

ALL the gear

...and NO idea



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Old sayings, a paradox, a crutch and the real deal.

Old sayings

Many have told me that the second rule in diving is to look good. This seems to be an argument that rides well with short adages like 'looking the part's 9/10 being the part', 'first impressions count' and 'you only have one go at giving a first impression'. I'm personally very sceptical about any of this.

When it comes to every day life, just knowing that many people blindly subscribe to these types of common beliefs gives me concern, and when I see someone dressed to perfection and often smelling of some sickening perfume or after-shave, my first thoughts are 'what are they after, and what are they not going to tell me?' I guess I might be a bit too suspicious but in these situations I'm wondering just what deficiencies or deceit is being hidden behind this wonderful appearance.

Even so, I don't think there'll be much argument that if a person has the right gear for the right job, gives the appearance of knowing something about what they're involved in, things might go okay.

So what issues can be of concern here when related to recreational diving and/or diver training?

A paradox



Quite a few dive operations use equipment for diver training that is, to be polite, well used. The rationale for keeping on with it is that the leaky masks, automatically filling BCDs, hard to breathe from regulators will inspire students more quickly to buy their own gear. Yeah, right! I don't think so! It's more likely the opposite.

I know that many, if not most dive instructors will agree that the best way to train someone is in perfectly fitting dive gear; wetsuits that are contour fitted, masks that don't leak, regs that don't free flow or have more bubbles coming out of the first stage fittings than your average spa bath.



When everything is brand spanking new and works well, students have far less anxiety about how they'll be with it out in open water. Many retailers too would get on board with this thinking. Obviously, this would be a perfect way to train someone and fill the till at the same time. The paradox however, as we all know, is that most students aren't usually in any position at this stage, either financially or geographically (like backpackers), to lay out several thousand dollars before they know how to dive and/or whether this sport is for them. So what to do?

Some retailers/instructors go to the expense of renewing their training equipment regularly and give a high degree of concern to the comfort of those to whom they are responsible. I commend this. Wholesalers also help with this and give selected instructors the opportunity, at minimal (if any) cost, into wearing the latest and greatest. They know, as do most other dive professionals, that students often purchase what their instructor is wearing. I'm all for instructors being



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looked after this way and equally that student divers get geared up appropriately as soon as they are able, but referring to another often quoted adage, 'there are two sides to every coin' and a nice new set of equipment could also be a signal of something altogether different.

Crutches

About three decades ago, and eager to please, I had my first experience of selling a complete package of dive gear to one of my students after his very first session in the pool. Dressed in the best he could get, he was pleased, I was pleased, and the shop manager was delighted. The newly bedecked student looked like 'the bee's knees' and stood out from the rest on his sea test. But two weeks after it had finished, he came to me asking if he could get a refund – he'd decided that diving wasn't for him and for whatever reason, he was calling it a day. You can imagine the consequent turmoil generated. Myself, being a slow learner, and within a year, saw the same scenario repeated and I fell for it again – but at least learned some serious lessons. I could generate an essay on this alone but suffice it to say:

the enthusiasm for owning the best of gear could too easily be a signal for better skill training and/or probably more time spent on chatting about motivations. And not falling for just a selling opportunity that everyone appears to want.

Many years later and in an entirely different setting, I was working in a tropical diving



destination that for those who were to ask how much it was to stay there, they obviously couldn't afford it. Here, I was

frequently challenged by those who had probably been down a similar track I have just described, but these folk just hadn't yet figured out they'd be going back for their refund. Equipment to the gills; brand new, sophisticated, state-of-the-art and absolutely no idea how to use it. Too often I ended up dragging someone along as a straggler looking like a Christmas tree full of goodies and with little air left, to their safety stop. Seldom were they not wearing a computer that gave them so much information I'm sure that it just stopped short of talking to them. But far too few knew how to use them.

The real deal

Common sense, that paradoxically rare stuff, tells us that there is nearly always more than one way to look at things. I've intimated above that looking the part and having all the right gear might hint at either a mild form of deceit hiding a deficiency but it could quite easily be someone who actually does know their stuff. In previous articles I've stressed that the best way to figure out what the case may be is to simply have a chat and find out directly. We should go out of our way to do this. If you're sharing the same dive boat/dive site, it may be that they might need assistance at some point and you'd be wise to be prepared for it.

Whether in beginner training or out there at a dive site, good quality and well serviced equipment is often the best way to guarantee comfort and may give that extra edge when needing to get out of a tricky situation. It could be that some divers we see have all the gear and no idea but for those recognising that possibility, to chat and support, if necessary, is a better idea still.

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