

The Downward Spiral of Scuba Instruction

By Tec Clark

Scuba lessons keep getting a misguided label as a “Barrier to Entry” into this sport. Research has proven that both time and costs are significant factors to learning how to dive, and further embracing a diving lifestyle. In turn, training hours and requirements are continuously reduced, which aids to bringing down course prices and shortens the length of the course. But ultimately what is this doing to the student’s experience of learning to dive? And what is it doing to the quality of diver? The common prospective student’s primary goal is to get certified. If the end product is receiving a C-card, than human nature tells us to follow the path of least resistance to achieve that C-card. The top two questions asked by perspective students are, **“How much is your course?”** and **“How long does it take?”** Not surprisingly, the students flock to the cheaper, easier and shorter course. This prompts competing instructors and retailers to call their certification agencies and point out how another dive shop following another agencies standard is getting more business. It does not take long before the other agencies consider modifying their standards to accommodate the needs of their instructors and shops. So begins the downward spiral of instruction. Unfortunately, here is where interpretations are amiss. Many scuba agencies have stated that this phenomenon is the “consumer demand”. The fact is, our industry is promoting the wrong product – certification. The public takes the path of least resistance, getting it by shopping for the quickest, easiest and cheapest way of getting certified. Instead, our industry should be promoting the benefits of becoming a good diver. We should never underestimate the power of human development. Do you think an individual wants the shortest golf lesson or the easiest yoga lesson? Of course not. In those lessons the person can grow, develop and get better at it. By bettering themselves at the sport, they engage in it because it is their passion and their lifestyle. On the other hand in our industry we are witnessing a dramatic decline in the quality of certified divers. Many boat captains and divemasters are reporting increases in new divers who cannot set up scuba equipment, nor control their buoyancy. Reports of incidents involving new diver stress and panic are also on the rise. These new consumers, after one or two bad experiences as a certified diver, choose other activities instead of diving, and diver retention in our industry suffers. Repeat business at the dive shop suffers too and the downward spiral of instruction continues.