

# Unexpected Lessons from Teaching Scuba Diving

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I was as Scuba diving Instructor for more than 30 years. I and some of my friends had originally began teaching Scuba diving to keep our diving and mental skills sharp for the adventurous diving we did. It was a convenient way to do that. We were mostly shipwreck divers and eventually dived many iconic shipwrecks around the world. I have dived just about 160 shipwrecks. I never intended to dive so many, they just added up over the years. And over the years we taught generations of new Scuba divers.

We began as YMCA instructors and transitioned to Scuba International and CMAS instructors when the YMCA ended its long-standing program. Our course always stayed true to its YMCA roots and in many ways was influenced by our passion. The course wasn't for everyone, and it barely paid for itself. However, we taught hundreds of students to dive, and in our view how to dive right. Not matter how difficult it was for some students; our commitment was that we would stick with them for as long as it took. It was never about the money for us. We stayed sharp over the decades and never had a problem diving in remote places on challenging shipwrecks. Although we certainly had frightened ourselves a time or two. Teaching Scuba had paid off and kept us safe. But after about 20 years of teaching Scuba an unexpected epiphany struck like a lightning bolt.

The epiphany had hit one day when my buddy Jack and I were driving home from a quarry in Pennsylvania after we had done check-out dives for another class of divers. As we had drove along causally reviewing the weekend and the students it had struck us – teaching Scuba diving to so many varied men, women, and children had fundamentally changed us as individuals! It had been a totally unexpected revelation. The process of teaching Suba diving had made us better persons. No matter how different from us a student might have been, our commitment to get them through the training had forced us to establish relationships with individuals we probably would have never known or even come in contact. Some students were afraid of water, or could

barely swim, were claustrophobic, felt self-conscious in a bathing suit, were intimidated to sit in a classroom or to be tested, had a disability, or were good swimmers who thought they knew everything. It didn't matter, we had to work with them all and establish a relationship, nurture them through the training and keep them safe. The epiphany was that we had in the process learned more about ourselves from them, then they had learned from us!

I know that for many Scuba diving instruction is a business, and they have to modify their teaching approaches accordingly. But even so, I think becoming a Scuba instructor can not only be a fun way to "get wet and blow bubbles," but also an extraordinary way to learn about yourself. In the end, being a Scuba instructor had enhanced both by personal life and professional career in many tangible ways. Who would have thought that when I first had put on mask, fins, and snorkel –certainly not me!