
CHOOSING A TECHNICAL INSTRUCTOR

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It is a big decision to go technical so the choice of the right instructor is crucial. Not all teaching styles suit all people. Not all of us respond to the same triggers. It is a very subjective thing.

Stick or Twist?

It is common for divers to follow further training with the instructor who taught them to dive in the first place as long as it all went well of course. A bond has been forged, a friendship has been developed and there is a degree of comfort in extending your skills and the range of your diving with someone you know and trust. Better the devil you know, some may say.

However, this relationship can also involve an element of dependency, which can inhibit your growth as a diver. Choosing a different instructor for a new training course may take you out of the comfort zone you have established with your original instructor and force you to be more self-reliant. Changing instructors may also expose you to a different approach to diving as everyone has their own style and no two instructors will approach the sport in exactly the same way. This can help you grow.

Currency

Currency is a major factor. There may be practical considerations too; just because an instructor has a card authorizing him to teach a certain level of diving does not necessarily mean he is currently actively engaged in that type of diving. It is 10 years since I taught an Open Water course; I have a card, (SEVERAL CARDS!) that say I can do it but I would not recommend myself to teach at that level today. I'd make mistakes and would not do as good a job as someone who is currently teaching new divers every week. In the technical world many top instructors only dive rebreathers now so they may not be the best people to choose to take training from if you want to learn on open-circuit.

Consider also that some instructors are specialists in certain fields, such as Cave or Wreck Diving, and they may have more to offer than a "general practitioner" whose skill set covers a wider area but who is not so expert in one specific subject.

Old Salt or Young Gun

Do not choose an instructor simply on the basis of experience. Of course, experience is important but be aware that, as in all professional fields, a person who has been doing something for a long time can become jaded and set in their ways or they might just be too successful to devote their whole attention to you. Newer instructors are often more enthusiastic, attentive to detail, open to new methods and ready to put in extra time.

Ask

It is unlikely that you were the one who chose your initial instructor but if you did, you probably made the decision based on a suggestion from a friend. To ask for recommendations from people who have already done the course and whose opinions you trust is still a good first move when looking for a new instructor.

However, as you are now a certified diver, you are better armed with the knowledge and experience to conduct more in-depth research and reach a more informed decision.

Talk to the instructors directly, either by phone or in person. Ask all the questions you can think of and assess the enthusiasm of their response. If an instructor does not have time for your questions before the course, he sure as hell is not going to become more attentive after he has pocketed your money!

Watch

Observe at first hand the instructor's attitude to training and personal dive skills. Go out on a boat trip with your buddy when the instructor is teaching or guiding dives. Is he sufficiently comfortable with his own skills to devote 100% of his underwater attention to the divers? Do you find his personality and approach to work sympathetic? After all, these are crucial qualities to look for in someone to whom you will be handing a considerable degree of responsibility for your safety.

Value

Finally, never choose your instructor on the basis of price alone. You always get what you pay for. A cheap course will invariably mean rushed lectures, short dives, a tight schedule and little time for questions, individual assessment or remedial work. If the course is cheap, the instructor will cut corners or you'll find yourself incurring extra fees during the course. Beware of incomplete courses or those that utter phrases such as, "ah, you already know this stuff!" that are the hallmark of the lazy instructor.
