

Navigating the Rapids

by Diane MacWilliams, President and CEO

Most of the time we are planning ahead and staying in our comfort zone – both in business and in our personal lives. It's a rare occasion where we have an entire day to focus on what is happening as every moment reveals something unexpected. I recently spent a day like that while participating in a rafting trip down the Arkansas River in Colorado. Along with my husband and three friends we signed up for a full day of rafting. I have rafted three or four times in my life, and the others had either never rafted or had gone once or twice. The snow was still atop the surrounding mountains but the weather was warming - making the river higher and faster than usual. We were attired in full wetsuits, life jackets, slickers and helmets. The water temperature was 45 degrees. About 10 rafts were being launched and we spent 20 minutes prior going over safety procedures. The guide giving the talk assured everyone they were fully prepared to deal with passengers going overboard and gave very specific instruction on what to do if you wound up in the water. He emphasized several times that everyone should keep a cool head and not to panic.

Our raft was about the 6th one in the water. My husband and our friend, Paul, took the front two positions as the paddling leaders. Our guide yelled instructions as he took the rear position using his paddle to guide us. We quickly hit the rapids. We were not on the raft five minutes when the guide yelled to stop paddling. I looked over next to me and saw my two lady friends were no longer aboard. I almost couldn't believe my eyes. We had hit a boulder and they had both bounced right over the side. Our guide lost it and started cursing and screaming at us. While we scrambled to pull both ladies back aboard we swirled and hit another rock and Paul was ejected over the front. Yes, three of our party hit the water in less than five minutes. Now our guide was beside himself. Paul got picked up by another raft and we were commanded to start paddling again. As soon as the water calmed down a bit, our guide made me take the now vacant front position. We still had a full day of

rafting ahead. It was exhilarating and frightening - all of my senses were going into hyper alert. I must have been hit in the face with cold water 30 or 40 times. We went over 8-foot drops, where I looked straight down into another set of swirling rapids. The unexpected was around every bend.



Navigating the Rapids (continued)

Every once in a while the waters would calm down and just flow along. Our guide used those opportunities to recount our first five minutes and tell us what losers we were. He had never had anyone go over the side before. As the day wore on I started thinking a lot about process, working together as a team and customer service. I just really wanted to have fun and enjoy something I seldom do – rafting. And that would have happened if our guide had not lost his cool. He was not a good example of someone who knows how to give his customer an excellent experience.



Later I thought more about this and equated this to the “creative journey” our customers come to Quicksilver to experience. Most projects are unique in combining message driven content and a unique creative approach. We start out with an agreed to approach and budget. The team is always inclusive of Quicksilver and the client working together. We usually set the pace, provide timelines and create an approval process. Often there are surprises when another contributor gets involved, new content is discovered or needed, or a time frame is altered. Because it is a journey there are unexpected bumps along the way. You can count on the Quicksilver team to help you navigate all of this with positive communication and the ability to adapt to feedback and customer needs. We have done this daily for more than 33 years. And when we reach our final destination we want our clients to feel good about the experience. That is why they keep coming back. Ok a few have bounced over the side, but we usually get them back on board with a smile and better understanding for the next leg of the journey.

My trip down the Arkansas River took me far, far away from my daily comfort zone. I loved it for that reason. Yet the overall experience could have been better if our guide had kept a cool head and not spent nearly as much time ridiculing his passengers. He would have garnered our respect and we would have easily learned from our first five minutes. The rest of the trip would have just been an awesome journey in one of nature’s most amazing creations.

We know most of you have not created a video, a website, or staged and produced and corporate meeting – that this is unfamiliar territory for you. Creative is probably not in your comfort zone. Yet, in the end, you should love it. When you experience working with Quicksilver we will always do our best to make it an awesome journey.

Diane MacWilliams is the president and founder of Quicksilver Associates, celebrating its 33rd anniversary on June 6, 2009. Diane has been active in WBDC, serving on the board that certifies businesses as woman owned.