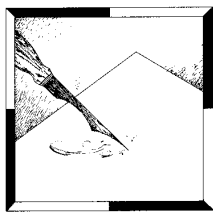

Two Women, Three Men on a Raft

by Robert Schrank



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What really happened to Raft No. 4 on an Outward Bound trip down the Rogue River?

Two Women, Three Men on a Raft

by Robert Schrank

One afternoon in June, I left the cloistered halls of the Ford Foundation and within 36 hours found myself standing on the banks of the Rogue River in Oregon with three other uncertain souls who had embarked on a week of "survival training" sponsored by Outward Bound. It was a cloudy, cold day, and as we pumped up our rubber raft and contemplated the Rogue, we also wondered about one another. Before embarking on a Greyhound for the raft launching site, we had gathered the night before at the Medford Holiday Inn. That night, the Outward Bound staff had distributed individual camping gear and waterproof sleeping/storage bags to the 20 of us, almost all novices, and had given us a short briefing on the perils of going down the Rogue River on a raft.

As they explained the nature of the trip, the Outward Bound staffers reminded me of seasoned military men or safari leaders about to take a group of know-nothings into a world of lurking danger. Their talk was a kind of machismo jargon about swells, rattlers, safety lines, portages, and pitons. Because they had known and conquered the dangers, it seemed they could talk of such things with assurance. This kind of "man talk" called to a primitive ear in us novices, and we began to perceive the grave dangers out there as evils to be overcome. In our minds, we were planning to meet "Big Foot" the very next day, and we were secretly thrilled at the prospect.

If the Outward Bound staff briefing was designed to put us at ease, its effect, if anything, was the opposite. Hearing the detailed outline of what would be expected of us increased our anxiety. "You will work in teams as assigned to your raft," said Bill Boyd, the Northwest Outward Bound director, "and you will be responsible for running your raft, setting up camp each night, cooking every fourth meal for the whole gang, and taking care of all your own personal needs."

The staff divided the 20 of us into four groups, each of which would remain together for the week on the raft. How we were grouped was never explained to us, but of the five rafts on the river, our raft, No. 4, was the only one that ended up with two women and three men. One of the men was a member of the Outward Bound staff, a counselor and guide who was considerably younger than his four charges.

The four of us on Raft No. 4 were all in our middle fifties. Each of us had experienced some modicum of

success in his or her life, and Outward Bound had invited each of us in the hope that after a week of living on the Rogue River we would go back from the trip as Outward Bound supporters and promoters.

On the River

Like most of the other 19 people on the trip, at the outset I had little or no idea of what to expect. I had participated in a few human growth encounter workshops, so I was prepared for, although again surprised at, how willingly people seem to accept the authority of a completely unknown group leader. Most people

The staff used a lot of machismo jargon but told us little about what we might actually expect.

seem able to participate in all kinds of strange and, in many instances, new behaviors with no knowledge regarding the possible outcomes. This group was no exception. All of us had some notion of Outward Bound, but we knew nothing about each other, or our raft leader John, or the Rogue River.

Even though their preembarkation talk was filled with the machismo jargon I mentioned, the staff did not describe what we might actually expect to happen, nor did they talk about the many other river trips they had been on. I suppose the staff leaders assumed that the best way for a group of people to learn about themselves and each other is to let the experience talk to them directly.

The two women assigned to Raft No. 4 were named Marlene and Hel-

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en. Marlene was a recently divorced mother of five kids from Washington, whom a number of us had observed in her pink bikini in the Holiday Inn pool when we had arrived. Most of us acknowledged that because of that build we would love to have her along. Marlene used to wear her red ski suit at night and talked a lot about the good times she'd spent on the ski slopes. A top-notch skier, she said she divorced her husband because she was tired of making believe he was a better skier than she was.

Helen, a big blonde woman with a fierce sense of humor and a divorced mother of two grown boys, was at the time of our trip the president of the Fund Center in Denver, a coordinating body for local foundations, as well as a political activist. She and I became each other's clowns, and one night at a campfire she leaned over and asked me, "Bobby, is this just another plaything of the bored rich, or can we really learn something out here in this God-forsaken wilderness?" I told her I wasn't sure but we ought to give it a chance, which we certainly did.

One of the two other men was Bill, a very successful lawyer from

There was a lot of forced joking as we tried to overcome our anxieties.

Darien, Connecticut. He was the only one of the four passengers who was still happily married, since I too was divorced. Bill was a busy executive, but he managed to find time for hiking, skiing, and fishing. While Outward Bound took care of all our food requirements and most of our medical needs, Raft No. 4 had its own supply officer in Bill. His backpack was organized like a Civil War surgeon's field kit. He had all his changes of clothing scheduled, and when it rained, his extra plastic rainjacket kept me dry since mine leaked like a sieve. Though he and Marlene were obviously attracted to each other from the start, it was clear from his "happy family" talk

that nothing was going to change, and it didn't.

The other man was John Rhoades, our heavily mustached, vigorous leader, in his early thirties, who saw himself as a teacher, educator, and trainer. As a progressive educator, John was overdedicated to the notion that no one can learn from anyone else since learning is a singular, unique experience.

The men and women of Raft No. 4 were a warm, friendly, outgoing bunch, each of whom helped create a nice, supportive atmosphere.

When we arrived at the river, each was anxious to pitch in and do his or her part. The staff distributed the rafts, each of which had a small foot pump, and Bill and I, with instruction from John, proceeded to inflate ours. It was one of our first chores, and we did it with a machismo fervor that suggested either previous knowledge, or that it was man's work or both. Marlene and Helen carried food bags, buckets, and ropes. It was a cold day, a gray mist hung over the towering Oregon pines, and I had a feeling that at least some of us, given a choice, would have opted for going back to the Holiday Inn. There was a lot of forced joking and kidding, with which we attempted to overcome some of our anxieties—we were whistling in the dark.

John gave each of us a Mae West-type life preserver and instructed us on how to use it. He told us, "You are not to go on the raft without it." Now with all of us bulging out of our Mae Wests, a Richter scale applied to anxiety would have registered eight or a full-scale breakdown. Postponing the inevitable, we shivered, fussed, and helped each other get adjusted to our life jackets. The trip down the Rogue River was beginning to take on a serious quality.

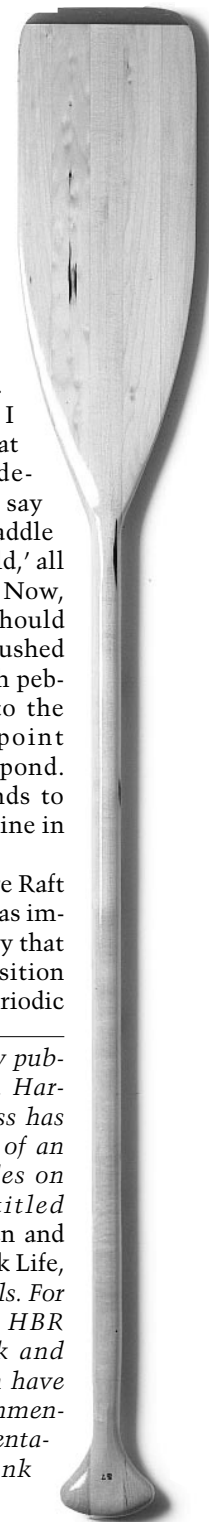
The rafts we used were small, about 10 feet long and 4 feet wide. The passengers sit on the inflated outer tube with their feet on the inside. Everyone is very close together with little or no room to move around. Also, unlike a boat, a raft

has no keel or rudder mechanism, which means that it tends to roll and bobble around on top of the water. Unless the occupants work as a team and use their paddles in close coordination, it is very difficult to control.

While we were still on shore, John perched himself in the helmsman position at the back of the raft and said, "OK, I am going to teach you how to navigate the Rogue. When I say 'right turn,' the two people on the left side of the raft are to paddle forward and the two on the right are to backpaddle. When I say 'left turn,' the two people on the right are to paddle forward and the two on the left are to backpaddle. When I say 'forward,' I want everyone digging that paddle in like his life depended on it, and when I say 'backpaddle,' everyone paddle backward. When I say 'hold,' all paddles out of the water. Now, have you all got it, or should we go over it again?" We pushed the raft out over the beach pebbles and paddled out into the Rogue, which at this point seemed like just a nice pond. John barked his commands to us, and the team did just fine in the quiet water.

John told us that we were Raft No. 4 of five rafts, and it was important to everyone's safety that each raft maintain its position so that we could make periodic

This article was originally published in May-June 1977. Harvard Business School Press has just published it as part of an anthology of HBR articles on women and work, entitled Reach for the Top: Women and the Changing Facts of Work Life, edited by Nancy A. Nichols. For its republication as an HBR Classic, Robert Schrank and three professional women have written retrospective commentaries. One of the commentators accompanied Schrank on the original raft trip.



personnel checks to make sure no one was missing. John gave the command "forward," and because No. 3 raft was already far ahead of us and out of sight, Marlene, Helen, Bill, and I paddled vigorously.

As we proceeded down the river, John announced, "Each of you will take turns at being the helmsman." After some comment by Helen, this term was quickly corrected to conform to the new nondiscriminatory linguistics, as well as for the EEOC, to "helmsperson." John said that this person would be in charge of the raft—steering from the stern and issuing the commands.

As John talked, my mind drifted. I was suddenly overwhelmed by the grandeur and beauty of this great wilderness river road we were traveling. In awe of the hugeness of the trees, I did not hear or respond to a command. John, a very earnest fellow, was somewhat annoyed at my daydreaming and upbraided me, saying, "Look, we all have to concentrate on our job or we will be in trouble." And then he explained the nature of the rapids ahead.

He told us how to recognize a rapid's tongue (entrance), how to avoid "sleepers" (hidden rocks), and then how to ride the "haystacks" (the choppy waves that form at the outlet of the rapids) as you come through the rapids. He said that the most important art we would learn would be how to chop our paddles into the waves as we rode the haystacks. Since a raft has no seat belts, or even

Raft No. 3, Helen began to complain that she was already getting tired. "I'm just not used to pushing a paddle, but I'm damn good at pushing a pencil," she said. I, too, was beginning to feel the strain of the paddle, but rather than admit it to anyone, I just laughed saying, "Why this is nothing, Helen. You should canoe the St. John in Maine. That would teach you." Bill chimed in with "Yeah, this is nothing compared to climbing Pike's Peak."

As we moved down the river, a faint distant roar broke the silence of the forest. And as we drew nearer to it, our excitement increased. One

time to bail out, we would just sit in the cold water. And even if there were time, we would still be soaking wet and cold from the hips down. Though this was our first chance to escape the cold water treatment, we quickly learned to look forward to such opportunities. The physical discomfort we felt together on the raft was overcoming our sense of being strangers; by the time we disembarked that first time, we were a band of fellow sufferers.

At that point on the river, the bank was very steep, so we had a tough climb up a high rock cliff to get a good look at the rapids. Just before

the rapids, the river makes a sharp 90-degree bend creating an additional danger. The swiftly running river could pile the raft up on the bank or into a hidden rock. After considerable discussion, during which Bill and I tried to demonstrate to Helen and Marlene our previous if not superior knowledge of boating, we agreed on taking a left course into the tongue while at the same time trying to bear right to avoid being swept onto the bank.

Coming up and down the steep river bank, Bill helped Marlene over the rocks, holding her elbow. A ways behind them, Helen commented to me, "Honestly,

Bob, Marlene isn't that helpless." As we climbed into the raft, Bill helped Marlene again, and I, smiling sheepishly, offered my arm to Helen. I said, holding the raft, "Well, if we go, we all go together, and may we all end up in the same hospital room." Sitting herself down, Helen asked, "Who will notify the next of kin since no one will be left?" After they were seated, Bill and I huddled and agreed that if anything went wrong, he would look after Marlene and I would look after Helen.

Once back on the river, with John at the helm, we paddled into the rapid's tongue, where the raft picked up speed. Staying to the left but maintaining our right orientation, before we knew what had happened,



might have thought that rather than a four-foot rapids, Niagara Falls lay dead ahead. I was relieved when, some distance before the rapids, John told us to head for the bank where we would go ashore and study the rapids first. As a team we would then decide together what kind of course to take through them.

We had been on the river now for a few hours, and, as it would be many times during the trip, getting on dry land was a great relief. Life on a small rubber raft consists of sitting in ankle-deep cold water, anticipating a periodic refill over both the side of the raft and one's genitals. If there was not

We were each to take a turn at ruddering the raft and issuing commands.

seats for that matter, unless you chop down hard, the rough water can bounce you right out of it.

As we paddled through the still calm waters, trying to catch up with

we were roaring through the tongue, roller coasting through the haystacks, screaming with excitement. Flushed with our first real achievement, the raft awash with ice-cold water, we patted each other on the back for our first great success. While bailing out the raft, we paid each other compliments and convinced ourselves that we could master the Rogue River.

But this was our first set of rapids, and while John assured us that we had done well, he also reminded us of the meaner rapids yet to come with such potent names as Mule Creek Canyon, Blossom Bar, Big Bend, Copper Canyon, and Grave Creek. My God, I thought, did we really have to go through all of those terrible places?

Life on the Rogue included many other things besides shooting rapids. We pitched tarpaulins every night, lugged supplies in and out of the raft, and became accustomed to the discomforts of having no running water and of being absolutely frozen after sitting in cold water for the whole day. Nothing cements a group together like collective misery, and the people of Raft No. 4 had a real concern for each other as mutually suffering human beings.

Each raft carried a watertight supply bag of sleeping bags and personal clothing. The bag was strapped to the front of the raft and had to be carried to and fro every morning and night. When we tied up at our first campsite, Marlene and Helen each took an end and started to carry the bag from the raft up the bank. Bill ran after them yelling, "Hey, hold it. That's too heavy for you," and grabbed the bag. Throwing it over his shoulder, he said, "You shouldn't try to do that heavy stuff." Marlene smiled at him and said, "Bill, anytime, be my guest." Helen, who seemed to be a little annoyed, commented sarcastically, "Well it's great to have these big, strong men around now, ain't it though?"

When we came off the raft at night, most everybody instantly undressed to put on dry clothes, caring not one fig for a leaf or modesty. But even though on the surface it looked as though the physical sex differences had disappeared, the emergency nature of things exerted a different pressure, forcing each of us to "do what you know best."

Bill and I, for example, would pitch the tarpaulins each night and haul water, while Marlene and Hel-



en would make the beds, clean the ground, and arrange the sleeping bags. Our mutual concern was evident; it was a beautiful experience of caring for one's fellow sisters and brothers, and I loved it.

After pitching our plastic tarpaulins (which were not much bigger than queen-size beds) as protection against the rain, the four of us would wiggle into our sleeping bags for the night. The first night Helen said she thought we were "four wonderful people gone batty sleeping on the hard cold ground when we could all be in soft feather beds." We laughed and helped each other zip up, arranged sweaters as pillows, and made sure we were all protected. Raft No. 4 was a real team.

During the days, I was beginning to learn some basics about rafts and

When either woman tried to carry the supplies, Bill yelled, "Hey, hold it. That's too heavy for you."

rapids. Once the raft starts down the river and enters a swiftly moving rapid, the helmsperson must give and the crew respond to commands in quick succession in order to avoid hidden rocks, suck holes, boulders, and other obstacles, which can either flip the raft over or pull it under, bouncing it back like a ball.

As we approached the second rapids, we again went ashore to "look over our approach." It was a bad situation since the rapids planed out over a very rocky riverbed. Helen suggested that we let John take the raft through while we watch. "Now Bob," she said, "do we really care about this damn river? I don't care if we can squeak through these rocks or not. Hit your head on them or something and you could really get hurt." Bill, John, and I cheered us on.

When I became helmsperson, I discovered how difficult it is to steer a raft. The helmsperson can have some effect on the direction of the raft, and because Bill and I had some boating experience, we were at least familiar with the idea of using the paddle as a rudder. Neither Helen nor Marlene seemed to understand how to use a paddle that way, nor did they have the experience.

When one of the two women on our raft – more so Marlene than Helen – was the helmsperson, she would chant, "I can't do it; I can't do it." Each time they cried out, neither Bill nor I would answer right away, but we would eventually try to convince them that they could. Typically, Marlene would say, "I don't know

right from left. One of you guys do it; you're so much better."

At Copper Canyon, we needed a "hard right" command. With Marlene at the helm, we got a "hard left" instead. Bill and I looked at each other in utter disgust.

He asked Marlene, "What's the matter, honey?"

She said, "I don't know right from left. You be the helmsperson."

He said, "Why don't we write on the back of your hands the words 'right' and 'left'?"

Bill was kidding, but the next thing I knew, they were doing it.

Helen was mad and said to me, "Is it really necessary to make a baby out of her?"

"No," I answered her, "of course not. But she really doesn't know right from left."

As Marlene would say, "I can't do it," Bill and I would say, "Of course you can do it. It's easy; you're doing just fine." All the time we were speaking, we were thinking, "Ye gods! When is she going to give up?" Each time either Marlene or Helen would be helmsperson, we'd have the same conversation; each time Bill's and my reassurances would be more and more halfhearted. Before long, we weren't responding at all.

As the days wore on, Bill and I proceeded subtly but surely to take charge. The teamwork was unraveling. When we approached a tongue, if either Marlene or Helen were helmsperson, Bill and I would look at each other, and with very slight headshakes and grimaces, we would indicate agreement that things were not going well at all.

Once we had established that things were not going well, we then felt free to take our own corrective measures, such as trying to steer the raft from our forward paddle positions, which turned out to be an almost impossible thing to do. Not only is running the raft from the front not at all helpful to the person at the helm, but also if the helmsperson is not aware of the counterforces, the raft can easily turn around like a carousel. The unaware helmsperson is then totally out of control. Each time that would happen, Marlene would say, "I just don't know what's



wrong with me," and Helen would echo her, "I don't know what's wrong with me either." Bill's and my disgust would mount.

Eventually, John became fed up with the inability of the bunch on Raft No. 4 to work together, which was mainly a result, he said, of the two "captains" in the front. As a last resort, he ordered each one of us to give a single command that he or she would shout as needed. My command was "hold," Bill's command was "left," Marlene's was "right," and Helen's was "backpaddle." John's teaching objective for the group was to get the four of us working together, or else. Needless to say, "or else" prevailed.

On the fifth day, Marlene was helmsperson. Bill and I were in the bow, silently anxious. Even voluble Helen was silent as the raft approached a fast-moving chute. At that time, only a clear, concise, direct command and a rapid response would be of any use at all.

Instead of a "hard right" command, we had no command. Marlene froze, the raft slid up on a big boulder, and in an instant we flipped over like a flapjack on a griddle. The current was swift and swept the five of us away in different directions. As I splashed around in the cold water, cursing that "Goddamned dumb Marlene," I spotted Bill nearby. The two of us began together to look for Marlene and Helen, whom we found each grappling with paddles and gear they'd grabbed as the raft had gone over. We assured each other that we

were OK and expressed relief at finding each other.

Cold, wet, and shivering uncontrollably, we made our way out of the river. To warm us and to keep us moving, John chased us around the bank to get wood for a fire. He stuffed us with candies and other sweets to give us energy. As we stood around the fire, chilled and wet, unable to stop shaking, we talked about what had happened, and why.

There was mutiny in the air now, and a consensus emerged. The four of us were furious at John and blamed him for our predicament. John retreated, but finally we were agreed that we would not have any more of this kind of thing. Regardless of John's wishes, anyone who did not want to be helmsperson could simply pass. Marlene was certain that she wanted no part of being at the helm, and Helen, though less sure, was happy to say, "Yeah, I just want to stay dry. I'll let you guys take the helm."

After becoming somewhat dry, sober, and a bit remorseful, the crew of Raft No. 4 returned to the river to resume our run down the Rogue. We had lost our No. 4 position, the other rafts having run past us. John was helmsperson. Helen and Marlene were settled into their backpaddle seats. Bill and I, miffed over our mishap, felt self-conscious and fell silent thinking of the joshing we'd receive from the other rafts.

We slowly overcame the tensions of our crisis, and as the trip came to an end, we were friends again; the fifth day was forgotten. As we climbed out of the raft for the last time, Marlene said, "Well, the next raft trip I take, it will be as a passenger and not as a crew member."

That last night on the Rogue, we celebrated with a big party. The women dressed up in improvised bangles and baubles. I was the *maitre d'*, and none of us thought much about what really had happened on Raft No. 4.

Deliverance

What really happened on the river? Why did the raft flip over? Not until I was back in the comfort of my

office did I begin to understand, and the realization of the truth was as shocking as any of the splashes of cold water had been on the Rogue. It became clear to me that not only had I been unhappy with a woman as helmsperson, but also that Bill and I had subconsciously, by habit, proceeded to undermine the women. When one of the other two men was in charge, I was comfortable, supportive, and worked to help him be a better helmsperson. When a woman was at the helm, I seemed to direct my activity at getting her replaced rapidly by one of the men.

A most revealing part of the raft experience, however, was not so much the power relationship between the sexes, which I think I understood, but how Bill and I unconsciously or automatically responded to protect our power from female encroachment. When the trip started, I knew that I might have some difficulty accepting a woman at the helm, but I did not realize that the threat would be so great that I would actually desire to see her fail. On that trip I did something new: I actively tried to sabotage Marlene's and Helen's efforts to lead.

Bill and I were unconsciously building on each woman's doubts about herself with negative reinforcement of her leadership role. The effect of our male, sabotaging behavior was to increase Helen's and Marlene's doubts about themselves as leaders. For each of them, their lifelong conditioning that a woman ought to be a passive sweet thing came into play, and eventually both of them gave up the helm because men "do it better."

If the reader thinks males are just threatened in the outdoors, look what happens to us indoors. First, there is the machismo business, which is a cultural way of granting power to males. To the macho male, it is his role to take care of the woman, particularly in the face of imminent danger, and in the course of things, he should never yield any power. In most organizational settings, the male need to be in charge in the presence of females may be subtle, which may make it harder to identify than on a raft on a swift-

flowing river. If all the male readers of this article would write down just one way to undermine the budding woman executive, there would be quite a list.

Judging from firsthand experience and reports from other people, I believe that what happened on Raft No. 4, Inc., occurs in most organizations when women enter positions of leadership. An exception might be organizations that have been run by women from their inception. Because organizations are usually designed as pyramids, the moving-up process entails squeezing someone else out. The higher up the pyramid, the more the squeeze. As women enter the squeezing, men are doubly threatened; first, the number of pyramid squeeze players is increasing; second, because the new players are women, our masculinity is on the block. The resentment of men toward women managers is also exacerbated by the realities of a shrunken job market.

As more women become managers in organizations, there will have to be a shift in power. The men who hold that power in fierce competition with each other will not expand the competition by encouraging women to become part of the battle without considerable changes in their own consciousness. In a wilderness setting, all decisions, either one's own or the group's, have immediate consequences, such as being dumped out of the raft, as we saw. The rightness or wrongness of decisions in organizations is not so

obvious since they may have no perceptible effects for days or even months. During this time lag, the male unconscious activity can occur to undermine the female.

Will women in administrative positions be supported, ignored, or subconsciously sabotaged by men who find their power threatened? As most experienced administrators know, a major problem in running an organization is directly related to the level of subordinate support. How should the organization go? Straight ahead, hold, turn left, or turn right? These decisions are judgments that may be tough, but the leader must make them; and unless they are supported by the subordinates, they might as well never have been made.

A command of "hard right" can be executed as hard-hard, half-hard, and soft-hard, the last one being equal to just a facade of cooperation. That situation is the most dangerous one for the leader who presumes that orders are being executed, while in fact the raft is foundering. I suspect that one of the reasons that a woman has trouble is because the lack of support she receives from one man gets reinforced by others; it is a collective activity. Things might have been different on Raft No. 4 had we been willing to confront each other. It might have spoiled the fun, but we all might have learned something.

At first, I thought there might not be much of an analogy between navigating a river and a big bureaucracy. Now I think there is. The requirements turn out to be different, and yet the same. The river is more easily understood: how it flows, its hydraulics, its sleepers, or its chutes, and women, like men, can learn these things. A big organization also has sleepers and chutes, but recognizing their existence is a far more political than intellectual task. Women trying to navigate most organizations may find them more complex than the Rogue, but they need to look for similar hazards. The sleepers and chutes will be vested groups of men, who, when their power is threatened, will pull any woman down for tinkering with their interests.



Retrospective Commentaries

ROBERT SCHRANK *reassesses the Rogue River raft trip 17 years later.*

After my trip down the Rogue River 17 years ago, I suspected that more had happened there than I realized at first. Only after an extended period of reflection, however, did my conscious mind grasp what my unconscious had known all along—that during the course of the trip I had effectively conspired with John and Bill to sabotage the performance of Helen and Marlene. In the article, I admitted as much.

Before the article appeared, I showed the manuscript to several people, all men. “Really now, Schrank,” the response was, “you’re not going to publish that foolishness, are you?” But I did, and then other men asked whether I really believed “that crap you wrote” or whether I hadn’t made up “all that stuff about what we do to women.” I thought their comments suggested that I had somehow betrayed a male tribal secret.

Women have undoubtedly made progress in the corporate workplace since the article first appeared, but certainly not as much as they had expected. We have new laws, rules, and policies relating to women in the workplace, but what we haven’t changed much is the male behavior. Women have fallen short in their goals—of crashing through the glass ceiling, for instance—because I think we underestimate the potency of the male need to maintain their power.

Piglet in *Winnie the Pooh* referred to sensing something in an “underneath sort of way.” That is hard to do. We can abide scrupulously by the laws, rules, and policies we create in order to assure women an equal opportunity in the corporate workplace and still not overcome the problems that afflicted—and eventually capsized—Raft No. 4.

John and Bill thought that what I wrote was all in my imagination, that it never really happened. “Didn’t we try to help them?” they asked. Yes, we did. We told them

what to do. We gave them their turns at the helm. We even wrote “left” and “right” on Marlene’s hands to help her keep track. But in Piglet’s underneath sort of way, we also did everything we could to keep them from succeeding. Why?

Why did our “underneath” behavior conflict so violently with our stated aims? I think it’s because we never looked underneath.

When females threaten to move into positions of power, men are threatened twice: first, that they’ll lose their authority over the women, and second, that they’ll lose prestige and standing with the male, that is, the important, members of the tribe. When I grew up in the Bronx, no self-respecting boy would ever have sponsored a girl into our daily stickball game on the street. Now, as grown businessmen, we still hear that little boy’s voice saying, “Hey, get lost. This ain’t no girls’ game.”

We need the laws affirming women’s rights. We need the rules and the regulations. But we can’t mistake the proclamation of equal opportunity for the realization of it.

I think what we have to do, especially we men, is keep trying to get to our underneath side. Instincts and hormones are mysterious things, not easily understood—and not an excuse for anything. But they are a reason for certain behavior. We need to understand more about what motivates the behavior that lies underneath our surface actions and intentions. Not so that we can justify it, but so that we can change it.

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The adventure on the Rogue River contains an old and a new lesson. As it describes the behavior of women

and men in a work situation, it could have happened yesterday—or perhaps tomorrow—instead of nearly 20 years ago. That constancy is what makes the article a classic.

As a woman who has worked in the business world since the 1950s, I know that what Bob Schrank experienced on the river happens every day

Women have fallen short of their goals because we underestimate men’s need to maintain their power.

in a regular work setting. Sexual tensions and attractions still intrude; men still undermine women unconsciously and deliberately; women still diminish themselves through lack of confidence or experience; and men *and* women are still leery of seeing women in leadership roles. Schrank was right in his revelation—startling as it seemed in the 1970s—that even when you substitute Armanis for Mae Wests, the male-female conflict persists.

I remember reading the article when it first appeared and seeing it as a mirror that showed clearly what was happening all around me and my female colleagues. We all knew with the conviction of our own personal experience and disappointment that it was just these behaviors that would keep us women from climbing the corporate ladder. Men would act to preserve their positions of power, and they knew how to do that with behaviors both subtle and obvious.

Today I read the story quite differently. Now I see it as a tale about what happens when managers fail to create the environment in which a diverse team can achieve trust and mutual respect. The result was there in a throwaway line in the story—the raft lost its place in line. Translation: it lost competitive position. Perhaps in the smoother waters of the 1970s, when growth and success seemed infinitely possible, the raft could find another line and try again. Today the discipline of the marketplace would likely leave the raft on

a rock, as it has left so many well-known enterprises recently.

So Schrank's revealing anecdote is really about what happens when management fails to address critical human resource issues in the "permanent white water" that one leading management consultant has defined as today's business climate.

Why did this happen on the raft, and what can we learn from it? It was clear that the men were interested only in being in charge. Oddly, they saw that in the role of helmsman (helmsperson, in clunky 1970s politically correct talk). Yet the helmsman wasn't really in charge. In fact, on that raft, no one was in charge except, perhaps, the river. As the men struggled to take over and colluded against the women so they could give their simplistic orders, they were living out the now-outdated command-and-control style of large bureaucratic organizations. Today's rapids demand something very different – highly responsive work teams whose members can act independently and collectively without being "led" by an order giver.

Read in the context of the 1990s, this classic reveals many points that should concern us. It shows us that diversity cannot be a "flavor-of-the-month" program. Business has talked the language of diversity for the last 20 years without really getting the message. In fact, diversity is a key business strategy that must be learned and practiced because it is linked to the success of the venture. It shows us that creating a team is a complex problem that entails more than simply assigning a group of people to a common task. Creating the environment in which a team can develop from a group of individuals demands thoughtful effort. And the story shows us that success will elude all ventures, whether boating or business, led by people who do not understand these lessons, especially when the current is as swift and the water is as roiled as it is in the business world today.

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effect change for women through research, advisory services, and communication.

While the Bill, Bob, and John of 1994 might still behave as corrosively as they did in 1977, a trip down the Rogue River today would reveal a much changed Marlene and Helen. They wouldn't for a minute sit back passively and let the men take over the helm because they are "so much better" at steering. In the last 17 years, women have learned a few things. One of them is that leading a business today has very little to do with white-water rafting and shooting the rapids.

The metaphor of Raft No. 4 is dated. The world of enterprise no longer revolves around the physical strength of the male hunter who slays the beast and drags it home (or the prowess of the river navigator, for that matter). Today's successful business "warrior" is marked by an awareness of the changing world and the leadership and team-building skills that bespeak brains, not brawn, metaphorical or otherwise.

The Marlenes and Helens of today are just as educated as the Bills and Bobs, if not more so. In 1991, women earned more bachelor's degrees (53.9%) and master's degrees (53.5%) than men (compared with 46.1% and 47% respectively in 1977). They also earned 43% of all law degrees (up from 22.4% in 1977) and more than one-third of all MBAs (compared with just one out of seven in 1977).

Furthermore, women have entered the ranks of corporate management. The percentage of executive, administrative, and managerial employees who are female has exploded from a mere 2.5% in 1977 to 42% in 1993. Although women have not attained the highest reaches of corporate management in large numbers, there is a critical mass in the pipeline. In 1977, 46 women were directors of America's leading corporations. Today there are 500 such women – not nearly enough, to be

sure, but more than ten times as many as 15 years ago.

I won't rule out the possibility that one or more of the men on the raft might have changed, too, in 17 years. Many progressive companies today are led by men who have responded positively to the challenge

Today's rapids demand highly responsive team members who can act alone or together without anyone to lead them.

of assimilating women into their workplaces. They're smart enough to seek the best talent in whatever shape, size, and color it comes. They know that if Marlene and Helen don't get their turn at the helm and the support they need to do the job, there's a good chance that at least one of them will leave to paddle her own canoe. (By the way, fellas, it just might turn out to be an ocean liner.) Such leaders have come to realize that we're all in the same raft and that whether or not we stay dry depends less on the brawn of the helmsperson than on the collective skill of the team and its members.

ELEANOR PETERSEN was the first woman chair of the Illinois Fair Employment Practices Commission, a founder and officer of a federal savings and loan created to make mortgage loans to minorities, and founder and president of the Donors Forum of Chicago, a regional association of grant makers. She has been retired for eight years and lives in Chicago.

I was "Helen" in Bob Schrank's raft, and when I read his article in this magazine 17 years ago, it made me angry. I was angry at Bob and the other two men for the games they'd played, and I was very angry – and chagrined – at my own failure to realize what was going on. It took the article to show me just how loaded the deck had been against us.

Now, 17 years later, I'm still angry. Not at Bob, whose insight into

his own behavior was illuminating and, in fact, courageous, and no longer at myself, because I have worked hard to make things better for women and minorities. I am angry at U.S. society. I am impatient and discouraged at how little progress we have made in almost 20 years. I have come to believe that the power structures of our political, educational, and corporate institutions are deeply conservative and authoritarian, that the authorities they conserve are still overwhelmingly male and white, and that change is insultingly slow.

It takes time, we're told, to rise through the pipeline in any profession or organization. How much time? Women have been pushing hard against the glass ceiling on business promotions for at least 30 years, but 30 years is not enough. Blacks have been pressing for equal opportunity since the end of the Civil War, but five generations is not enough. The suffragist movement began its struggle for equal political rights more than a century ago, and we now have 7 women senators out of 100. Are we supposed to be proud of that achievement? Wouldn't

shame be a more appropriate reaction? The pipeline argument is a sham and a disgrace.

For many years, I've worked with foundations. Over the last two decades, in order to get more money for women, we've made a huge, successful effort to get foundations to hire more women and an equal, much *less* successful effort to move them up to decision-making jobs and to seats on foundation boards. In that whole 20 years, foundation grants to women's and girls' organizations have risen from 3% of total foundation giving—to 4%. So now, at last, women have begun to set up their own foundations, run by women to raise money for women.


Women, especially young women, have to start doing the same kind of thing in business and politics, because the pace of "acceptable" change is too courteous, too ladylike, too accommodating. Many in my generation went along with that leisurely, unproductive rate of change, exactly the way Marlene

and I went along in that raft. We let the men take care of us. We allowed ourselves to be comfortable and irresponsible. We were all victims, of course, men and women alike, because instead of learning new skills and new ways to work together, we all just repeated old roles in an old, authoritarian world.

Today I would no longer let that happen. I would make myself take the helm and the responsibility no matter how frightened I was. And I

Today I'd make the men give me responsibility. You can't be polite about change. You have to be rude.

would make the men give it to me. You can't bring about change politely. You have to be tough. You have to be rude.

Before the civil rights movement, people said to blacks, "Don't try to move too fast." But after 100 years of waiting, they lost patience and so took change into their own hands. Women must do the same. 

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