

An email I received in response to the recent article I wrote in TSF Magazine (July '12 issue) started me thinking about the ethics of guiding. In the email, a reader described a disturbing guided trip he'd taken and paid for.

Before they left the dock, the man told the guide he and his brother didn't really want to keep limits of trout; they'd keep just a few to be eaten later that day. Apparently, the guide didn't listen or care. The three men walked into a hot bite on big trout at daybreak, and all were involved in catching plenty of fish. About 7:30, the guide announced, "We should have our limit by now," indicating he thought it was time to go back to the dock.

"Not unless you have a bunch of trout on your stringer," the client retorted. "I've only got a couple here, and my brother has just 4 or 5." The guide showed him at least 15 fish on his stringer. According to the email, all or nearly all of them were longer than 20 inches!

They did keep fishing for a while, and the bite slowed. About 9 o'clock, the guide again asserted his wish to head in, saying he was "tired". The clients stated they'd like to fish for redfish, but the guide was ready for the request, saying "they aren't biting". Back to the dock they went.

The client paid for a full day, then posed for pictures with the pile of dead fish, despite the fact the guide had killed most of them. In fact, the guide had broken the law, killing more than his limit!

All of this is disappointing and disturbing. The guide should be fined and suspended from guiding for breaking the law as he did. The client should be encouraged to do things differently in the future.

For me, the ethics of guiding come into play as soon as a potential client contacts me about a fishing trip. I always make a point of clarifying the ways I like to do things--wading and using artificial lures exclusively. I also make sure to mention my boat rules with regard to what we will keep and kill.

That way, a client who doesn't agree with (or share) my priorities can begin looking for someone else to take them fishing. Unfortunately, many guides do not have similar conversations with people before booking trips.

In the worst-case scenario, this is because the guide doesn't want to make things clear for the potential customer. Said guide would rather let all these things reveal themselves after the charter is underway, then do whatever he wants, assuming (correctly in most cases) the client will pay in the end.

My advice to anyone calling a guide to inquire about a trip should make sure and have a conversation with the guide about their expectations. If the client specifically states they want to fish a certain way, and they don't want to kill limits of fish, the guide has a choice to make.

If the guide agrees to provide the kind of trip the customer desires, the customer can expect the guide to follow through. If the guide doesn't do what he said he would, the client has every right to negotiate a new price for the charter, and to give negative feedback to others about the guide. Certainly, refusing to pose in a picture which makes them uncomfortable is well within the clients' rights.

Calling a fishing guide and booking a trip without talking about details related

to the purposes of the trip places the client in a compromised position. Many guides think their job is to help the customers catch a limit of trout. If and when this is accomplished, they think their job is done, their workday over. Clients who specifically state they are wanting to keep limits of trout should therefore beware; guides who hear this probably think no other purpose is in play.

Some people are pleased to be "back at the dock at 9 o'clock". The men who sent me the email which prompted this blog were not, though the guide tried to convince them it was a good thing.

The only way guides like this one will change their ways (or disappear from the guiding community) is if people who hire them clearly state their disappointment and disgust over being treated disrespectfully and refuse to hire them again. Any guide who shows such a low level of respect for the people paying them (and the fish who support their livelihood) should be blasted in every way possible and encouraged to find some other way to make a living.