

So you want to be a Scuba Instructor

... just as soon as you get OW certified

Text by Steve Lewis

Do you remember your first reaction to being able to breathe underwater? What was the first thing you wanted to do when you caught sight of a coral head liberally seasoned with tiny, multi-colored bait fish? When your instructor handed you your very first c-card, did you get a strong urge to swap places with them?

Judging by regular postings on any one of the various scuba forums and diving message boards in Cyberland, a fair percentage of newly-minted divers suffer through an overwhelmingly strong urge to replace their current situation with the “romance and glamor” of life as a scuba instructor on a warm beach someplace exotic and far away from the nine-to-five rat-race, the daily commute along clogged highways, and the vagaries of a climate that features seasons... especially cold ones.

The wording of their memos varies a little but the core message goes something like: “I have just got my XYZ open-water diver certification, and I have decided to become a scuba instructor! Can you give me some advice?” Occasionally, time is mentioned, too, as in, “I already have six dives under my belt and have enrolled in the XYZ professional scuba school so that I can become a scuba instructor next week...”

Ah, who can blame them? I am not sure if diving is truly unique among “lifestyle” sports in this regard, but it really is quite amazing that scads of recent inductees to our little community (some still waiting for the mail to bring them the piece of plastic that tells the world they are a paid-up and checked-out member) want to teach others how to do it.

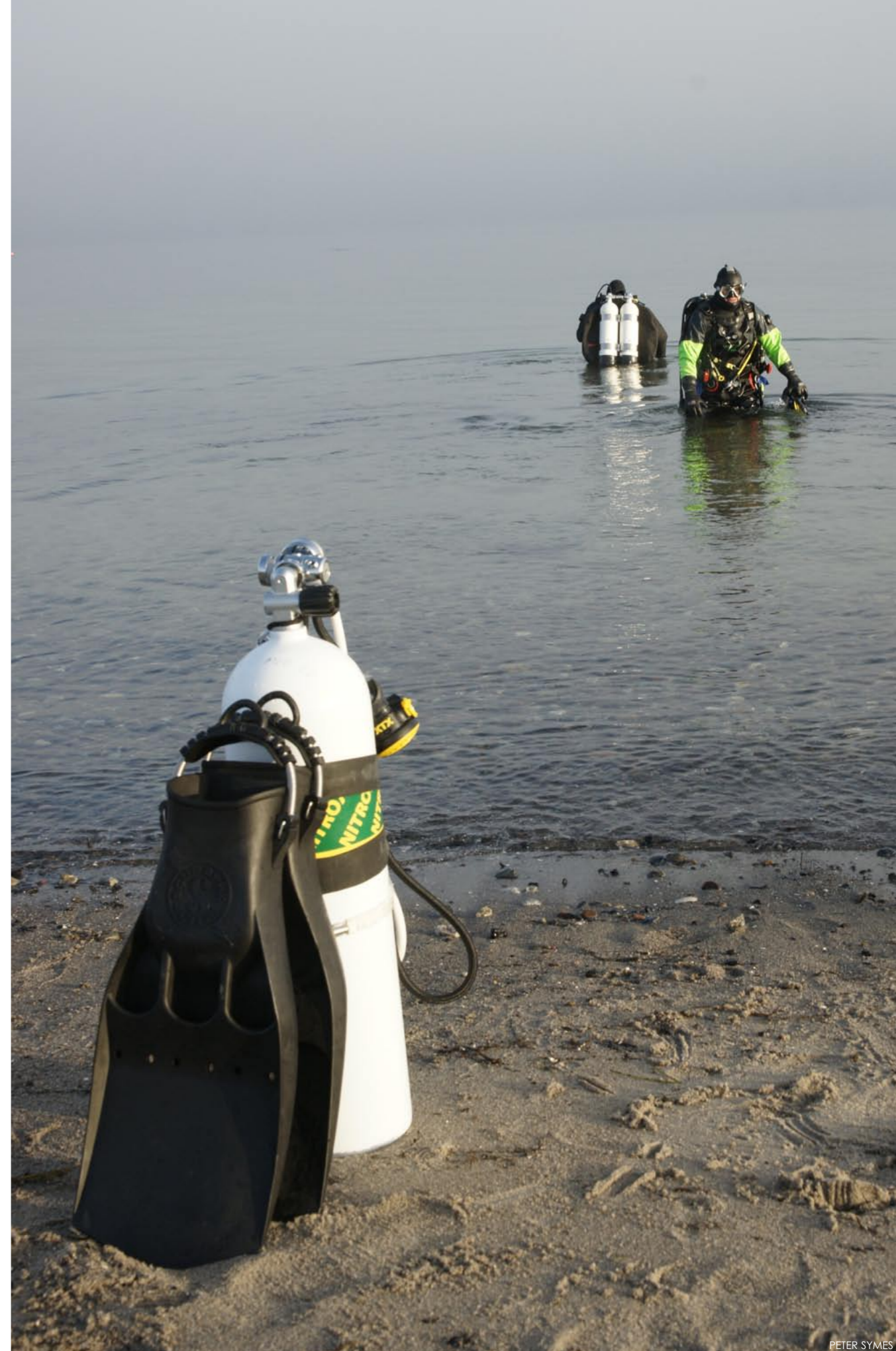
You simply have to love that level of enthusiasm, and when any of us get a chance to reply, we should take these requests seriously and actually try to help. However, I admit that my reaction can be hash sometimes. I have a slightly jaded perspective, and my view of the scuba industry—through what’s left of the rose-tinted spectacles I started

out with—is clouded by the much less attractive hard-edged primary colors of the real world.

Those of you who do actually teach scuba professionally—regardless of which level and to whom and where—will probably agree that the romance is a little white lie from a V-P of marketing someplace, and the glamor of climbing into slightly damp, slightly stinky drysuit underwear on day four of a six-day CCR Cave Program is severely limited. However, teaching people to dive has its moments.

Okay, so let’s put all that aside and instead, let’s concentrate on what advice we *should* give the neophyte diver who is hell-bent on becoming a diving professional, because “Forget about it!” or “You must be kidding” are simply unfriendly and unhelpful.

Your mileage may vary, but here are my suggestions for the enthusiastic newcomer who thinks being a diving instructor is something they simply have to do. These are things that a perspective employer (shop owner, resort operator or punter looking for an instructor) will probably find appealing. Oh, and a quick qualifier: these suggestions assume



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New courses



Diving Diseases Research Centre (DDRC) and SDI are proud to

announce that DDRC will now be able to offer SDI certification for CPR, First Aid, Oxygen Admin and AED training courses.

The combination of these two organisations means that divers will be able to receive training from the United Kingdom's leading hyperbaric research and treatment charity while receiving cer-

tification from one of the world's leading diving agencies.

Divers taking the DDRC Diving Accident Responder Course (DARC) will be able to benefit from receiving training from world-class diving doctors and trainers. They will then be able to receive certifications from SDI and gain recognition for their training. This certification can be recognised as part of their ongoing training towards Advanced Diver, Divemaster or even Open Water Instructor.

DDRC trainer recently completed a cross-over course to SDI non-diving speciality instructors with SDI/TDI Instructor Trainer Mark Powell. "DDRC are the perfect candidates for the SDI non-diving speciality instructor. This unique scheme allows SDI to make use

of the world's leading experts to deliver non-diving speciality courses. Who better to train divers on what to do in a diving accident than DDRC? We are very proud to have DDRC as an SDI training facility."

Jon Parlour, Training Manager at DDRC said, "We are very happy to be working with SDI on our DARC course. We were impressed with the structure of the SDI course and material as well as their training philosophy and are hoping to be running additional SDI/TDI courses in the future."

For details on other TDI/SDI courses contact:

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that the perspective instructor considers teaching others to dive is a business rather than a charitable service.

Curiosity and empathy

The first and most important requirements (because we are taking enthusiasm as a given) are curiosity and empathy. I put curiosity first on the list because teaching—whether the topic is scuba diving or applied mathematics or car repair—requires both the student and instructor to have a real desire to learn. And certainly a new instructor has a lot to learn. Perhaps the most engaging thing about diving and certainly about teaching it is just how much there is to discover. Most of what presents itself for discovery is about people and how they react to being underwater... little of which is covered in your average diving textbook.

It is curiosity and what's uncovered by the curious instructor that adds value to a bare-bones scuba class taught by the incurious and complacent or—worse yet—fed-up instructor. The ins and outs of diving at a basic level really are not that complex: breathe in, breathe out, repeat, surface slowly. However, these skills are surprisingly difficult to get across

to the average student regardless of how strong their internal motivations might be.

Education is about changing behavior, and as long as the person delivering the education understands that different people respond differently to the same stimuli—and is enthusiastically curious as to why—most other things fall into place... sometimes.

Empathy is just as important, if for nothing else, for the times when things do not fall into place.

The most common trait shared by successful instructors is empathy with the people they are charged with looking after—and make no mistake, a class filled with open-water scuba students take some looking after.

The most common failing of instructors who do not enjoy success is lack of empathy. Just my opinion, but even at the most complex, risky, elevated level of technical instruction, there's room for understanding and empathy. The instructor's job is to identify what part of breathe in, breathe out, repeat and surface slowly is challenging his or her student. Indifference to their plight is not going to help the process along.

DAN Lectures

Divers Alert Network (DAN) America delivers a new talk on diving physiology, medicine and safety research on the first Wednesday of every other month. This is the third year of the bi-monthly public lecture series, where divers from the region have the perfect opportunity to hear from a variety of local experts. DAN's Senior Research Director, Dr Petar Denoble, will present, '*The Heart in Diving*', on Wednesday June 5, at 6 West Colony Place, Durham, North Carolina.

"Diving affects cardiovascular functions through the effects of hydrostatic pressure, thermal status, breathing efforts, increased oxygen partial pressure and various other stressors. Healthy hearts adjust well to these challenges but hearts affected by symptomatic or asymptomatic disease may be less able to cope. We will consider how common cardiovascular conditions may affect divers and their ability to enjoy diving and to stay safe. We will also discuss steps to maintain health and mitigate risks."

The evening kicks off at 18:15 with a pre-lecture social with light refreshments sponsored by 'Down Under', a local dive center. This is followed by a 45–55 minute talk and an additional 30 minutes for questions and discussion.

Dr Neal W Pollock, a Research Director at DAN instigated the series in 2011, said, "I felt it was important to reach the divers in our own backyard and this is a wonderful way to interact with the local community, letting them share in the evolution of new talks. Testing new material on a live audience is both fun and productive, frequently guiding revision or even new topics. Many people write to us

with questions, but the relaxed open venue prompts discussion

that can bring better understanding to both sides.

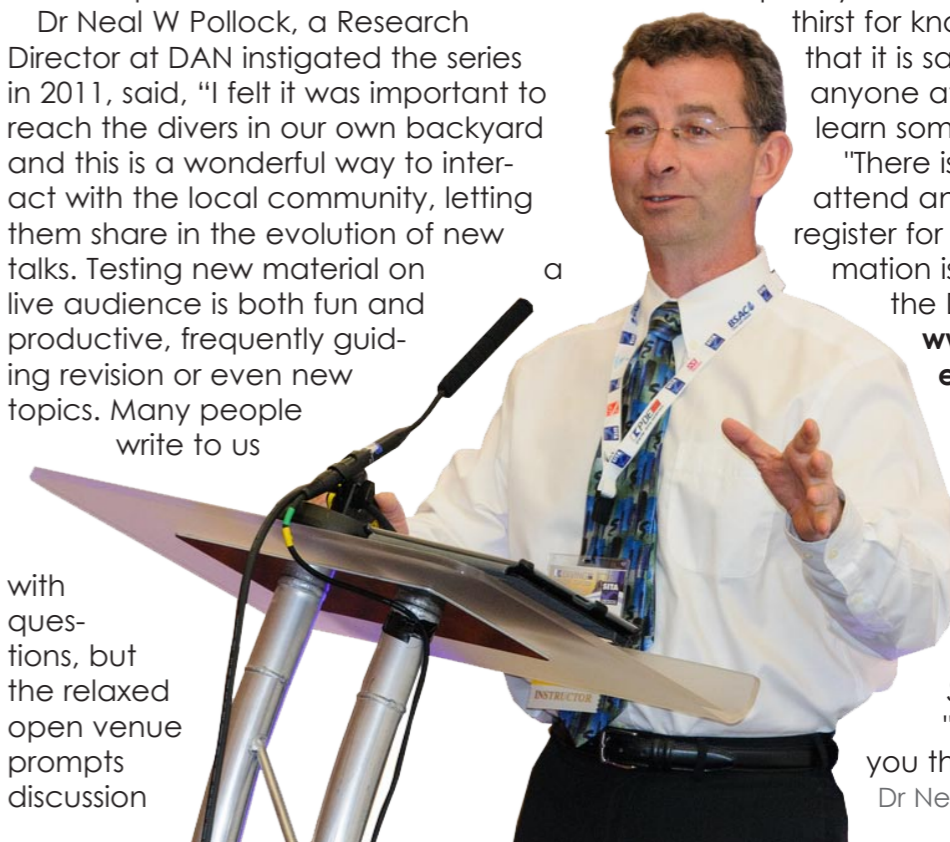
"The social preceding each talk provides the casual icebreaker to set the tone. The post-talk Q&A sessions frequently run over to meet the

thirst for knowledge. I think that it is safe to say that anyone attending will learn something of value.

"There is no charge to attend and no need to register for talks. More information is available on the DAN website:

www.dan.org/events. Looking ahead, August 7 will showcase Dr Matias Nochetto, presenting, *Critical Thinking of Post-Dive Symptoms.*

"We hope to see you there." ■
Dr Neal Pollock



Jason Brown - Bardo Creative



Scuba Instructor

Before the emergence of technical dive programs aimed at recreational divers like us, there wasn't much readily available for the development for superior diving skills outside of the standard sport diving pathway from rescue diver, dive master to instructor. And one could argue that the curriculum for those certifications lacked emphasis on the key areas that technical divers pay attention to.

Not to say that *all* sport diving instructors should be certified as cave divers or trimix CCR pilots or whatever, but *all* sport diving instructors should be logging a few dozen personal dives each year, and in a semi-perfect world, will gain a lot from earning advanced certs for themselves. If nothing else, being on the receiving end of a scuba course helps to build their instructor-student empathy.

Life beyond diving

In addition and finally, general life experience outside the underwater

world is useful for a dive instructor, too. If nothing else, it helps them to relate to their students and gives them something to talk about other than Boyle's Law!

There's really nothing to chuckle at when someone who has yet to finish their open-water checkout dives tells the world they want to become a scuba instructor. Our community needs those folks... desperately; however, there's slightly more to doing the job right than knowing how to work a projector and how to connect a regulator to a scuba cylinder. It just looks that easy.

Dive Safe. ■

Steve Lewis is a Technical Diving International (TDI) instructor-trainer based in Ontario, Canada, who has authored and co-authored several diving textbooks. In addition to serving as editor and contributor for several international dive publications, he has also served on the Training Advisory Panel for TDI, SDI and ERDI. Visit: www.techdivertraining.org



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Business sense

Another more tangible skill that will help any new instructor is a background in some type of business. An MBA in marketing, accounting, project management, human resource management and the like will be a bonus, but anything related will be a real asset. Even knowing how to use the latest version of the most popular bookkeeping software would be a start. So too would be some understanding of how retail works and knowing how to solve the basic equation: cost + value = price.

Language and communication

The next skill on this list involves language and communications. A second language is probably the best start—Mandarin, Spanish,

French, Russian, Portuguese. I'd vote for any of these, but with a real bias towards Mandarin. The world has changed, and English may be the lingua franca, but something besides it can help... a lot... especially since the growing world economies are no longer part of mainland Europe or North America.

However, even in cases where potential candidates are uni-lingual, a thorough knowledge of that one language is really key to being able to get a point across, and more importantly, listen and understand what's being said to them.

Being fluent and confident are required skills when standing in front of a group of people whose behavior you wish to change.

Experience

Lastly, experience as a diver is kind of nice for an instructor.

I think most of the sport agencies require inductees for instructor development programs to have a minimum of 100 dives logged. A hundred dives is not that many really but it hopefully allows time enough for the perspective instructor to have had a few things go pear-shaped while underwater. Since one "bad" dive has the potential to be a better learning experience than 15 or 20 perfect dives, perhaps we should be asking how many times they've been faced with the shock and awe of a dive that's gone so far from perfect that it's barely recognizable—and of course, what they learned from it.



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