

PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING LEADER TRAINING

STRAIGHT DOWN THE RIVER: RAFTING AND THE WORKSHOP TEAM

CHAD EDWARDS

I once went on a rafting trip expecting a relaxing weekend with my friends. The experience that ensued was not what I had imagined. To begin, I was subjected to four hours of training, including how to carry the raft, paddling techniques, rescue maneuvers, and other non-essential things. I remember thinking why should I care, this truly doesn't affect me, for my raft mates will paddle, everyone will stay in the raft where they belong, and carrying the boat is for my river guide to worry about. The next morning when we set out for our adventure, I remember the guide saying, "My job is to keep you going straight down the river, and to coordinate your efforts for the benefit of all. Your job is to paddle your butt off when I tell you to, hold on when I tell you, and you will work like you have never worked before for the next two hours . . . I will make sure your work gets you where you need to be."

This is the very role we play as workshop leaders. It is not our job to do the work. It is our job to see that all workshop members contribute, and to ensure that the work of the workshop group produces results.

Many students have the mindset that they do not have to prepare, for their workshop mates will do the work, and the workshop leader will come to their rescue when they struggle. This mindset was much like mine on my rafting trip: "Why should I care? Others will do the work and our leader will make sure we do everything right." This cannot be further from the truth. When one person does not do his or her part, the team suffers. It is this team suffering that makes people pull together to solve a problem and this is how people learn. This became apparent to me on that fateful rafting excursion. When the people in our raft did not work together, we found ourselves swimming through the grueling rapids rather than enjoying the rapids from the confines of our raft.

The greatest lessons learned in life are the lessons associated with a struggle. Human nature often fosters passively learning what we deem not important, and actively learning things that are important. Nothing facilitates active learning like a struggle, and it is not the leader's job to interfere with the struggle. If the leader steps in and solves the problem, the workshop students are robbed of a golden opportunity to learn not only a chemistry or biology lesson but also a lesson about life: hard work, perseverance, and teamwork can solve the most difficult of problems.

*Chad Edwards, Peer Leader
State University of West Georgia*

Cite This Article as: Edwards, C. (2012). Straight down the river: Rafting and the workshop Team. Peer-Led Team Learning: Leader Training. Online at <http://www.pltlis.org>. Originally published in *Progressions: The Peer-Led Team Learning Project Newsletter*, Volume 2, Number 3, Spring 2001.