

Why you should teach others how to fish

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I have had two experiences recently that has led me to offer some thoughts on why you, regardless of your level of ability, should try to teach others how to fish. It is a process which will be fun for others and be very rewarding to you. I guarantee it will also make you a better fisherman.

The two recent experiences were:

- (1) I recently took on short fishing excursions over two days Gerald Wirthwine, a member of our fishing club, and his nephew, Jim Beanecker, who was visiting from out of state. The nephew was a relatively experienced fisherman. The weather was not cooperating – strong cold winds and sunny skies. We had fun together, but only limited success at catching bass. We discussed lots of topics, such as how to cast, to how to work various lures, how to manage your time while fishing, why you need a strategy for each day's fishing and the need to test that strategy so that you can learn from your theories (whether it turned out well or not), etc. We were having little to no action. I told them that my strategy for that day since we had a strong cold wind blowing was to try to find a shallow protected cove (or pocket) out of the cold wind, where the sun can warm the water. Bass tend to be less active when the water is cold. They will often seek warmer shallow water to forage on baitfish. We found such a shallow-water protected pocket. A portion of it was covered by pond scum. A lot of fisherman avoid areas which have pond scum. I love pond scum because it provides shade for fish, which gives the fish a greater sense of security on sunny days (i.e., they are not in the spot light) and tends to cause them to be more active. It is often an exciting method of fishing because the bass explode on the lure on the surface, and will even sometimes do a complete flip out of the water as they attempt to attack your lure. I told Gerald and his nephew that the area with pond scum was where we needed to fish first and focus our attention. I was showing the nephew how to cast and work a wacky worm under and over the pond scum. I missed a fish on my first cast. He then began to cast and had one bass on for a brief period of time, but the bass jumped and threw the hook – the nephew had not yet learned how to make a strong quick hook-set. He told me that he would never have imagined that you should throw a lure onto the pond scum, rather he would only have worked the outer edge of the pond scum. It was an exciting learning experience for him, opening his eyes to a new way to look at fishing. A big part of learning how to fish is imagining and experimenting.

Note: I went to the same location the next day and caught 7 bass on wacky worms dragged across the surface of the pond scum. One was small (1 ¼ lb. or less), rest were 2 lbs. or larger (2 were weighed at over 3 ¼ lbs.). Missed or lost 8. 2 bass did complete flips as they came out of the water while attempting to get my lure.

They later sent a gift card from Field and Stream to me as a thoughtful way to show their appreciation for the time I had spent with them. I have mailed the gift card back to them and

asked that they pay forward instead; e.g., take a neighbor and their children fishing and spend the money from the gift card on lures or equipment that may help them. I hope to encourage them to share whatever fishing knowledge they have with others and have fun while doing it.

- (2) I was going out to fish Crooked Pond. As I turned onto Crooked Pond Road, I noticed a couple with two young boys who were fishing on the South end of Crooked Pond. I often stop to talk to people who are fishing to see if they might be interested in our Fishing Club. I ended up spending about 1 ¼ hours with them, focusing primarily on lures and how to cast. They (father and 2 young sons) had not been having any luck. There was a portion of Crooked pond which was covered with pond scum, some of which was so thick that a wacky worm would only stay on top of the pond scum. I explained to them why I thought we ought to focus our attention on that area. I cast a wacky worm several times trying to show them how best to work that lure. The youngest boy said “Would you do that again. I’ve never seen someone catch a fish on every cast.” I hadn’t caught a fish on every cast (about 6 casts) although I had either caught and landed a fish, briefly had a fish on, or at least had a bass to attack but miss my lure. Obviously, this was not a normal event, but it also does not have to be an unusual event. The father and his two young sons had soon each caught and landed at least one bass. I am sure that these young boys, and their father, will remember this day with a smile for a long time. It is very rewarding for me to see people, who I have tried to help, experience something exciting for them and memorable.

If you go to hhpfishingclub.com, and click on “Fishing Info” at the upper right corner of the website home page, you can find an article which I submitted in the past entitled “HHP Fishing Club – Thoughts to help catch fish within HHP.” On the first page of that article, you will find a subject entitled “Be an ‘SOB’ – Share your fishing knowledge with others.” In this article, I offer the following experiences and thoughts:

I was once a member of a fishing club in Tennessee called “Sly Ole Bassmasters.” Members were generally referred to as the “SOB’s.”

Purpose of this club was to help all members become better fishermen by sharing fishing knowledge. It was recognized that everyone, even the very experienced fishermen, could learn from others; i.e., what goes around, comes around.

(Money) Turnament rules – If any competitor asked about your fishing situation, you must tell him the number and size of fish you have caught, the type of lure and retrieve used, the type of structure and character of bottom, the depth at which fish were caught, and any other info that would help him have a chance to catch more bass that day (e.g., shady banks, windy gravel points). However, you did not have to identify the specific location(s) where you caught the fish. This rule ensured that every member of the club, regardless of their level of knowledge and experience, would have the chance to learn from others, and do so while on the water competing with others in tournaments.

The theory behind the tournament rules was that the best fishermen would over time still rise to the top, and that their level of success would be a reflection of their individual knowledge and skills, and not based on sheer luck. Everyone had a chance to learn from others, and catch fish while doing so during the tournaments.

Farther down in the article is a subject entitled "If a kid has fun, you will too." In that article, I offer the following thoughts:

If you fish with a child, focus on them having fun. If they have fun, you will too.

Using a light action spinning rod, 6 lb. test line, and small lures (in-line spinners, jerk baits, twister tail grubs or tube grubs, small spinner baits) will normally provide the greatest chance for a kid (or an adult) to have a lot of fish activity.

*** Timeshare at Shipyard: When my son was maybe 8 to 10 years old, he wanted me to watch him catch and land fish so I could see how good a fisherman he was (he is a much better fisherman than I now). Therefore, I would walk behind my son as he walked the banks throwing a buzz bait or a jerk bait. Because he was so good, I ended up fishing "strained water." But he and I now have great memories.

There is a tendency for people to be reluctant to try doing something when their knowledge or experience in that area is limited, and are afraid other people may notice that. This is a normal human reaction, but you must overcome that hesitancy. I have been fishing for over 65 years, but today whenever I have arranged to take people out to help them learn how to fish, I tend to feel "pressure." "I'm supposed to know what I am doing," so I feel the need to be able to have them catch fish, and if we are not successful, they may think less of me. However, I have learned to say "So what." Like the outing with Gerald Wirthwine and his nephew described under (1) above, people are happy to learn, and are delighted to have a chance to catch fish while doing so.

If you do make the effort to help others learn to fish you will soon realize:

- (a) You are having fun with others, and can develop friendships you would otherwise not have had
- (b) You know "enough" to make yourself and others happier
- (c) You experience a feeling of reward when what you do helps others to have a good time or increase their knowledge or skill level, or when you have opened their eyes to a new way of thinking about things
- (d) You will begin to think about fishing subjects during periods when you are unable to fish, and may even decide to look up those topics on-line to get more information to help you
- (e) You may notice that fishing is starting to become an enjoyable part-time hobby rather than merely another activity in your life
- (f) Your success at catching fish will increase substantially in short period of time
- (g) You will learn from others

95% of fishing success is mental. The “pressure” that you may feel when attempting to teach others will only drive you to learn more, and as a result you will become a better fisherman.