

Bill Parks

“How important it is to treat customers well” Bill Parks

Now in his 80s, (2017) Bill Parks is still running rivers and still working to help others pursue their passions on the water.

After his parents divorced, Bill was raised by his grandparents. His grandfather, David Rankin Osborne, was an amazing person and he had done just about everything but his greatest attribute was that he was a sales person. He was the sales training director for Studebaker Corporation, and was one of the founders of their sales training organization. He had written books on selling but one of the things that was always in his stories was how important it was to treat customers. So Parks grew up with that idea. He thought he would eventually work for Studebaker because his mother, grandfather and uncles either worked for Studebaker or for a supplier of Studebaker. But by the time Bill graduated from college Studebaker was on the way down and it was clear he wasn't going to work for Studebaker.



{Bill Parks - 2015 at NRS in Moscow, Idaho}

So Parks went to work for General Motors and worked in the advertising division. Because he thought he would work in marketing he majored in sales and salesmanship classes while working on his Masters Degree. At this time there was very little restriction on what you could advertise, basically you could lie about a product. For example a product called Carters Little Liver Pills didn't do anything for your liver. Parks wrote a paper about truth in advertising suggesting the Federal Trade Commission should fine these companies and use the money to run corrective advertising. Parks got the paper back and it said, in red written across the cover page, “you think business would like this, question mark.” C-. Because he was a masters candidate and I had to have an A or a B and he knew from that point that their idea of marketing and his idea of marketing were much different, and that's how I ended up in finance.

After a stint in the military, and working in the Cadillac division of General Motors, Parks received a PhD in business from Michigan State University. Bill took a business instructor position at the University of Oregon. He quickly became aware that he was teaching things that he had never done.

Bill said: "Working in a giant corporation teaches you to be an expert in a minute little section of business, but you don't learn how a business operates. While that may not bother most teachers, it bothered me and so I started looking around for a way to start a business."

Parks had been a ski instructor for some time but it was clear that the ski industry was a pretty mature industry and didn't offer much business opportunity for a novice. He looked at raising crayfish for the Asian market, selling beer making supplies and even selling bread knives.

Bill, who had become an avid river runner, recognized that rafting was a lot of fun, but that access to river equipment was difficult. He knew that more people were likely to take up the sport and they would need equipment. So with \$2,000 in a Moscow, Idaho bank account he left the University of Oregon to take a job at the University of Idaho where he rented a Post Office Box to begin selling river equipment. In 1972 he began selling products out of my garage and basement.

From the beginning Bill wanted to make NRS the kind of company that he would want to buy from. That meant treating the customer with respect and giving outstanding customer service. What most companies didn't realize at the time was that an extremely high percentage of customers are sincere in their beliefs that they deserve whatever they are asking for. Therefore, it became the mantra of NRS that the customer is always right and deserves the best service.

"Though NRS started in 1972, my first remembrance of selling a raft was a young man from Clarkston Washington in the Spring of 1973. He said that he would buy a raft if I'd teach him to raft and so the two of us went down the lower Salmon in May of 1973. Though it was a low water year, what high water there was peaked on Memorial Day. There were no rapids, just a few pressure waves until we reached slide rapid. And that was when I packed all our bags under the frame and told him to get as low as he could in the bow. Rowing backward through the 45s we made it through and I sold my first raft."



{Gator & Bill Parks at 2001 America Outdoors Convention, Salt Lake City}