

The HangLine

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The Diving Industry - Is it Working?

When PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) standardized diver training and retail in the late 1960's, they opened the floodgates and the expansion of industry grew wildly. Initially it facilitated the establishment of safe training standards and a marketable and insurable product. However over the years the profession became saturated with training agencies, Instructors, dive boat charter companies and shops.

The training agencies, in order to maintain their annual sales have not only had to continue to improve their product line, but increase it as well offering dozens of specialty programs each requiring a manual and certification fee. In addition to expanding curriculums they made it easier to both become an Instructor, and to be an Instructor. Eventually the standards for all programs from open water level through to Instructor Trainer required less

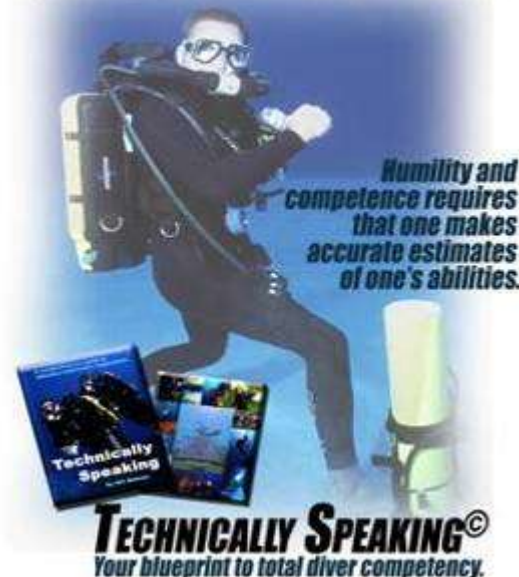
experience and prerequisites not to mention a less intense qualifying process.

Today the industry is inundated with 'fast food' style products, including 'whirlwind' introductory courses to cattle boats dropping platoons of mud-puppies on vulnerable

environments. We are now faced with a generation of diving Instructors who have little no experience relative to the caliber of professionals in the industry fifteen or twenty years ago. As a result the industry has experienced a dilution in the level of competency and ability expected of a diving professional. Yes, we are generalizing, and we do need to acknowledge the

various operations and individuals who have committed the time and effort to maintain a quality product and service. There are several excellent and experienced professionals, many with

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whom we hold a great deal of respect and admiration for.

We also have to extend some gratitude to the training agencies for without them we all would not likely have had the positive and rewarding careers we have had in this business.

Remember when Instructors could recount countless tales of adventure, each with a learning point or two? They demonstrated confidence and you could not help but respect their experience and knowledge. It made you want to go out and explore and learn all that you could about the underwater world. For anyone who has been in this business for more than ten years however, the change in Instructor experience is significant. Despite DAN's (Divers Alert Network) statistics that show a decline in diver accidents per capita over the last fifty years, anyone with any time served on the front lines of dive tourism knows that the border between a safe dive and a diving incident is increasingly becoming more vulnerable. Perhaps what has helped keep the statistics low is the vast improvement on diving equipment. In fact if we had to provide some key milestones in the development of diving industry that have contributed to the reduction in diver accidents we would list the following:

1. Improvements of diving equipment technology,
2. Advancement of the continuing diver training for using that equipment.

Somewhat ironic is it not, that training can quickly go from a positive aspect in creating a safe diving infrastructure to a weak link? Where are we going in this industry if the same intrinsic value that abruptly lowered the rate of diving accidents and added adventure to diving, is quickly becoming watered down? ~ DFP

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There is a difference between what Instructors are responsible for teaching and what Divers are responsible for learning.

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