

### **The Magic of Teamwork**

This summer my family and friends went white water rafting on the Kennebec River in Maine. As we drove up to the long, winding dirt road to the launching docks, my heart pumped with excitement and anticipation. I both feared and longed for the thrill of riding the rapids. As we took our ten minute safety lesson, it became clear that I was getting what I paid for – an adventure! What I did not count on was how much, and how quickly, I would learn about the importance of team work.

After descending a very steep hillside, we put the raft in the water and jumped in. Within minutes our guide instructed us on some key commands and we were off. At first the seven of us did not work well together. Under the calm leadership of our guide, we practiced the commands just in time for the first rapid. We managed to keep the boat upright and paddled towards the calm water. We all yelled with a sense of accomplishment. We did it. A few more rapids... a few more commands... a few more shouts from the crew. Then we approached "Magic", a level 5 rapid (the highest rating) that gets its name from people getting magically lost once they descend into it. Our leader gave us our commands a few seconds before the decent. Then without words all members of the crew paddled together to transport our vessel through the dangerous waters. With a good leader, a newly skilled crew, effective communication and trust, we did not "magically" disappear. Instead we made it down the river safely and by the time we arrived at the river bank, we were truly a team.

Many entrepreneurs are independent by nature. We are self starters who take risks and make ideas into businesses, products or services. Those of us in small business often work alone. Many complain that having a partner or being on a team is not as good as working independently. At times, I have thought this way as well. But with my recent whitewater rafting trip, I realized that alone I would not have made it down the river in one piece! I needed the whole crew to safely navigate the water. Besides it was more fun having a shared experience than if I had done it alone. So I encourage all my readers to look at those entrepreneurs who are most successful. What you will see is someone who is highly motivated and a good team player.

Remember...

#### **Every raft has a guide**

Teams need leadership. While collaboration is a key component in team work, it helps to have someone steering the ship. Under the leadership of our friendly

guide, we worked together. Without someone to oversee our journey, the boat would have capsized and we would have individually road the rapids. Now that would have been an adventure!

### **The guide needs the crew**

A cornerstone of team building is to appreciate that we all have intrinsic value we bring to the team. Our guide quickly assessed our skill set and put the strongest paddlers in the front and the supportive paddlers behind. Without the crew, his journey would have been long and exhausting. With us, we moved smoothly, well most of the time, through the turbulent water. In addition to our physical attributes each of us brought our unique personalities to the experience. Some of us were cheerleaders, some were safety conscious and some were comedians. Together we were a team.

### **Effective communication steers the raft down the river**

At the beginning of the journey we learned four simply commands – paddle right, paddle left, paddle forward and my personal favorite – hold on. This is the essence of effective communication. We all knew what to do when a certain instruction was given and we acted upon it. Imagine if some of us heard the command, some of us did not and some us just did our own thing. The raft would have been tossed and turned down the swirling waters without a clear path. Effective communication steered the raft down the river.

### **Trust keeps the boat afloat**

Nothing instills trust like a shared fear of falling into rapids! I realized when the journey was over that I trusted each member of the crew and the guide to do their job. I did not second guess it or try to control it. I just trusted that if I did my part, they would do their part. And as I drove away from Maine and this wonderful experience, I realized the true magic of team work.