

Am I Really DIR?

By David Rhea

Recently, in addition to my regular cave classes, I have had the great satisfaction of teaching several DIR Fundamentals courses. When, prior to the commencement of these classes, I reviewed the required student registration forms, I noticed a common thread running through them. Almost unanimously the students registering for these classes indicated that they were DIR. Some even professed they were so committed to DIR that they organized dive clubs under its banner; others still demonstrated their staunch dedication to the DIR cause by designing and wearing T-shirts, displaying license plates and other DIR specific regalia.

Now please don't misunderstand me; I am thrilled to see that DIR has generated so much loyalty and excitement in the diving community and that individuals are going to such lengths to demonstrate their support for it. Simply taking DIR Fundamentals training speaks volumes about their desire to "do it right." Ironically, however, I often find that many of those who see themselves as DIR are exactly those who lack a true understanding of the essential elements of "Doing It Right."

What I would like to do here is outline what I believe are some absolute essentials to being DIR. First, divers can only understand and practice the DIR philosophy if initially they have been properly taught all of its essential components. There are two ways to do this. The first is through GUE training. By adhering to the holistic diving philosophy communicated in these classes, divers will dive DIR. The second is by undergoing an extensive apprenticeship program in the WKPP. Each of these avenues requires not only a high level of dedication—mental, physical, and financial—but also a great deal of time. Learning is an ongoing process regardless of whether it is done in a college, in a laboratory, or in an underwater cave. One begins by engaging new information or a new skill set within a controlled training environment; once completed, a diver goes on to practice or build experience within prescribed conditions until this information or skill set becomes solidly incorporated. As this occurs, one is poised to engage new information or a more demanding skill set.

Today many seem to believe that they can receive their training from the Internet. The problem is that while the Internet can be very educational, it cannot make one DIR. Reading books, viewing web sites, and chatting in chat rooms will not enable divers to cultivate the techniques that will allow them to dive competently, comfortably and confidently and to be responsible for other team members or ensure team unity. Cultivating such skill requires stringent evaluation in adverse

conditions when one is task loaded; it requires proper training. The Internet, though a fine educational tool, can also be a great source of confusion.

Many feel that breathing the long hose alone qualifies one as DIR. Nothing is further from the truth. Understanding the logic supporting correct long hose use, deployment, routing, and placement, requires proper training. Choosing the hose one breathes is only a small fraction of the overall logic supporting sound long hose use. Other considerations would include: Which post the long hose is placed on and why. Why is it 7' long and routed behind the wing and under the canister? How is the long hose routed if one is using a single cylinder? This is the easy part. Proper deployment of the long hose during a true gas sharing emergency is a substantially more complex issue than how to route one's hose. During such an emergency a diver must not only deploy the hose correctly and use the correct communication skills, but must also maintain absolute perfect buoyancy and trim while remaining cognizant of gas supply issues. Once a diver is skilled enough to handle this responsibility instantaneously and competently it insures that he/she is an able and reliable member of a DIR team.

Another popular misconception is the belief that having DIR gear is sufficient to make one DIR. While it is true that a diver cannot be DIR without using the proper equipment configured in the proper way, the DIR system transcends equipment issues. Though such issues are essential elements of DIR, they do not exhaust it. DIR is a discipline, a discipline that commits one to doing it right or not doing it at all. It's a discipline that commits to a holistic diving philosophy that supports sound diving practice.

Being DIR commits one to finding the right team members that will insure that everyone is in agreement and that everyone is trained and skilled equally. Being DIR means that a diver will make the time and spend the money to get the best dive training possible. Being DIR is being dedicated to the environment, to safety, and to the sport of diving. Lastly, being DIR is being committed to a certain lifestyle, to a lifestyle that says, "I will maintain a proper level of fitness; I will treat my mind and my body in a way that insures my maximum ability as a responsible team member; and I will live a lifestyle that assures that I will be the best I can be the moment I hit the water."

To be truly DIR, a diver must be dedicated to doing it right, to a holistic system that has proven itself over and over again as having no peer in the world of diving. DIR is the only holistic system in the world of diving; it is like a machine that works only if all of the components are in place. Also like a machine, DIR can give divers dedicated to it countless hours of enjoyment or fail them if they abuse or misapply it.

This is what I understand to really be DIR.

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