

RARELY DOES EVERYTHING GO EXACTLY THE WAY we want it to: in life, business, diving, and especially take-out food. And that's okay, since the serendipitous events of the unexpected can sometimes be a great learning experience. Or they can be yet another episode in natural selection. Hey, Darwin never worked at Burger King!

Anticipation is, of course, a first line of awareness that conditions the diver to expect things to go wrong and to be constantly adjusting a mental protocol of things to do when circumstances find yourself "circling the drain" in some situation or another.

Mental preparation and skills conditioning are the

Honing the SURVIVAL edge»

attitude & awareness

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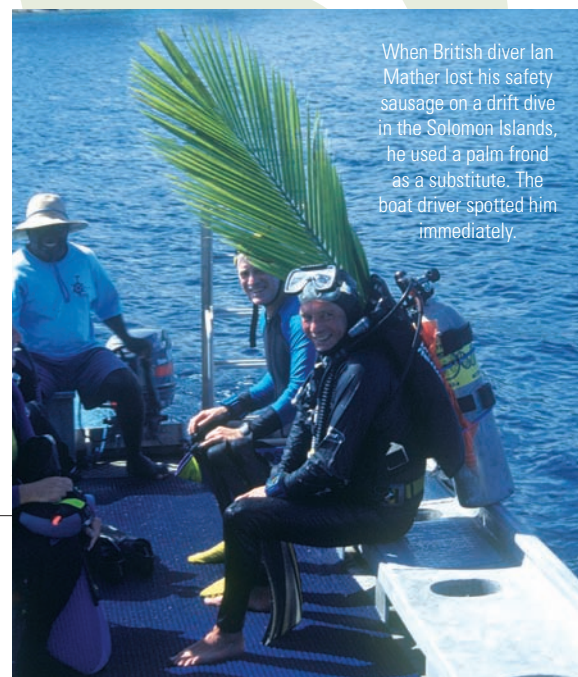
first element of survival. But it helps to have the extra edge of knowing that you can beat the situation simply on will and attitude. Remarkably, the only difference between some survivors and those who perished was the attitude of each individual.

In diving, preparation for contingencies can ease their eventual encounter. But almost as important is developing an "attitude" of confidence that allows you the edge in dealing with stressful and dangerous scenarios. My first dive was in the late 1950s and along the way since then I've managed to step into the world of contingencies with both feet on more than a few occasions. Several brushes with mortality were thwarted, perhaps as much as anything, by simply refusing to accept that my number was up. And although scared and stressed, still running through the check list of options instead of giving up.

Consider this quotation from *How to Survive on Land and Sea* originally published in a U.S. Navy publication in 1943:

*Life's battles do not always go
To the stronger or faster man,
But sooner or later the man who wins
Is the man who thinks he can.*

There are accounts of seamen who managed to escape death in convoy vessels sunk in World War II only to lose hope in lifeboats and simply decide to die. Their shipmates who marshaled courage to cope with the fear that everyone must eventually face were



When British diver Ian Mather lost his safety sausage on a drift dive in the Solomon Islands, he used a palm frond as a substitute. The boat driver spotted him immediately.

able to "decide to live" as an alternative in exactly the same circumstance and were rescued.

There are similar accounts in diving. Consider the oft told story of the individual who became lost in a cave system and spent the final 20 minutes or so of his life writing a lengthy message to his family on his dive slate. When his body was found several days later he was within 100 feet of the exit. I don't know about you, but I've got to think he might have better used that time and the remaining air supply to take a more pro-active role in seeking a way out.

About ten years ago, three divers got separated from their dive boat and drifted away in the dark Gulf Stream. In spite of being similarly equipped and in warm water, two died and one survived. The survivor later recounted discussions between his two partners as to the utter hopelessness of their situation.

"Will we drown, die of thirst, or be eaten by sharks?"

Not exactly the power of positive thinking.

"The hell with Door Number Three, Monty, I'll take what Carol's got on her table" pretty much summed up the survivor's attitude and he finally swam away rather than listen to more of the grim dialogue that seemed to be measuring him for a coffin already. He was retrieved on the third day.

Underwater our most serious contingencies sooner or later come down to a question of air supply. When that's gone, in most cases, so are you. There are an endless list of ways to avoid running out of air and with modern submersible pressure gauges, no diver should face that situation unless he has become unexpectedly trapped without an egress to the surface. This happens in caves, wrecks, ice and other overhead environments. But even then, if you keep your cool there is every fighting chance that the situation can be overcome with a bit of luck and some creative thinking.

I'm sure everyone who read about the divers lost in Palau on a drift dive in 1994 had to shudder. A combination of mistakes led to their marooning but the biggest problem ultimately was that they could not be seen by rescuers looking for them.

There have been millions of words written on how to survive the "unexpected underwater." But little devoted to surviving a bad situation once the diver makes it back to the surface. And that's where we should be able to muster a fairly strong argument that it's not our week to be fish food if some common sense is applied to supplementing our gear packages.

Surface signaling apparatus should be a part of every diver's standard equipment for every dive. We have the economical tools to provide at least a fighting chance for rescue if an inflatable "sausage" and a Dive Alert are carried. These items are small enough to be carried without intrusion and cheap enough to remove a financial obstacle.

I have spent far too many occasions in my career abandoned by Third World boat drivers (through a variety of scenarios). If you have not experienced the singular pleasures of watching the sun set over the Yucatan as you drift north at five knots past Cozumel while your boat steams anxiously in the opposite direction... well, you really haven't seen the island with the same appreciation as one who watches the lights of Carlos & Charlie's fade between wave crests.

After my last thrill-packed drift into oblivion in 1989 that lasted nearly four hours, I went out

and bought a carton of "safety sausage" floats and gave them out like cigars from a proud dad. Now I also carry the Helix strobe for possible night situations and some orange smoke flares for the day whenever my schedule has me in real or potential drift situations. Especially if I don't know the boat operator. And I've used them every year when Mr. Murphy inevitably strikes.

I'm also a firm believer in borrowing money from the captain at the beginning of the trip. Funny how that bond seems to keep them alert.

"There's a diver missing? Yeah, call me if you don't find them in an hour or so. Oh Christ, it may be Gilliam and he owes me fifty bucks!"

Now the choppers are scrambled

But all kidding aside, there are a variety of excellent products that can dramatically increase your odds of being detected in a dark, rough ocean. And the investment is probably less than your New Year's Eve bar bill.

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING

1. some variety of inflatable "safety sausage"
2. a long life battery powered flasher or strobe
3. a small signaling mirror
4. smoke for day and flares for night
5. a folding compact radar reflector
6. a Dive Alert sonic L.P. "shrieker" (This should get an Oscar for how many people it's helped or saved.)
7. a modern submersible EPRIB device
8. a water-compatible loud whistle

All these items can be stored in a BC pocket or in a tank mounted fanny pack. They can be the difference between being found and rescued or a long wait with the "Donner party". After all, it would really be a bummer to manage a magnificent free ascent from 200 feet or some other life threatening scenario only to expire because you drifted away in the fog and no one could find you.

Regardless of the circumstance, remember that your will to survive may well be the only edge you have on others who toss their chips in early. Fear is a potent adversary. But the human species has a remarkable ability to endure what might seem impossible. It all comes down to confidence. And attitude.

You can start by wearing your ball cap backwards and an old Raiders football tee shirt under your wet suit. Al Davis was right: "Just win, baby!" ■