescue equipment, a compass, radio, and other devices that may have been useful on their excursion.

Radio: Northwest winds at 15knots.

Lobsterman is setting traps. Scene fades again to Jack and Kate pushing their boats into the water to begin their day without any of the safety gear shown in the flash. The pair are shown paddling and exploring along the coast.

Katie: We paddled down the coast in clear, calm weather and as the hours passed my confidence grew. Jack showed me some of the techniques he'd learned. The scenery was incredible. Life was good.

Jack: Hey look at that cove over there!

Katie: Hey that looks cool!

Jack: Wanna check it out?

Katie: Yeah.

The pair are paused, resting as they float in the water. They are breathing heavily having obviously exerted themselves.

Jack: Woah, Katie. Guess what time it is?

Katie: No idea. 1 o'clock?

Jack: Try 3:30. Maybe we ought to get heading back?

Katie: I'm just starting to get the hang of this. How about we head out to that island on the way back?

Kate points at a distant island that is just barely visible from their cove.

Jack: I don't know, it looks kind of far.

Katie: It's a beautiful day there's barely any wind. Come on, it'll be a piece of cake.

Kate and Jack begin paddling toward the island, away from the shoreline. Jack pulls out an energy bar and begins to eat before he paddles to catch up with Kate.

Jack: Piece of cake. That reminds me. Okie-dokely

Katie: Perhaps the explorer in me was feeling the tug of the unknown, but pointing our bows at that tiny off-shore island didn't seem like a big deal. It looked like only a short paddle and it was more or less on the way back. I guess we didn't really think about it.

Flash to a scenario where Kate and Jack are able to listen to the weather forecast and see the distance of the island. A weather report from the radio plays in the background.

Radio: Southwest winds 10-15 knots.

Kate and Jack are pictured again on their original course as they paddle visibly further from shore towards the distant island.

Katie: As we paddled away from shore I noticed a current nudging the lobster floats. The farther out we got the stronger it seemed.

Jack: How are you doing Katie?

Katie: I'm good. Are we there yet?

Jack: This currents really moving. We're going to have to hurry if we're going to make it to that island.

Katie: Alright.

Jack: Can you do it?

Katie: Yeah.

Jack: Let's go!

Katie: The island wasn't looking any closer when in a matter of a few minutes fog rolled in. It was getting hard to see the island and we could barely see where we'd been. We should have turned around then.

Time-elapse filming shows the quick progression of fog as it rolls in and obscures the shore, island, and makes vision difficult.

Katie: Jack I think it's a little more to the left.

Jack: Look at the current, it's pushing us to the right. We need to adjust. Wait, do you hear that?

Katie: It's just a boat.

Jack: Yeah but it's a boat that's getting closer.

Katie: He's not going to be able to see us.

Jack: Hey!

Katie: Hey!

Jack: Don't hit us!

Katie: We're over here!

Jack: Hey! Wow, that was close.

Flash to a scenario in which Jack was able to sound a horn, warning oncoming ships of their presence.

Katie: Without a horn or some kind of radar reflector we were stealth kayaks in the fog. Completely undetectable. What's more, it never occurred to us to bring a GPS or even a compass. We didn't have the tools to find our way

Scene changes to the lobsterman, talking into the radio on his boat.

Radio on ship: Hey Archie, how's that engine of yours working today?

Lobsterman: Yeah the alternators still acting up I gotta go have a look at it. I hate to do it on a day like this.

Radio: Southwest is building over here.

Lobsterman: Yeah it's breezing up over here, it's blowing a good 25.

Scene changes. Boat moves off into the distance and Kate and Jack are pictured again without the fog. The island appears no closer.

Katie: As quickly as the fog rolled in, it was gone. Blown away on the afternoon breeze. We'd been paddling blind for over an hour, but now that we could see the island it didn't look much closer.

Katie: Jack, we've got to be about halfway there.

Jack: Yeah, maybe but the winds really picking up.

Katie: Truth be told, I was running out of steam. Jack had been snacking all day long and I hadn't eaten a thing. It was turning into a long, hard paddle. I was beginning to wonder if we had bitten off more than we could chew.

The water appears to increase in turbulence and Kate is visibly exhausted.

Katie: Jack, I really don't like this.

Jack: Maybe we can make it to those rocks over there.

Jack motions towards a small outcropping of rocks just a short paddle away.

Katie: Go ahead, I'm right behind you.

Jack increases speed and paddles forward. There is a significant amount of distance between him and Kate.

Jack: Ok.

Katie: It was just a bare little rock off the end of the island, but it was the only thing between us and the ocean. We were being swept out to sea by the tide. We were both a little scared. Jack hit the accelerator but I was out of gas. I got really far behind. When Jack turned to look for me he caught a wave wrong. That's when things really fell apart.

Katie: Jack!

Jack turns, loses his balance on a wave and capsizes. The scene becomes black and white as Kate races to his aid, loses her balance, and capsizes as well.

Katie: I saw Jack flip and felt a rush of adrenaline as I paddled hard towards him. I'm still not sure what happened. One minute I was fine and the next I was upside down in that icy water fighting to hold my breath. Against the current Jack couldn't pull his boat into the rocks so he just swam for it. His wetsuit made a big difference. In the frigid water he still had enough strength to make it to dry land and that same current was quickly sweeping me away.

Katie: I'm in the water!

Katie: No way I'd ever have made it to shore.

Katie: I can't get back into my boat! Jack! Jack!

Katie: We'd really gotten ourselves in a jam. Jack couldn't help me, I couldn't help myself much less Jack. There wasn't another boat in sight, it would be dark in a couple hours and I was floating towards Spain in a frigid sea. Kind of a one person Titanic. If only we'd known about these tides and checked the forecast. If only I'd practiced some of those self-rescue techniques I'd learned about. If only we'd stayed closer together so we could have helped each other. If only. The funny thing, I wasn't even struggling. I now know I was in the initial stages of a condition called hypothermia. Without a wetsuit or dry suit to help insulate me from the cold water my body was losing heat faster than it could produce it. My cold muscles lost any coordination and strength they might have retained after a long day of paddling with almost nothing to eat or drink. My cooling brain was sluggish at best. My lifejacket was the only thing keeping me afloat. Even so every minute in that chilly water was bringing me closer to death. Eventually I'd lose consciousness and the end would be certain.

Flash back to a scenario where Jack and Kate stay together, aid each other in self-rescue and have the proper gear to save themselves.

Looking back I could see we'd set ourselves up for this. Eager novices we'd paddled away without the skills or equipment we needed. That, and some sketchy decisions we'd made during the day, we'd made ourselves really vulnerable! Then all it took was a minor mishap like a capsize and we were sliding down that slippery slope that ends in tragedy. We could no longer help ourselves and if it hadn't been for a lobster man on a route he hardly uses...well...As you can see I really shouldn't be here. I got a miracle, I'm not counting on another. Next time, I'm counting on a better plan. For sure we'll be sea kayaking again but the next paddling adventure will better suited the skills, paddling equipment and experience that

we have. And, I'll think hard about those little decisions along the way to make sure we're not setting ourselves up for a really bad day.

The lobsterman and his boat spot Jack signaling from the rock and rescue him before beginning to search for Kate. The scene closes with Jack spotting Kate and reaching down into the water to save her.

Lobsterman: Gotta keep this old engine running you know. Gotta make a dollar. It's the only reason I went that way.