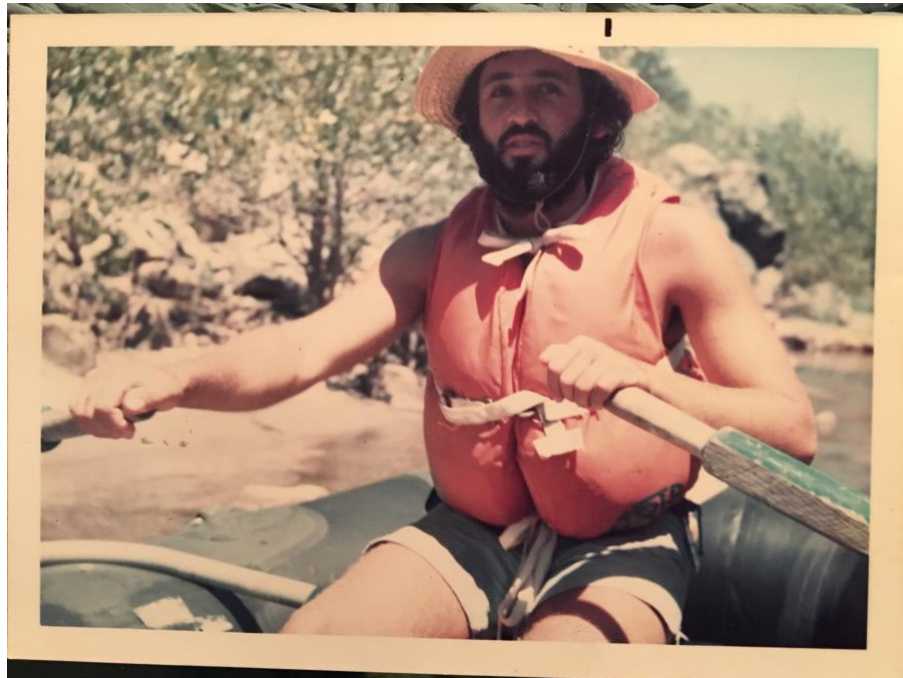


Leadership Skills I Learned as a River Guide

LARRY JACOBSON

It all started on the Stanislaus River. It's where I first began guiding rafts down whitewater rivers and it's where I first began to learn how to make my own journey through life a happy and rewarding one. It's also where I first began learning about being a leader.



This past weekend, I attended the annual river guides' reunion on the American River. This event began in 1974 with a small group of river guides living in a commune on the Stanislaus River (yes I lived in that commune), and continues to bring the original group together year after year. Surveying the group of nearly 100 attendees, I spoke with a wide variety of people about their chosen (or not) life direction including career, family, goals, objectives, and dreams. There are doctors, lawyers, businesspeople, life coaches, musicians, artists, politicians, and even authors; a diverse group of people is represented each year.

However, there are also marked similarities among the people in this group. They all possess leadership skills that may not normally come to mind in a typical discussion about leadership.

The river teaches us many skills and traits that are applicable to our daily lives and a flowing river is perhaps the grandest metaphor of all about life. These are just a few of the lessons I learned from spending so many years on the river.

1. Be kind, caring, and don't feel you are better than anybody else. I noticed that my fellow river guides do not have an air of superiority about them. This was learned from working together as team leaders carrying passengers safely through dangerous situations. Leaders know they are not superior to others; they are simply in the leadership position.

2. Go with the flow. You can't paddle upstream, but as river guides we learned to work with the current and use it to our advantage to get where we wanted to go. Leaders know how to look for alternate routes when the way is blocked.

3. Appreciate and work with what you have. Traveling down a river teaches you to plan well and carry the food and equipment you need for the journey. A river trip also teaches you to care for and appreciate those things. Leaders work with what they have while continually striving for more.

As the river continues to flow through my veins, I shall always appreciate its lessons. As you make your way down your own river of life, I hope your journey is filled with the good teachings from the river.

With love, laughter, and passion,

Larry Jacobson (aka Frito)

