

The View From ...

Gaining Recognition

By
Heather
Crawford
on a
'View
from...' theme

It's been a curious summer in that many adventure type activities have been in the news and have been given a sort of public recognition which is a strange state of affairs. Usually the only time adventure is mentioned is when something has gone drastically wrong. But this time around there has been a level of reverence and awe for achievements, and rightly so. The rowing of the Atlantic by James Cracknell and Ben Fogle - an awesome achievement; the probability of the round the world walk having to be abandoned - can any of us possibly comprehend the enormity of that challenge and the desperation of the situation?

The media flocks to cover Cheltenham, the Grand National, the Boat Race and the London Marathon, Ascot and Wimbledon. But tucked in amongst them all is one feat that is curiously overlooked each year and yet the level of commitment and mental, physical and emotional preparation that it requires is equal to any of the others. That is the Devizes to Westminster Canoe Race. 125 miles of seriously hard graft. I watched the finish this year, boats with aching, exhausted, elated paddlers being directed to the little beach under the Festival Pier, and I was struck by one thing - that apart from the marshals directing them and carrying the boats up the steps (a small but so significant act of kindness) there were very few people there. Not so much as a journalist, photographer or camera crew. And even when a larger crowd did gather, no doubt drawn by those of us peering over the edge and clapping and cheering, none of them knew what was happening and seemed awestruck when they were told. Starting that race takes serious commitment and getting to the end is a quite incredible achievement - I've known, as many of you have, a number of people who have taken part (some of them a number of times) and am silenced by their strength of purpose. I know that for many it is a personal challenge, one that requires little outside confirmation, but I wonder... just how good are we at recognising and promoting the achievements of our adventures and journeys? The irony was that a hundred yards along the embankment there was a huge crowd gathered around a group of Moroccan dancers and musicians, completely oblivious to what was happening on the river below them.

We have this year seen the some of the first recognition of achievement in our industry with Lifetime Memberships honours. But I am aware that too often we are very low key in our celebration of all that is good and strong and wondrous in what we do. The Association for Experiential Education (the USA version of IOL) gives out several awards each year to those who in the eyes of the industry have contributed most over that year. Some of these have been won by internationally known people and organisations. But very often the awards go to small companies or people who are just doing what they do every day and who have been recognised. I'm not sure that awards of that kind are what I'm advocating, but certainly some kind of recognition for all the good that is done would be great. As a nation we are notoriously reticent about singing our own praises but we do like to be noticed and for our work to be acknowledged. Over the years there has been some wonderful work done by groups such as the Campaign for Adventure and the English Outdoor Council to highlight the value of outdoor learning and this is gradually beginning to pay dividends through recognition and understanding of what we do by politicians and the wider public. But as we go through everyday life it is important for us to remember what we do as individuals and groups and to celebrate that success. The thank you letters are fantastic and can brighten up the dullest of days, so remember to say thank you to your clients, your staff and your colleagues – not everyday and certainly not in any kind of sarcastic manner – but truly and genuinely. Celebrate the diversity of those people we work with every day and encourage and celebrate their achievements. They are after all the life blood of our businesses. ■

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The View From ... continues with a third viewpoint in Horizons 36.

Author's Notes

Heather is a Training and Development Manager for Fairbridge, a national charity working with inner city 13-25 year olds most at risk. She has worked as a lecturer in outdoor education at both HE and FE levels and also as a practitioner. Her articles focus on how academic models can be used everyday by practitioners and also on observations of what is happening within the industry.

Photographs

From the IOL library