

Signs of the Time

A recent overseas trip brought home a key message that I wish to share with you this month. It starts innocently enough with a client wanting to take me out for a ride on his Jet Ski. Always one who enjoys some adventure, I gladly accepted the offer, hopped on the back, and away we went. The scenic tour soon found us in an area of channels and condominiums. My host certainly knew the area as he slowed right down, even before we came across the sign “Go Slow! Don’t leave any wake”. I think I saw another sign that posted a speed at less than 5 miles per hour.

On a Jet Ski, pattering through a channel at such a slow speed may be safe and appropriate for the conditions, but it was by no means what I had envisioned when I “agreed” to go for the ride. Nonetheless we did our tour of the area, never breaking the speed limit.

My host must have sensed my “boredom” to a degree, but being the sort who enjoys an adventure himself, we soon found ourselves leaving the safety of the channels, and heading out towards the bay. As we picked up some speed, I recall thinking, “This is more like what I expected!” Those thoughts quickly dissipated as the bay soon expanded into the wide ocean! We were actually going to head out there?? Yikes!

As my luck would have it, we picked the windiest day of my trip to head out on the Jet Ski. Waves that may normally be 4 to 5 feet in height (fun for a Jet Ski) were twice as much, and appeared to rise even higher the further we headed out. Now for some of you who boat, or spend a lot of time on the ocean, 8 –10 foot waves are no big deal, but for me, a person who has a mild fear of the ocean – I was caught in an undertow, along with my wife once while on vacation – just the thought of being out there on a Jet Ski was probably something that I would not have signed up for.

Nonetheless, what could I do? I am the passenger, and my client was the driver. Luckily I sensed he knew what he was doing, but as the waves kept coming at us, and as we kept going AWAY from the shoreline, I had visions that this could be my last consulting trip. But I was also determined that this adventure would be just that – an adventure, and one that I would white-knuckle my way through. So I just became determined to hang on, and ride it out.

Finally, the client decided that perhaps the waves were too high – even for him, so he decided to turn the machine around (not an easy feat in high waves), and head back. Just then, a huge roller of a wave descended on us, so he made a sharp tack to the left. The bad news was that I was not expecting it, so while he and the machine went left, I went right. All of me, except for one arm that refused to let go – anything to avoid a dunk into the ocean with those rollers. He must have heard me yell, trying to get back onto the machine. Luckily (for me) I managed to completely get back on board, and promptly kidded the driver that he would have to try harder than that to get me off!

We managed to get back to the harbor, and even sped at break-neck speed down the main channel. To me that last bit of the ride was so tame, compared to our 10-15 minutes out on the ocean.

Great story Ed, but so what! You nearly fell off a Jet Ski while out on the ocean. It happens. Move on. Ah, the key point out of all of this is the comparison of the two extremes – the Go Slow, don’t cause a wake, and the thrill of an ocean experience.

I knew at the time that I would remember that ride for a long time. I knew that while I would experience a lot more on the trip, meet lots of great people, eat good food, and have lots of laughs, the Jet Ski experience would be the most memorable.

What kind of experiences are you offering your clientele? Do they leave your Park yelling out “WOW, that was incredible?” or do they experience what we initially did – a safe putter through the channel. Are you offering the same old? What’s new for 2006 that is revolutionary for you, for your guests? Will they look back at the end of the year and put their visit to your Park on their highlight package?

Customers today are looking for experiences. Sure they want the standard clean washrooms, good service, decent site, and value for their money. But that’s a given. Will they be disappointed if that’s all they get? Some will accept it and move on. But if you want them to come back, and in the meantime tell everyone else they know, give them a memorable, unique experience. How you put the ingredients together to form the WOW, is up to you. But don’t stop at one. Make it your mission to ensure 2006 is indeed the best it ever has been at your Park.

Best wishes for a successful year,