

Personal Responsibility

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Since taking up scuba diving as a hobby I pay a lot of attention to diving accidents and near misses, always striving to improve my dive skills so I don't become a statistic. Many of these accidents begin with typical behavior I would expect from teenagers; dares, trying to do things beyond your skill level, just doing dumb things. The scuba accidents that happen because of equipment failure are few and far between and can usually be traced back to improper maintenance or knowledge of operation. Of course accidents caused by health issues also occur, but that is beyond the scope of this blog.

In many of the follow up posts about these accidents and incidents people are quick to jump on the instructors, dive masters and other professionals, blaming them for the people who are with them's mistakes. Many folks seem to believe that unless someone tells you don't do something stupid, they are responsible for you doing something stupid. Many times it seems our whole tort system is based on that premise.

For those not familiar with the Scuba certification process, the process involves classroom, self study and practical factors. All of the certification agencies provide training materials that are a part of this certification process. There are also many third-party books available for diving.

Let's examine two divers:

Diver A:

Took a quick Resort Dive cert, decided he loved it. Upon getting home from vacation Diver A enrolled in a full certification class, went to the local library and bookstore and picked up several diving instructional books. Diver A read all that he could and visited many online sources to find out everything he could before class. Diver A read all of the manual, answered all of the questions and participated in class as much as possible.

During the water certification phase Diver A practiced as much as possible and asked questions, even dumb ones.

Diver B:

Took a quick Resort Dive cert, decided he loved it. Upon getting home from vacation Diver B enrolled in a full certification class. Being a very busy person diver B didn't have time to read the materials or do the questions, he got his answers from folks he knew had taken the class before. Diver B did the minimum needed to get certified. Knowing that questions only delayed the class, he didn't ask any questions and often made others in the class feel stupid for asking them.

During the water certification phase Diver B did the minimum required, never feeling totally comfortable during the sessions but figured he could pick it up later.

Ok, which diver would you want as a buddy?

Diver A takes responsibility for his actions and his life, he posts his mistakes to his favorite scuba board and asks for criticisms so he can improve. On dives he does his best to be self-reliant and watch out for his buddies. He carefully monitors his air and depth and pays attention to his dive computer. If the dive starts feeling wrong, he aborts it.

Diver B is rude and arrogant hiding his lack of knowledge by being condescending and belittling those around him. In the water Diver B has poor buoyancy control, sucks down air like he has an unlimited supply and expects everyone to help him. He never checks his air pressure or depth figuring that the dive master will take care of that. Diver B depends on the DM for making sure he doesn't exceed limits, doesn't have a dive computer and barely remembers where he put the recreational dive planner charts, let alone how to use them.

Which diver do you think will immediately think of suing someone if they get bent or have an accident? We all need to take responsibility for ourselves and our actions. I would say more than half of the problems facing the USA, and the World, today are because we don't practice self-responsibility. It is always some one else's fault.

Students don't learn, we blame the teachers, kids misbehave, we blame video games. No one wants to say Johnny can't read because Johnny didn't apply himself to learning to read. Sure, children learn from their parents, however, after a certain age, they have to take responsibility for their actions. We spend too much time finding others to blame for our problems when the person we need to point the finger at is right in the mirror in front of us.

So, what do I believe needs to be taught? These seven basic values:

1. Everyone cannot be a winner
2. Win and lose gracefully
3. Nobody owes you anything
4. Accept criticism
5. Take responsibility for your actions
6. Treat others like you want to be treated, even when they don't
7. Life isn't fair, don't expect it to be

If these seven things were taught to everyone at an early age more than half of the problems in our society would disappear. The only way to build true character is through both winning and losing. We seem to concentrate on nobody ever having to face defeat, we mustn't harm Johnny's self-esteem. Some of my most valuable lessons came from my defeats, not my victories. We have games where no one is allowed to win and everyone gets a trophy, we have to promote students who don't earn it and we reward

benefits to those who have never worked to earn them. And we wonder why society is going to hell in a hand basket? You can't give someone self-esteem, it has to be earned from both winning and losing and dealing with both.

An old saw says that when you point at someone else, there are three fingers pointing back at you. You have to take responsibility for whatever you do. You are responsible for your life, your learning and your safety, no one else.