

## How To Be Successful As A New GUE Instructor

By David Rhea

During a brief instructor meeting while attending the Oztek conference in Australia a new instructor asked for some tips on getting started as a GUE instructor. We discussed a few items, but later that evening I was approached again and this time asked to write an article for Quest outlining some of the techniques and tips for the new guys.

To begin, we must first make sure every new GUE instructor realizes what talents they have and what differentiates them within our industry. One only has to think back as to the prerequisites to enter into this, the most prestigious instructor ranks in the history of diving. Let's take a Fundamentals instructor for example since our Rec program is quite new. To consider becoming an instructor the candidate had to have first taken Fundamentals, followed by 25 post training dives before being required to take both tech 1 and cave 1 each again requiring 25 experience dives post class to progress. Now they can begin the instructor process. This will entail several internships before being recommended to a 7 day ITC. After this unless they are exceptional, they will have more internships to do and then on to their evaluation, which requires a minimum of 2 signatures, one of which must be from a Training Council member. This instructor process is virtually impossible to complete in less than one year. This being said they have been taught, evaluated and we as an organization have the comfort in knowing they are the best of the best at this level.

I spell out the process for 2 reasons, first to let those who have not reviewed our standards know just what our instructors have gone through and the depth of our determination to insure the highest standards in our instructor making process. Second I bring this up to say, once you reach this status, you should have the confidence to know you can proudly promote yourself globally as an equal to all other Fundamentals instructors. Often I have heard young instructors state that they can't demand the same price structure as veteran instructors, or that they feel that they need to offer special prices to fill their classes. This is first and foremost incorrect, as you are a highly trained expert, who has been evaluated, qualified, and certified by the same individuals you feel you are unequal to. Second, our organization has chosen you as an ambassador for GUE in your community, and we want you to be successful as a result of all your efforts, and as such we promote you as an expert and an equal. This begins by your having the confidence to price your talents on par with the veteran instructors who have determined the market value for such training and have set this value for all GUE instructors.

So how do I build my relationship with my local Dive Center? First let me say that as a dive store owner for over 17 years, and a manufacturer's rep for over 15, I can tell you that all stores are looking for talented instructors willing to teach quality classes and support gear sales. Personally I recommend you meet with your favorite local dive store and ask for the opportunity to conduct classes at their facility. I would advise you ask nothing in return other than for personal nitrox fills and the ability to use their facility. Ask if they are willing to promote your courses within their community utilizing their existing email list, newsletter, etc. In return, present them with a professional packet showing the details of the Fundamentals program complete with the mandatory equipment list, course outline, gas requirements, hours, and be sure and remind them

of the post class practice dives the students will be doing, coming to them for fills and additional equipment. If you approached them and suggested they give you a few trial months to see how things go and at the end of that trial period, you would like to be allowed an instructor discount for personal purchases equal to whatever they currently offer their staff instructors. If you present yourself in a clean, professional manner with an attractively detailed package outlining the parameters of a mutually beneficial instructor/store relationship, I am confident they will be impressed and open-minded.

A few tips for making this symbiotic relationship work.

1. Don't ask for ANY commission
2. Don't offer ANY discounts or commissions on your teaching fees
3. Always be professional, courteous, respectful, and supportive of the dive center and their staff.
4. Promote their store exclusively, as you are asking them to do for you
5. Never sell any equipment you purchase from your supporting store to any of your students, ask the owner if he is interested in doing a trade back or how they would like you to handle your old gear when it gets tired and unprofessional looking or you wish to make upgrades. If you want to sell dive gear, open your own store.
6. Be responsible, if they give you access to the store after hours or trust you with the keys, the compressor, etc, treat it like it was your own.
7. Offer to conduct workshops and seminars to help promote both your classes and get customers into the store.
8. Encourage them to become a GUE facility, as this will support the organization and work as a marketing vehicle for them. Offer to split the cost.
9. Do an equipment walk through explaining the required components each GUE fundamentals student will require, (invite the entire staff and buy some pizza)
10. Absolutely make sure the owner knows you want this to be successful for the store and financially beneficial for you both.

One of the best thing you can do up front is encourage the owner to get him/herself and the staff trained in GUE fundamentals. Offer zero discount! I have never given a free GUE class in my life and I would never suggest you do either. I have always said, "It will be the best class you have taken in your life or I will completely refund your money." I am confident if you can get the owner to take the training, that not only will you never have the need give them their money back, but you will 9 times out of 10 cement a relationship that will make working together a great success.

Being an independent instructors who bounces from store to store, trying to get the best deals without having to commit to any one store, just builds animosity, resentment, and is quite frankly exactly why some of these relationships are so hard to nurture. Working with a successful dive store is like diving with a GUE trained buddy, smooth, productive, and painless.

I have a saying I live by "Quality, Service, Price, pick 2 it is impossible to have all three". I have spent a lifetime promoting this concept, and frankly believe most individuals want the quality and service, and don't really care about price if you truly give them the other 2. The reason you became a GUE instructor was to offer the highest quality training available, and this comes at an unprecedented cost. If you never, ever give it away, I am confident you will always give each and every student the absolute best quality and service you have to offer. And let's face it that's why

you chose GUE.

How about professionalism? As a GUE instructor, you are held to the absolute highest standards. We have 100% quality control, and we use it to insure the instructor we made is the instructor we always have. Your attitude, punctuality, appearance, as well as the quality of your courses are always reflective of GUE, your fellow instructors, your GUE community and the dive store you represent. Something as little as leaving your phone on, being inefficient and making the days too long, or consistently running late, can quickly destroy your reputation before you can get a good following. Remember, word of mouth fills most all of our classes, and you can afford not to be recommended by your past students.

So how do I get my students?

First I recommend you pick the store you want to work with and get the previous mentioned relationship started, as they should have hundreds if not thousands of customers who have never had Fundamentals. Next I would start offering a workshop at least one weekend a month that does a basic introduction to GUE and the fundamentals program. Naturally don't offer the workshop unless you have some handouts outlining the dates, details, and prices of your available courses. Always remember you only have to teach the first few and then if you do a good job, you will have those Raving Fans (my favorite book by the way) filling your future classes for you. Advertise in Quest, so GUE trained divers in your area are know that you have received your instructor rating and that you will be offering classes in the area for their friends and family. Naturally, email, Facebook, Twitter, and a sharp website are paramount for starting out and building your following and your community. And last but probably most important is to build that community and the best way to do that is to organize and promote local dives where folks can build that social network that is unfortunately a lost art in our sport these days, but we are starting to see a glimmer of hope of this returning around the world via GUE. If you always show people you love diving and you prove it by personally staying active, spearheading local dives, and showing your passion, you will hold their respect and. They will send you every friend they have.

Good luck, be proud of yourself, I know we are.