

Thoughts about Paddling (by Chuck Brabec)

Over the past 15+ years of paddling and teaching whitewater kayaking as a volunteer, I have accumulated the following list of “thoughts” that I like to share with my fellow paddlers.

You are welcome to use any part (or all) of this document.

Thoughts

1. Paddling is an inherently risky activity. The best way to reduce the odds of becoming a statistic is to recognize the inherent risk and act accordingly. This does not mean giving up paddling. It means always taking paddling seriously.
2. Remember who's waiting for you back home when you are making basic decisions. Your choices have implications for them too.
3. Choose your equipment carefully and know how to use it. All boat designs involve compromises. The compromises that make some boats great for racking up points in rodeos reduce the margin for error when using them in more difficult, decision-intense situations. Keep in mind that you WILL on occasion make mistakes ("shit will happen" if you're more comfortable with this concept) and that some boat designs are more forgiving than others.
4. Choose paddling partners carefully. You are dependent on them and they on you.
5. Dress to be comfortable if you have to be in the water a long time to rescue someone else.
6. Honestly evaluate your paddling skills, not just in general but in the context of the specific day you're boating. Being able to survive a class 5 run and being a class 5 boater are not the same thing. Take pride in always exactly hitting your lines in difficult rapids, not just in getting to the bottom of them. If you're not exactly hitting your lines most of the time you're relying on luck to get down the drops, and luck is not always good.
7. Paddling skills involve more than just boat control. They include judgment, rescue and first aid skills. You can't maintain these skills if you don't first attain them and then practice them. Your efforts may well make you more humble and respectful of your limitations.
8. Beware of letting your guard down on days when everything seems to be going right. The "paddler's high" of a great day on the river can be intoxicating to the point of losing the mental edge necessary to paddle safely.
9. If you want an extra dose of humility, purposely take a swim at least once a year. It never ceases to amaze me how much more I'm at the mercy of the water when I'm out of my boat than when I'm in it. For many top-end boaters this is a real eye-opener because they so seldom swim.

Thoughts about Paddling
(by Chuck Brabec)

My Plea to You

1. Please think carefully about your motivations for doing things and think about the consequences of your decisions.
2. Please don't do hard runs just because everyone else is doing them. Few will think less of you if you don't. (And those few may need to re-examine their own priorities.)
3. Please don't do them because you have testosterone poisoning (and that applies to the women, too).
4. Please don't do hard runs on an off day (and all paddlers have them). The river will be there when you come back.
5. Please consider walking that hard rapid if you're not comfortable running it today - even if you've run it before.
6. Please don't assume that just because you managed to get through something in one piece that you've mastered it and can move on and up.
7. Please take into account the fact that your paddling companions will try to come after you if you screw up, putting themselves at risk on your behalf.
8. Please realize that there are a lot of ways to challenge yourself in this sport besides seeking more difficult whitewater. (If you're a kayaker, try learning C-1. If you're an open canoe team, try slalom. And so on.)
9. Please realize that what happens to you out there can affect everyone else -- in the form of regulations and restrictions.
10. Please realize that we will all miss you if you're gone.
11. I'm not asking or telling anybody to stop. I'm just pleading with all of you to THINK. First.