

## **CSLSA PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

Are you ready? Our profession demands a continuous state of readiness. Our readiness is built on a foundation of fitness, proper training, correct equipment, communication, teamwork, policy and procedure and obsessive vigilance. Our readiness is built upon our ability to recognize early, prevent whenever possible, and our ability to take swift and correct action within a heartbeat.

Those who swim at our beaches do so with the expectation that the lifeguard is ready to risk his or her life when the situation demands it. We are expected to act without hesitation, but this does not mean we leap into action without analyzing the situation. Readiness includes analysis or thought.

In the past six months I encountered two significant emergency situations that called for near instantaneous response. The first was a fatal traffic accident on the freeway and the second was a three-victim rip current rescue. In both cases I was first on scene with an estimated five-minute response time for backup. Both incidents became learning opportunities that reminded me that readiness and rapid response should always be tempered with a few extra seconds of analysis or thought.

The traffic accident involved a delivery truck slamming into the back of a Cal Trans truck. I was returning from the post office in my lifeguard vehicle and happened on this scene approximately thirty seconds after collision. The delivery truck was on its side with the driver suspended in his seat. He had sustained multiple compound fractures of his upper and lower legs and serious head trauma. Cal Trans workers and an off duty firefighter were frantically attempting an extrication as I radioed for assistance and gathered my trauma kit. The firefighter and I gloved up before initiating CPR; there was a large amount of blood mixed with vehicle fluids on the pavement where we worked. Two lifeguard units arrived before the paramedics and assisted with CPR. The driver succumbed to his injuries and later that afternoon we were advised by the Coroner's office that the patient was both HIV and HEP C positive. A dozen rescue workers experienced blood to skin exposure in some manner. Two lifeguards experienced blood to blood exposure from kneeling on the pavement while performing CPR, dressed in trunks or shorts.

The rescuers responded as trained and leapt to action in the heartbeat. They were ready. But...they missed something by failing to pause an extra second or two to analyze the complete situation. Readiness includes analysis and thought. The Trauma Center Doc who later treated the rescuers for their communicable disease exposure, suggested strongly that all rescuers take a few additional seconds to give an extra evaluation in heavy situations.

Ironically, two of the lifeguards from the first incident responded to a gunshot victim less than a month after the first incident. The victim lay on the pavement in a pool of blood. This time the guards moved the victim to a dry location and knelt on their rescue tubes while performing CPR.

The swimmer rescue happened a little over a week ago on a Friday afternoon. A consistent eight foot + south swell was hitting Southern California. I happened to be the nearest solo unit to a section of private beach when dispatch asked for a response to check on three bodyboarders in a rip at that location. As I approached, I observed one individual bail his board and attempt to swim against the rip. The three were approximately 150 yds offshore and making no headway. I called the rescue, grabbed my fins and buoy and entered the water directly opposite the neck of the rip. I didn't take an extra three seconds to read the horizon and the approaching ten wave set. Needless to say, I took all ten on the head as I struggled to maintain my position opposite the victims. Everyone eventually made it in. I was exhausted.

Perhaps the extra seconds of reading the conditions would have saved me the beating. The victims had flotation gear and were not panicky. They rode out the set just beyond the surfline while I was getting acquainted with the impact zone. I was ready and leapt to action but missed something important in the process.

The following morning I attended the first day of our lifeguard academy at Huntington State Beach. The surf was pumping, with a double break, six to eight feet and a racing side current. The rookies were preparing for their first long swim of the day and the trainers asked me if I would be willing to paddle for the event.

Fresh from the previous day's experience and mindful of the earlier lessons about taking the extra seconds, I drove to the location of the buoy swim ahead of the rookie swimmers. As I unstrapped my paddleboard, I watched a macking set of top to bottom closeouts pour through the swim zone, generating a two hundred yard rip at the conclusion of the set. I waded into the inshore hole with my eleven footer and waited. In five minutes the next set appeared, a duplicate of the one I had just observed. I launched when I could see the last two waves of the set approaching the impact zone. I pushed through their white water and found the forming rip and the escalator ride to the outside. I made it out without getting my hair wet. The beating of the previous day had knocked some sense into me.

Yes, we are always ready. Our training and professional mission demand that we are ready. But readiness must include thought, not only swift action. A few extra seconds may allow us to do the better job. I urge every lifeguard to include careful thought in your daily actions this summer. Your ability to do your very best is important to everyone who intrusts their life to your vigilance and skill. Have a safe summer. Urge your fellow lifeguards to become connected to our professional association. I look forward to seeing you at the Regionals, Nationals and the Fall USLA meeting in Newport Beach.

Steve Long

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