

Sailing in a Zone of Convergence

By
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It's interesting how things that are invisible can suddenly become so influential in our affairs.

From my office, I can see several miles of Gardner Lake that lay to the southeast of Eagle Wing. This view from Weathertop (name for my office) should have allowed me to figure out what was happening far sooner than I did! *But, it's not uncommon to miss the real nature of things that thoroughly surround us.*

In the summer, Gardner lake is often calm in the early part of the day. On these days, for those who simply look at the sky, the clouds, and test the wind with their finger, all appears to be well. But, it's not. Something invisible is at work, something which often turns the lake into a tempest by mid-afternoon. It does not happen all at once. It happens in phases, and there are signs that precede it.

During the Gardner Cup Race, the CITs and I saw (for the first time) clearly what was happening. We were sailing in a Convergence Zone, *and that has implications!*

The race began just off the Eagle Wing peninsula, which put the fleet in the center of the lake. Gardner Lake is about seven miles long and three miles wide. It's size is important: *a Convergence Zone requires an expansive environment to exist. This expansive nature may contribute to the difficulty in detecting its causes.*

As the fleet of JYs crossed the start line, they were close hauled, pinching it hard in a modest west-southwest breeze. There is a thrill to be charging through the water in the midst of several other boats, all jockeying for position. It was an exciting start! Because of the size/weight differential, the Peggy Bee, with the CITs and myself aboard, started five minutes later.

Within a few minutes of crossing the start line, the three trailing JYs were following the lead boat, and it was off course! *Following the herd is quite often not a good thing to do!*

By the time we reached the first mark, the Peggy Bee had made up most of the five minute start delay. *I don't think we were going any faster, we just knew where we were going!*

To round the second mark required the fleet to sail deep into the cove that lies beneath High Head (a promontory on the west side of the lake). Remembering that sailing behind High Head had been the undoing of Colin Weber during the 2008 Cup Race, most skippers rounded the mark and headed directly back to the open water in the center of the lake. *Sailing in the shadow of a wind catching behemoth is never a good idea.*

Sometime between clearing High Head and rounding the third mark, which lay at the far east end of the lake, we began to feel the change. The west-southwest breeze began to lessen, and by the time we rounded the third mark it became little more than a zephyr. Moreover, it became fickle, changing direction without apparent reason.

Though I was aboard as an observer and not allowed to take the helm or trim the sails, I did answer questions. (All right, I confess, I answered some questions that were not asked!) When we were caught in the first of the numerous wind shifts, Zach Heller, who was at the helm, asked, "What should I do?" I replied, "*Hold your course, don't chase the wind.*" By holding our course we conserved our momentum, and rudder control, until the wind changed, yet again, to a more favorable direction.

The Peggy Bee, at this point in the race, had about a half mile lead on the rest of the fleet and was about a half mile from the finish line. Thanks to good navigation and having resisted the urge to "chase the wind," we were in a great position. So we thought!

Then, with the finish line literally in sight, we became becalmed; the wind stopped. Yet at the far east end of the lake, where the rest of the fleet was rounding the third mark, the wind was blowing hard from the east-southeast. They had a following wind and were on a run to the finish line, *while we sat becalmed*. Moreover, we could see the wind still blowing from the west-southwest at the far west end of the lake, which was ahead of us. ***The wind was blowing from nearly opposite directions at each end of the lake, making the center portion of the lake the battle ground where these two forces contested the day.*** We were sailing in the middle of the Zone of Convergence!

On some days, the sea breeze takes control of the whole lake, on others the prevailing wind wins the day. The outcome is determined by invisible forces that are far beyond our horizon. This uncertainty makes sailing in The Zone difficult if you are trying to follow a prescribed course. If, however, you're not intending on going anywhere particular, then chasing the wind is fine!

As we sat becalmed and motionless, with the rest of the fleet racing toward us, Zach Heller asked, "What do we do now?"

His question, though well asked, led to my less than satisfying reply, "We do nothing. The same wind that's blowing the fleet to us, will fill our sails too, but for now we wait." *When sailing in The Zone, there are times when the only option is to wait for the wind to return. It's not easily done, but at such times patience becomes requisite. Sculling, paddling, using the motor, are all against the rules!*

In time, the wind came to us and along with it came the fleet of JYs. Weighing 3000 pounds, the Peggy Bee takes some time to accelerate. Thus, as we were regaining our speed, the JYs sailed past us. However, once we regained our momentum, we began to catch up. Had there been another half mile to the finish line we might have regained our lead. But, we did not have another half mile to go and were the third boat to cross the finish line. Yet, when our five minute start delay was subtracted from our time, the Peggy Bee was in first place. All in all, it was a great day.

Over the course of the summer, our sailors learned another interesting skill; they learned to 'read' the water. As the wind blows over the surface of the water it creates, ripples, waves, whitecaps and finally it creates foam that lines up in rows. By reading these signs it's not too difficult to judge how hard the wind is blowing. But embedded in these phenomena is another 'sign'. When the wind is

gusty, it makes the lake beneath the gusts turn a darker color than the surrounding water. A skipper who is alert to these approaching areas of dark water, is never caught by surprise when a gust hits his sails, and gusts are common in The Zone.

These same areas of dark water can also tell a skipper if the wind is about to change direction. But reading a change in direction is far more difficult than reading a change in speed. To recognize a direction change, a skipper must first know the direction of the current wind and then compare it to the movement of the approaching patch of dark water. Even with practice and considerable *attention to detail*, this is hard to do. *Yet we are not out in the middle of the lake to learn the **easy** things; we are here to learn the **hard** things.*

Is this akin to *why* we send our children to camp? We do not send them to learn the easy things; such as how to sail, paddle, hike, climb, etc. No, we send them to learn the hard things: to bear the weight of responsibility that comes with the freedom to find their own way; to learn *who* they are, so they might put to good use *what* they will become, viz. husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, employees, employers, citizens.

This process is hard, not because it is complicated— actually (once our children are in the right environment) it occurs quite naturally. It is hard because it cannot occur until they are apart from us. We [parents] are simply too powerful. Even when we are present, or merely nearby, we remain ‘in charge’. *The middle of the ‘lake’ works quite well!*

Sometimes I think this is only hard for us [parents]. Our children are longing to learn such things. One of the great goodness’ of camp lies in its ability to deliver this freedom, while still providing, not merely a safety net, but a second (hidden) hand on the tiller.

We [parents] do what is right for our children, regardless of what *they [children]* think, and regardless of how it makes us *feel*. We don’t ask for permission to do these things; it’s expected of us, because we bear the most important title a human being can be given: Mother or Father.