

## Don't Shortcut the Learning Curve

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Picture this: Two divers, both with doubles, on a boat moored over a wreck. One has a failed regulator, but elects to dive anyway; after all, it isn't very deep. Being dry-suited he places his working regulator on the left post to allow suit inflation.

Into the water and down to the wreck. They run a guideline in and both divers enter the wreck. An entanglement, a silt out; the dive is turned and the first diver exits ahead of his buddy and waits, and waits... and waits until finally he has to ascend.

I'm sure you can guess the rest. When the body was recovered, the tanks were empty; the right post had rolled open to let everything escape. The victim was an open water diver wearing technical equipment; shutting down a valve in a crisis was not likely to be in his problem-solving repertoire. If you have technical training you will probably see many other problems in this scenario than just the rolled open valve that finally tipped the scales and senselessly wasted a human life.

The point here is that all too often diving accidents aren't accidents. Getting struck by lightning on the way to work tomorrow would be an accident, a random event. Getting badly injured or worse killed, in the water tomorrow probably wouldn't be. Many diving accidents are not random, they happen when a diver gets into a situation for which they were not trained, in to an environment where they are unable to cope or when stress builds to a level beyond which they are able to deal with.

Technical diving affords more opportunity for fast moving stressful situations to unfold than many other avenues of our chosen sport. Understanding this, more than anything else, will keep you out of trouble and possibly save your life. We all have limits and no one is bulletproof.

Formal training bestows the knowledge and skills, the base from which you gain the understanding and confidence to make good in water and out of water decisions. Water skills sessions build on existing ability level and develop your readiness and capacity to respond in new situations. It is paramount that you and your instructor make an honest appraisal of your performance after each session.

While your instructor should serve as sound motivator and good role model the correct attitude to apply the skills and knowledge you gain from any formal training is ultimately down to you.

For technical training, more than any other, choose an instructor you respect and whose judgment you trust and remember that the learning curve takes time. While you may want to push ahead as your confidence increases take a moment to stop and think about the above scenario - without training and the proper application of that training what lies ahead can bite you very hard indeed.

Become completely familiar with one set of conditions before you raise the bar. For example, there is a big increase in the required gas and ascent management skills coming up from eighty meters as opposed to fifty. While you may be comfortable handling a situation in fifty meters - don't find out how different it is in eighty meters the hard way. If your instructor is discouraging you from the next level of training or the next depth there is probably a good reason, don't be afraid to give it a little more time. Time allows you to obtain and become familiar with equipment you'll need and to acquire the physical fitness you may not yet have to be comfortable with greater decompression obligations and exposures. Time is also important meet (and exceed) the prerequisites for your next course and time, just once or twice, to make a mistake you can recover and learn from.

The sad truth is that many divers do not know how unprepared they are for any given situation and its only an emergency that wakes them up. Nothing can replace solid training and practice of emergency skills, avoid the attitude that says: "I've cracked it, this is easy." Keep learning and look for the best courses and instructors possible to further yourself

Your level now is baseline, as you build on it remember that if you go too far, too fast; there is a very, very fine line between a bad dive and a body recovery.