

## TRAINING

# NAUI Leadership and Safety

By Michael Jacobs, NAUI 22707



*Lift heavy loads with your legs, not with your back.*



*For some people, balanced on the head might be the natural way to carry large loads; for most of us, not so.*

In a leadership course, much time is spent on safety-related topics. NAUI leaders are skilled. They ensure that safety is not overlooked during the training process. In addition, they make sure students are well-looked-after at all times and in all phases of instruction. Whether it be theoretical, confined water or open water, dive leaders ensure that students do not exceed their abilities.

We, the leaders, look for signs of incorrect behavior, correcting anything we see that could possibly be a cause of any incident. Our assistants and other support personnel are constantly at our sides to assist and ensure that the student is always safe whenever in the water. We also expect our assistants to be our second pair of eyes and ears should we possibly miss signs of stress and/or discomfort.

But is it enough? Are we prepared to look for and address the needs and safety of our assistants too?

### **There are two basic, yet important, safety situations that I often see being overlooked.**

The first is the correct way of handling equipment — the loading and off-loading of heavy items such as cylinders,

weights and weight belts from vehicles, storerooms, boats and dive sites. This applies to students and clients, but often we forget about our assistants.

With the minimum age level for scuba having been lowered to 10, we must consider the effect of the weight of cylinders and weight belts on these smaller people, and take extra care when handling both them and their equipment.

But should you also train your assistants in correct handling procedures? Indeed, a training session in correct lifting methods would help prevent possible future back injuries. One should always ask, “Can I lift this heavy item on my own, or should I seek assistance?” Often when under time constraints, we or our assistants might not consider the possibility of a back injury, so we go ahead and lift and carry on our own, regardless. But if you follow sensible practices in lifting yourself, shouldn’t you convey this message to clients, students and new assistants? Do you preach what you practice?

Sometimes I feel that dive leaders think once they have done the required training, it all ends there. They then concentrate on sales techniques, customer service and similar skills that are required to run a successful



Avoid overloading yourself (or your motorcycle).

## ***“Are we prepared to look for and address the needs and safety of our assistants too?”***

dive operation. I feel there is a definite lack of further safety-related training.

My second concern is the way I often see assistants being treated. They are with us to support us as leaders, but often they are misused and assigned all the dirty work. I have often seen the lack of a simple thank-you. Assistants are human too, after all.

Assistants might not feel well or might even experience emotional stress at times. Therefore, dive leaders should be aware of this too. If assistants have done something not according to your liking, take them to one side and counsel them in private; don't shout and negatively address them in front of others, whether those others are customers or fellow staff members.

Often the emotional impact can be a bigger issue than a physical impact. As leaders, we need to consider the physical and emotional wellness of our assistants. Do we consider them when we send them out with customers or students?

Are we aware of their abilities and state of mind when we ask them to deal with a difficult customer or situation?

In a series of future articles, I wish to further outline the importance of occupational safety. I aim to reveal many new insights into how we can increase the overall safety of diving by relaying safety procedures through the perspective of another point of view.

*Michael Jacobs began his diving through the South African Underwater Union. He became a NAUI Instructor in June 1999, and with his wife, he started Ocean Dreamers in Pretoria, which offers both diver training and trips. In 2008, he became involved in the occupational health and safety arena. He currently works for an international chemical company as site support and looks after all site-related projects, as well as occupational health and safety and responsible care. Jacobs can be reached at michaelj@mweb.co.za.*