



Setting The Course

By Vern Swedin ■ Pace

Can we lead without a commitment to a clear direction? We probably can, but where would we end up going?

I'd like to share with you my 2003 vacation.

Two of my friends and I set off to Buena Vista Colorado to take part in a guide certification training course for level three and four whitewater rafting. There we came to develop a sense that the way we look at things and the way they really are can be two very distinct things. Along the turmoil of the Arkansas River we experienced several new viewpoints of direction and the responses needed to combat the challenges of the river, with all of its mighty obstacles.

A few variations of view:

5000-foot view—from a distance, this wicked wonder of water is merely just a thought, a feeling, something to observe. This calmness and dependence on our normally perceptive senses can be very deceiving. My friends and I started the five-day guide certification training on a Monday and by day four we would end up on some of the most extreme water in Colorado, the "Numbers". The schedule would include getting to know the gear, understanding river current, rescue training, swimming techniques and practicing boat or maneuvers on mostly level two and three rapids.

We set out to run the "Numbers" (a treacherous two-mile stretch of non-stop class four rapids) the last day of the guide trip and as we scaled the mountainous road upward, you could sense the anxiety of our trainers. As we began to ask questions, our guides shared with



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us their fear of the rapids and a very interesting point was made.

No two days on the river are the same. The water volume changes from day to day and as a result, the river is very different. The nuances of each rapid along the way have changing attributes each day and that changes the way you "run it" or position yourself. On one trip, you may have to go 'head-on' directly into the rapid and paddle with every ounce of human effort to escape it. While the next trip, with just moderately different water levels can uncover new hazards, this changes everything about the way you run it. Every run becomes a new adventure.

Much like our environment in the

business world, our "water volume" can create an ever-changing landscape for us to navigate through, making 'run' a new adventure. We need to consistently monitor the water volume of our teams, our partners, and our customers. Our clear goal in positioning ourselves is to make it through without harm.

Our white-water trainers shared with us that "when we fall out of the boat, paddle as hard as you can to the shoreline. If you don't make it to shore, we'll pick your body out of the water miles downstream." I don't know about you, but comments like that change the way I position myself to the event and help me focus on what is really important!

100-foot view—you may need to



change your direction before it's too late.

Our trainers said it best; "Hesitation is devastation." As we stumbled along bumping and spinning along the river much like a toddler judging their first steps in their brand new feet, our instructors talked us through the river one hundred feet at a time. Encouraged us to maneuver rather than steer it like a car. We were understanding the technique, not alone mind you, but with a trained expert. Imagine for a moment, your driving along the highway at 60 mph and you had no idea of how to react to signal lights, merging traffic or even knowing the safe distance required in traffic. Welcome to my world! These were the dangers of the river that my friends and I experienced.

What is the value of leadership? Without a guide (an experienced leader), we could have easily wrecked the boat, never made it to the landing destination at the end of the canyon or possibly even have made fatal mistakes. Just as we need leadership and training situations like these, we also can benefit from experts willing to mentor us in our business and personal lives. A good mentor can help to keep us from making poor, single-minded decisions. More importantly, a good mentor or coach can help you unlock the potential for achievement that is inside of you.

If you are adventurous and find yourself risking and stretching your boundaries, look for a guide that can educate

you on your own course.

5-foot view—watching the rapids from the shore line or from the calmness of an "Eddie" (the calm part of water a few feet behind or to the side of rocks or other objects in moving water) is very different from the dangerous, almost unstoppable force of the river flowing several hundred feet of cubic volume per second. From five feet you do not have time to maneuver, you only have time to call out the high side and brace for impact.

It is what we do from 5000 feet and one hundred feet that either raises or lowers the level of danger. If we are to try to make our plans and manage our course in five-foot increments, much like a riverboat, we

won't have customers for very long. We'll either kill them or they'll just get out. It's likely that we won't survive the trip unscathed.

We may often view new things as very little and non-threatening. We need to make sure that what we see is actual, discerning if it is just a single viewpoint, a pattern or a very concrete truth. Good, experienced counsel, from 'guides' who have the experience and expertise can help us survive and flourish—whether we are on the river or in our office. A great 'guide' can offer a different perspective for the unforeseen obstacles that may exist, help us better understand the view from both 5000 feet and one hundred feet ahead.

"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed." — Ancient Wisdom.

Reach out to new opportunities with

good personnel and business counsel. By planning and strategizing ahead of the rapids with good counsel, you will see things differently. I guarantee it! You will be preparing to be an excellent guide in the future.

Step back, look at your personal river. Is it calm? Do you need a guide to get through it? Do you really know where all the 'Eddies' are? Are you going the right direction? Do you know what to do when trouble hits?

Can we lead without a commitment to a clear direction? You are the guide on your river. You either choose to run your river so others would like to join you or you run it alone.

The choice is yours. God bless and Guide on! ■

About the Author

Vern Swedin is Director of Business

Development at Pace. His experience as the Co-founder and Chief Visionary Officer of the revolutionary UR-ON organization and development/creation of other technology businesses has shaped his ability to help organizations find new and creative ways to win. With an extensive business and entrepreneurial background, Mr. Swedin focuses on helping businesses find ways to grow by improving their organizational effectiveness by providing consulting, training, mentoring, and coaching assistance to Pace Business Partners serious about growing personally and professionally. The proprietary information in his workshops and training sessions is based on real-life experience in the world of technology. The author welcomes questions or comments via email at vern@uron.cc.



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