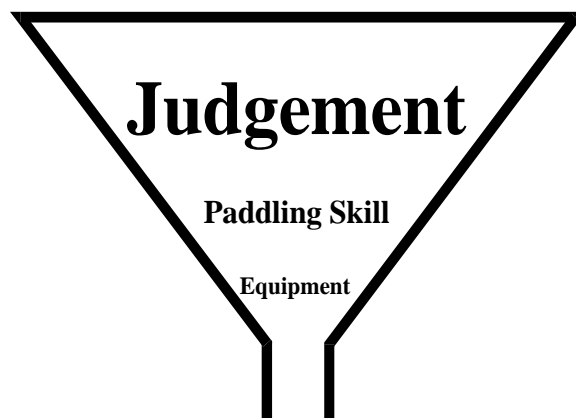


Paddling with Wisdom

“Oh Summer paddling, happens so fast.....Oh Summer paddling, gives me a wet @\$\$ (rump)...” Just like the song from the classic movie “Grease” people suddenly find themselves getting the itch or back into dipping their blades. With paddling sports offering an excellent opportunity for you to explore the water, then woods; folks are flocking in increasing droves. The places are abound and given you are playing in their world, wildlife has no choice but to interact. I have taught several now in the ways of the paddle and I recollect a query from one student after a wet exit practice from a Kayak comment “This paddling thing is pretty good stuff, is there any way you can do so and not get wet?” I did have to collect myself a bit and returned with – “I assume only one thing when I do a water activity; I am getting, in some way shape or form, wet!” In fact, your biggest trick in the Maritime Provinces (key word – maritime) is staying wet and warm. I did applaud the individual for growing the most important tool you need in your tool box though – their brain. By taking a course this individual acquired a solid perspective on rescue, personal skill ability and the reality checks on some of the actual risks taken when out on the water.

Exploring safely involves more wisdom than equipment. The common trend is to go acquire the necessary gear, go play to figure it out (skills) and the last thing deliberately thought about is judgment. But 95% of the time good judgment should mitigate risks from happening in the first place. They have lots of tools, but a limited toolbox is one quote that has stuck with me. It is not uncommon to have a participant reflect after a course on the number of times they unknowingly could have easily created there demise. What are some of the perceived vs. actual risks...?

A PADDLER'S SAFETY FUNNEL



Down the drain.....

Water, the very medium we are enjoying, is your largest foe. You lose heat 25 times faster wet than dry. Get immersed and you could increase your thermal output into the Atlantic to 200 times, especially since you are likely moving to keep your head up! Some of the basic premises of preparing for the worse, but hoping for the best get discounted. Folks prepare and dress for the air and not the water. If you end up in the drink from a whoopsy-daisy you are now suddenly surrounded by a much cooler environment than you once were. In fact if you hit 10 °C water or lower you will experience a cold water gasp that will have you hyperventilating within 30

seconds. It will only subside if you deliberately attempt to do so within three minutes. This combined with the sudden vasoconstriction of your vessels, for some, create cardiac failure. The recent loss of a maritime paddler in Germany gives evidence of this and Coast Guard has numerous documented cases to reflect upon. As your muscles get constricted you become less capable to perform basic tasks within 10 – 15 minutes, like hanging onto the craft you just fell out of. You will not directly die from hypothermia in 5 ° C water for upwards to half an hour. Most, without thermal protection and a lifejacket, die well before of a lack of respiratory function = big words for drowning. That's correct, your lifeguard level swimming skills matter very little now. If that doesn't motivate you to effectively connect your buoy (lifejacket) around your torso, have a change of clothes, be able to rescue quickly and have more than water bottles between your legs then we need to only add in a sea state, surf, rocks, eventual darkness and a sudden NS fog bank that just surrounded you. Yes it can still happen in a lake.... Case after case, lack of wearing buoyancy and cold water has been the paddler's demise.

Gaining some wisdom on clothing, wind, water temp, quick rescue and what can work for you or not personally can be attained in a safe controlled environment by training. As you further your abilities and experience you will further your judgment and training. Good judgment comes from experience, but experience comes from bad judgment. Examples are plenty with gear vs. judgment. Coast Guard will stipulate you're to have a sound signaling device, judgment will teach you make it a whistle, to have it on your lifejacket and accessible to your mouth. In fact judgment will also make you realize getting back into your craft might not easily be possible. So, should you be in the middle of the bay alone with your lifejacket behind your seat. Some bad judgments do result in paying the ultimate price. Taking a course before you ply your trade is pre-built into most occupations, but required in only a few of our recreational pursuits. Anyone can get a kayak, paddle, and the necessary Coast Guard required \$30.00 gear package from Wal-Mart; then head for Sable Island. Most have enough judgment to not take large risks, but as the gear becomes more accessible and conquering the latest "Amazing Race" becomes an attractive commodity, we need to emphasize wisdom over Wal-Mart. (judgment over gear) Even the responsible purveyor of rentals will set parameters in play for you, or not rent at all if you cannot demonstrate wisdom via a series of questions.

Some societal myths still exist. I have heard it said every Canadian believes they can drive a car and paddle a canoe, and a number of capable canoeists believe they can copy-paste their skills to a Kayak, but that is comment for another article.

If we don't risk, we don't grow. Can we grow with more wisdom? Most would have to agree. Let's play safe and continue to enjoy what the water has to offer.

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