

## Adventure Experience at Taboada Enriches Local Students

Jóvenes Adelante knows that in order for its graduates to succeed in today's job market, they will need to outshine the competition in demonstrated leadership, communication and team abilities – even now, while they are still in university. This year, through the generosity of Hotel Hacienda Taboada and the Santa Fe Learning Center, Jóvenes Adelante scholarship recipients were offered a concrete way to hone these important skills.

For Ron Smith, the owner/manager of Santa Fe Learning, resilience, confidence, problem-solving and innovation are not just catch phrases but real skills that can be learned and improved. As a seasoned experiential learning expert and advocate, Ron offers carefully designed, individually tailored programs at a challenge course based at Taboada. He uses a range of action learning techniques — including high climbing events and portable “low” activities — to accelerate understanding in areas such as leadership, teamwork, communication, and decision-making.



The students embraced the opportunity with a natural mixture of enthusiasm and trepidation. Throughout the day, they worked in teams, practicing problem-solving and communication skills while learning to build trust and to push through their natural boundaries. Structured debriefing sessions helped them to process each activity, to analyze what had worked (and not worked!) and relate it to school, home and the workplace. The students were able to articulate their learning and personal growth in a safe and constructive environment.

At the end of the day, the students bubbled with excitement and praise for the course. “I had a great fear of heights and never imagined myself getting to the top of the pole much less daring to jump, but the support of the facilitators and the students empowered me to leave my comfort zone and I achieved it!” reported University of Guanajuato student Juana González.

The students were all inspired by the program's focus on goal-setting, team-work and persistence. Cinthia de la Vega, who studies Communication at Universidad de León, recalled, “When I was climbing, I was leaning towards giving up because it was physically strenuous. My colleagues could have given up on me but they didn't,

because we had to reach the summit together. Which we did! This created very strong friendship bonds.” Another young woman, University of Guanajuato nursing student Shalma Muñoz, reflected: “This workshop made me see that -- although the obstacles are very big -- if you propose your goal, and leave your fears and your negativity, you can achieve what you propose.”

Even as a very experienced youth activities facilitator, Ron Smith was impressed with the students’ performance, saying “These students are Mexico's future leaders. For me they are the antidote to the pessimism that threatens our ability to move ahead with our lives. I was uplifted and moved by their determination, honesty and commitment to grow and work together.”

JA is very grateful for the generosity of Hotel Hacienda Taboada and the Santa Fe Learning Center for making this event possible.



