

Lessons from blisters, balance and heading backwards

by Connie Brubaker

Having been raised on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi, many of my favorite memories feature



Connie's Comments

water: picnics on the beach, long walks along the shore (first holding my parents' hands, and later a boyfriend's), sailing, catching crabs off the pier, beach volleyball and evening marshmallow roasts. The seashore is always my first vacation choice for recreation and relaxation.

Last April I decided to take up sculling as a way to reconnect with the water and to release stress. I was also delighted to learn that rowing gives the entire body a full workout while burning twice the calories of jogging.

As I watch scullers, I am amazed by the grace and ease of the boat as it glides through the water. But like so much in life and business, that appearance is a little deceiving.

Sculling is mechanically pretty simple. Facing the stern, you lean your body forward, keeping your knees bent and your arms straight. Then with the leg muscles you push the oars toward the bow. Only when your legs are straight do you use your upper body to pull the oars. The blades sweep the air and then dip into and through the water, making only the smallest of splashes while propelling the boat forward.

Balance, attention to detail and constant repetition are the keys to sculling success. Do even one of the small



things wrong and you can end up real wet real fast. And you have only yourself to blame for your mistakes.

Since my first outing, I've traveled a bit further each time as I explore Town Lake. Over the past five months, the blisters on my hands gradually turned to calluses. My hamstrings stopped aching and the motion became natural and smooth. The repetition was having an effect on me, as well.

The thing that amazes me most about sculling is that it's essentially done backwards. You face the stern, not the bow. You have to keep glancing over your shoulder to check navigation and traffic. The beauty of the landscape and the warm sunshine can be very soothing. But I know that I have to stay aware or I could hit the bank, collide

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Tools for winning customer trust

Here's a sobering statistic: in 1960, 55% of Americans agreed that "most people can be trusted." By 2000, only 34% felt that way.

Blame it on political scandals, corporate fraud or crime. The bottom line for your business is that most of your prospective customers don't trust you — until you earn that trust, that is.

While this is a very real challenge for today's businesses, it's also a tremendous opportunity for savvy companies. With so much mistrust and so few companies who know how to build trust, businesses who do have a considerable advantage over their competition.

A surprising amount of trust can be built within the first few *seconds* of meeting someone. What's your body language like? Is it open and friendly, or are you unintentionally making it seem as though you're hiding something?

If you have actual products, show, don't tell — or better yet, let them *do*. They'll be impressed that you trust your product enough to let it speak for itself.

To build trust, show some. It's a well-recognized tendency in humans to respond to positive acts with a similar act. This "law of reciprocity" can be a powerful sales and customer service tool.



"Our customers have told us that everything we're doing is wrong. Obviously, we need some new customers."

In this issue of SOLUTIONS:

- Sculling, business and life
- Corporate team building through sculling
- Earning customer trust

Sculling as team building

Rowing is the widely recognized as the ultimate team sport. A boat's success depends entirely on its individual oars working in unison. Texas Rowing Center has a corporate program that provides a fun and unique team-building experience.

The program begins with simple dock exercises that teach the group the basic rowing stroke. Then the focus shifts to teamwork — the group is divided into team boats. Coaches put the team boats through a series of drills, eventually creating cohesive rowing crews.

Visit www.texasrowingcenter.com for more information.

NEED A SPEAKER? *Connie Brubaker is a certified Integrity Systems® business consultant and professional speaker who focuses on sales, customer service and leadership. Her speeches include Leadership Matters: Motivating Your Employees to Success; The Emotional Side of Selling: Discovering What's Holding You Back; The Magnolia: a Southern Woman Shares Her Struggles and Triumphs; and Turn Storytelling into Storyselling: Using Stories to Make a Connection.*

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Often people attempt to live their lives backwards; they try to have more things, or more money, in order to do more of what they want, so they will be happier."

The way it actually works is the reverse. You must first be who you really are, then do what you need to do, in order to have what you want."

— Margaret Young

Life and business lessons from sculling

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with another boat or slam into a bridge pillar.

There are any number of life — and business — lessons I can draw from my sculling experience. One is the importance of setting aside all the distractions of our environment to focus on the task at hand. Another is the necessity for balance, whether it's physical, emotional or fiscal. Properly balanced, we can move forward. If we're off-kilter, even a little, it can have dramatic negative consequences. And repetition

is important. The more we do a task, the more instinctive it becomes — freeing us to be aware of the big picture.

One final note: I recently rowed the 10-mile round trip to Longhorn Dam — over 1600 strokes — in less than 2 hours. My next goal is to row from one end of Town Lake to the other. So I'm preparing for the challenge — building endurance, waiting for the right climate, improving my skills, turning those blisters into calluses and enjoying the small triumphs along the journey.