

# ***Teaching Surf Instructors to Teach***



## **National Surf Schools and Instructors Association Instructors and Coaches Training Manual**



### **SUP and Surf Etiquette Part 6**

*Provided exclusively for NSSIA certified instructors.*

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## Surf Etiquette: The Basics

For the majority of surfers, surfing is an extended love affair with the ocean. It's about waking before dawn to catch a few waves before work or school. It's about seeing the sunset or sunrise reflected on the water's surface while gliding (or ripping) down a glassy, purple-pink pastel line. It's about having fun. It's about



freedom. Even the most serious, hard-core surfer will admit that surfing is not (entirely) about winning competitions, showing off or about being cool. Rather, it's the feeling that you get, whether it's an adrenaline rush or something more "spiritual," when you ride a wave.

Nowadays, more and more people are taking up surfing and other activities that involve ocean wave riding. As a result, breaks are becoming more and more crowded.

Generally, the more crowded conditions are the fewer waves there are to go around. This increases competition, which increases frustration, which increases aggression.

Stand-up surfers, body boarders, knee boarders and kayakers all catch and ride waves differently. This can lead to confusion and confusion can lead to frustration and injury. As more and more people take to the waves, the more important it becomes for everyone to know what the rules are in order to stay safe and to avoid conflict.

Most beginning surfers do not know the basic rules that guide conduct out in the water. Because the vast majority of these rules are not written down anywhere, most of us have had to learn them by spending time in the water, reading surf magazines, by watching and hanging around with other surfers and by making mistakes.

What follows in this section are basic tips on surf etiquette: the "dos" and the "don'ts." Teaching beginners the basic rules will give them the "heads up" they need to help them to stay safe and to have more fun as they learn how to surf.

While these rules apply to most surf spots, an important point needs to be conveyed to student as well as experienced surfers: Every break has its own history and its own set of rules. Every spot has its own group or "crew" who have expectations for those who surf "their" break. So, even if they've mastered the basics of surf etiquette in class, they need to know that they may still have some learning to do.

## Localism and Surf Rage

For some people, surfing is very serious business. There are people who live only to surf. It's what they are all about. Many of these folks are friendly and forgiving but some are downright hostile. Without scaring your students, they should know that (depending where they paddle out) there might be some folks who will not always welcome their presence.

Hassles with other surfers are the last thing that anyone wants in or out of the water. Crowding, localism, surf vandalism and hostility in the water diminishes the value of surfing. Bad vibes extinguish stoke, which is bad for the community of surfers at large who care maintaining the positive aspects of our shared culture. Hostility is bad for the surf camp market that depends on newcomers being able to get waves without the fear of being hassled. It's bad news for the surf shop owners who sell newcomers (and everyone else) surf stuff and whose businesses run on stoke. And it's bad for surfers in general. Arguably one of the most important (if not the most important) reasons for educating beginners in surf etiquette is this: If crowding leads to hostility and injury, and the surf community is thought to be unable to manage it from within, then local authorities may intervene and restrict surfing on public beaches.

Learners should understand that aggression (“surf rage”) can arise when someone messes up someone else's wave. Sometimes it is unprovoked and comes out of nowhere. It can arise from a simple, automatic prejudice locals have toward "outsiders." But more generally, it comes from crowding. At many beaches, there are simply too many people competing for an increasingly limited resource.



In Australia, crowding and subsequent aggression is a huge problem. So much so that to help manage the situation, Aussies have been promoting surf etiquette for years, beginning with the “Law of the Surf” forum in 2001 and the “Spirit of the Surf” organization’s installation of a surfer’s code of ethics (actually set in stone) at Bell’s beach in 2002. In the United States, in Santa Cruz, California

for example, efforts have been made to spread the word about surf etiquette to try to reduce hostility in the water.

Surf instructors can play an important role in dealing with this growing problem. Above all, learners should be taught to remember this as they paddle out for the first time: If they want respect, the best strategy is to show respect. The best way for them to show respect is to follow the "spoken" as well as the "unspoken" rules of the game.

Ultimately, helping beginners learn how to effectively conduct themselves in the water will make a difference in determining whether their early experiences in the water as independent surfers are mostly good ones or mostly bad ones.



Toward this end, (and without getting on a soapbox), they should be encouraged to learn the rules and to adopt what's called the "Aloha Spirit."

### **The "Aloha Spirit"**

September 22, 2001 was a warm and muggy day. Morning clouds had turned to sunshine and a moderate southeasterly breeze was blowing. On this day, a memorial service was held for a New Hampshire surfer who had lost his life on Tuesday, September 11th. Bob Hayes was on his way to Los Angeles when terrorists took control of the plane he was on, American Airlines Flight 11, and then crashed it into what was the World Trade Center in New York City.

The service was held at "The Wall," a beach break located in Hampton Beach, New Hampshire. Bob's wife and two young sons were there, along with about 100 surfers. Some of the surfers who had come to the service had not known Bob personally but had just felt the need to attend.

Bob's friends were there, and a couple of them said a few words remembering him and his love of surfing. Volunteers were called upon to help his sons learn to surf and a number of people stepped forward.

Two rows of 10 boards placed upright in the sand created a passageway leading to the sea. Bob's board was placed at the "entrance." Hanging from the board was a photograph of him riding a huge and beautiful wave. At the moment that photo was taken he must have been having the time of his life. All who were present walked through that passageway, boards in hand, out to the waves. As they passed by Bob's board, they briefly touched it. The idea was to take his spirit with them as they paddled out into the surf.

Flowers were handed out and each surfer carried one as they paddled out. Sitting on their boards about 100 yards from the beach, they formed a circle around the pastor and kind words of remembrance were said. As the ceremony ended, they threw the flowers into the sea and shouted together as loud and as long as they could, "Aloha." And that was it.

Most stayed out and surfed for a while. The waves were pretty good and everybody was in a forgiving mood. People cut each other a little slack and were friendlier than usual.

So here's the thing: Most surfers all want the same thing. We all want our fair share of "the good stuff" and we are all, on any given day, willing to scrap for it. But that day was different. One of "us" had died in a horrible tragedy and all had gathered to say "Aloha." The big question is: Why does it take a tragedy to bring people closer together? Why does it take loss to get people to realize the meaning and value of what they have or of what they had? Why can't we all just get along?

In the Hawaiian language, Aloha stands for much more than "hello" or "goodbye" or "love." Its deeper spiritual meaning is "the joyful (oha) sharing (alo) of life energy (ha) in the present (alo)." The Hawaiians gave us surfing. They also gave us the "Aloha spirit" which can be expressed by surfers in the act of surfing and in their interactions with each other. If there's a spirit or attitude that surfers ought to have in approaching this sport and their fellow surfers it's the Aloha spirit, which is expressed by showing patience, kindness, humility (i.e., don't be arrogant and stuck up) and generosity.

There are more than enough mean-spirited, greedy, unforgiving people in the water who are so wrapped up in pursuing their own selfish interests that they completely miss this point. Beginners should be taught to try not to become one of them.

### **Learning the History of Surfing and Surf Culture**

Surfing is about connecting with the ocean, sharing stoke with other surfers, and having fun while developing and perfecting a personal riding style. Hawaiians have been riding waves for centuries. People have been surfing in the mainland United States ever since George Freeth hit the waves in Redondo Beach (California) in 1907. Although surfing has become more “mainstream” and commercialized over the past few years, it still is a unique and rewarding lifestyle with a rich history full of interesting characters. Because Surfing has many wise old-timers who are still around and who have a good understanding of the spirit and culture of surfing, beginners should be encouraged to talk to older (the friendly ones, that is) surfers at a local break and to read about the history of wave riding (Da Bull: Life Over the Edge by Greg Noll is a great book as is, All for a Few Perfect Waves: The Audacious Life and Legend of Rebel Surfer Miki Dora” by David Rensin).

### **NSSIA Guidance for Instructor and Student Handouts**

NSSIA instructors and schools offer basic rules, safety tips, and other instructional guidance for students so they learn to surf in a safe and healthy manner. The NSSIA’s suggested guidelines are provided below and can be given to students separately as handouts. Instructors need to practice these rules as well as instill them in the students they teach. Students should read them to ensure they remain safe in the surf. They are in no order of importance but all are relevant. Remember - surf safely and respect your fellow water babes.

### **Explain to Students Surfing Do's and Don'ts**

Besides the do's and don't below, remember for both the instructor and the student “The number #1 rule for both safety and common sense is don't panic.”

- **Be Aware.** Be aware of other surfers and water users, of the surf conditions, and of where you are surfing (see Patrolled Beaches).
- **Comfort Zone.** You should surf in waves that you are comfortable in, don't get in over your head.
- **Fitness.** Make sure you are physically fit when surfing. You need to be able to swim back to shore if you lose your board at the end of an exhausting session - no mean feat in a 3-meter swell. Don't surf in any conditions in which you would not be confident swimming in.
- **Fun.** Surfing is all about having fun, keep it in mind when you are in the waves.
- **Hold or Throw.** Know when to hold onto your surfboard and when to get rid of it. If you are paddling out then keep hold of your board, you'll get out back to the line up more quickly and you will not put anyone paddling out behind you at risk. If you are about to wipe-out on a wave, then get rid of your board to prevent injuring yourself. However, don't just bail out in front of someone paddling out.

You are far more likely to sustain an injury if you and your board are getting washed around together.

- **Patrolled Beaches.** If you are surfing on a patrolled beach make sure that you keep within the designated surfing area. Take note of where you should be surfing before you go out, and make sure you stick to it when you are out.
- **Priority.** Always make sure that you are not taking anyone else's wave. Remember, the surfer who is closest to the breaking wave has priority. If you see someone already on a wave then the wave is taken and you'll have to wait for the next one.
- **Practice.** If you want to improve then you need to be in the water surfing as regularly as possible. More time in the water actually riding waves is the only way to improve your surfing skill.
- **Respect.** Respect the locals if you are visiting a beach. Remember that you are a guest and that waves should be shared.
- **Rips.** If you are caught in a rip remember that it's called R.I.P. for a reason. Although hopefully you already know that a rip is a strong current that (normally) goes straight out to sea and if caught in one that you should not panic but paddle across the rip (not against it) until you have escaped. Experienced surfers use rips to quickly get out into the lineup.
- **Sun Block.** Always wear a good waterproof sun-block. You'll know about it if you have been out for a few hours surfing in the sun without it.
- **Surf Buddy.** Always surf with at least one other person. Not only will you have more fun if you are sharing your waves but you will always have someone to help you out if you need it.
- **Crowd Conditions.** Make sure that the surf is safe before you go in and the crowds are compatible with your skill level.
- **Warm-up.** Always have a quick warm-up and stretch before entering the surf. This will reduce the risk of muscle injury or cramp whilst you are surfing. A sample of typical warm-ups for "older" male surfers is provided in Appendix D.
- **Check out the Surf.** Take a good look at the waves before you go out. Watch the waves until you can visualize a place where you can ride. Then get a landmark on the shore in front of that water position, and paddle out.
- **Shore-break.** Don't surf too close to the shore, particularly in very shallow water. You can break your neck or easily sprain an ankle when your fin hits the sand.

**Student Rules: Handout based on safety and common sense.**

- **Wave Ownership:** The person closest to the breaking part of the wave has the right of way.
- **Dropping In:** Dropping in is taking off on a wave in front of someone who is already up and riding. Don't do this. Ever.

- Paddling out: If you are paddling out and see someone dropping in, GET OUT OF HIS OR HER WAY. Don't get the "deer in the headlight" freeze and don't paddle for the shoulder in front of where the surfer is going. Sometimes that means paddling directly into the impact zone and eating it. Just do it. Wouldn't you want someone to get out of your way if you had a good ride going? On another note...If you see that someone is obviously in your way, hold back, and do not drop in, possibly hitting him or her.
- STAY IN YOUR AREA (LEARNER SURFERS): Do not venture out the back to where the take off zone is, unless you are capable of controlled take offs on a main peak situation. You should not be out in the lineup where more experienced surfers are as it is not only dangerous to yourself, but also to the more experienced surfer especially if you are unable to control your board or maneuvers. Utilize the white wash when learning to surf.
- TAKOFFS: To practice take offs out the back, look for a section of beach where you will not interfere or get in the way of other more experienced surfers and do not rely on your leg rope or wrist rap as a lifesaving device that attaches you to your board.
- DON'T DROP IN: The surfer closest to the breaking part of the wave (the inside or the peak) or the first surfer to their feet has the right of way/priority. Before taking off on a wave make sure no one is on your inside, always check behind you before taking off.
- DON'T PADDLE OUT THROUGH THE BREAK: Do not paddle out through the lineup or where the breaking area/impact zone of the waves are. By paddling around the breaking or surfable part of the wave you will not interfere with another surfers ride and will also reduce the risk of getting hit by the surfer on the wave. No one likes having their ride ruined. If you get caught inside, stay in the white water until the set is over and always paddle around the break or go in and paddle out again.
- DON'T HOG THE WAVES: Don't try to catch every single wave that comes through. You will only create animosity amongst the others in the line up and will be seen as a wave pig or hog. If you have the paddling power or a board that allows you to get into the waves a lot earlier, remember this, learn to give and you will receive. Share the waves around and learn to give a few to the other crew. Respect gets respect. If you know someone will go one direction on a peak, you can always paddle around and go the other way.
- KEEP CONTROL OF YOUR EQUIPMENT: Never ever attempt a move, maneuver, turn or Aerial that will cause you to land or smash into some one else and always keep an eye on crew paddling out. Usually when you are about to take off on a wave someone might be paddling out right in front of you, avoid the hassle or possible injury to you or the other surfer and just wait for another one.
- DON'T SNAKE: Don't paddle up inside someone as they are trying to catch the wave. This is known as "snaking" when a surfer who is nowhere near the point of takeoff where the other surfer is taking off, paddles over and tries to steal the

wave from the surfer at the peak. "Snaking is a no, no and one that will get you little respect in the lineup.

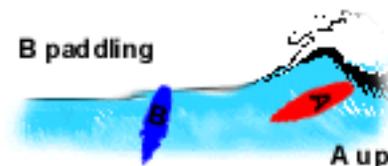
- **GIVE A YELL:** If it looks like someone is going to drop in on you, let them know you are on the inside or have right of way by calling out and letting them know you are taking off or already on the wave. Sometimes crew drop in because they think you haven't made the takeoff. A friendly reminder of a shout like "Mine" or "Going right" or "Going left" helps clarify the situation.
- **CHECK YOUR EQUIPMENT:** Always check the state of your equipment. Try and get all the dings (damage) fixed on your surfboard that have fiberglass protruding to avoid damage to yourself and others. Check the back edge of your fins; if they are sharp lightly sand the edge off them with a bit of wet and dry sand paper to dull the sharpness. Nose guards are relatively inexpensive to buy and can save you a lot of time and pain from receiving stitches because of the wound that some surfboard noses can cause. Buy one, their cheap and easy to put on.
- **IF YOU NEED TO WORK ON YOUR BALANCE** Roller blading or skating are the fastest ways to improve your balance. With even one session, your balance will be ready for your next lesson.
- **SHARE AND RESPECT:** Share the ocean, not only with other surfers, but also the marine life that lives in it. Don't practice your competition tactics (if you are a contest surfer) on those who enjoy the surfing for the life style and fun it offers. Leave that form of hassling for contests not free surfing. The sea is there for everyone to use and share.
- **GIVE UP A WAVE:** Give up a wave now and again to others even though you could catch it. Enjoy watching the person you gave it to enjoy it. It is a great way to make friends in the water. Not to mention that now there is one less person to compete with for the next one.

### Surfers' Code of Ethics

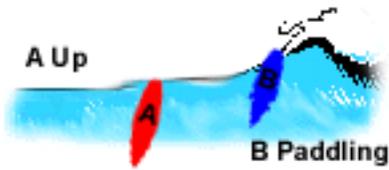
This code was originally developed by the Surfrider Foundation, Australia (modified only slightly for this publication). These are the basic rules of conduct to be followed while in the water. Learning and following them will help you to stay safe and will help to protect the safety of others.



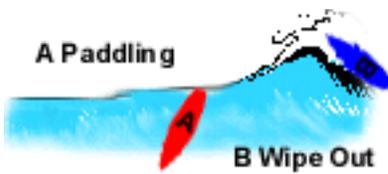
Surfer A is nearer the peak and has right-of-way. Surfer B has no entitlement to the wave.



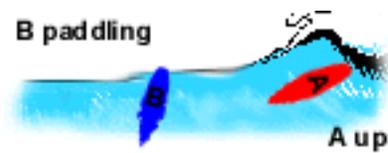
Surfer A is up and has right-of-way. Surfer B must give way to Surfer A who has already caught the wave. If Surfer B does catch the wave, he/she is “dropping in” on Surfer A.



Surfer A, having already caught the wave, has right-of-way over Surfer B. Note: This applies only if Surfer A has ridden the wave for “a while.”



Surfer B’s progress toward the unbroken wall has halted. Surfer A is then entitled to take off.



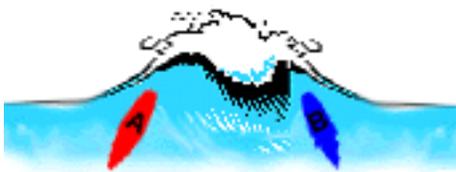
Surfer A, riding in front of the whitewater toward the unbroken shoulder has right-of-way. Surfer B must not take off.



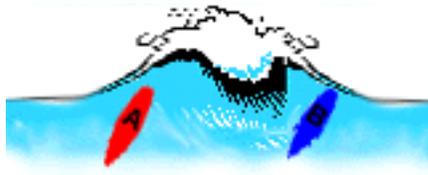
Surfer B, attempting to take off in a broken section of a wave, has no entitlement to the shoulder occupied by Surfer A. Surfer B should “kook-out” and go straight towards the beach.



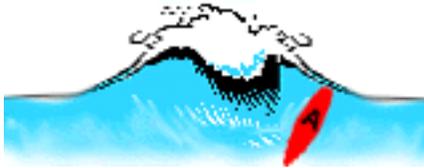
Surfer B wipes out. Surfer A may only then catch the wave.



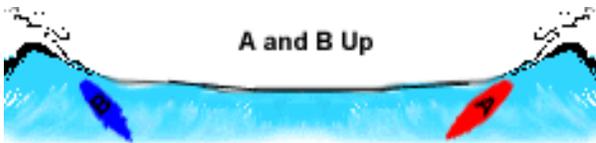
Surfer A has right-of-way on the right-hand shoulder, while Surfer B has right-of-way on the left-hand shoulder. Call out “left” or “right” as appropriate. Communicate.



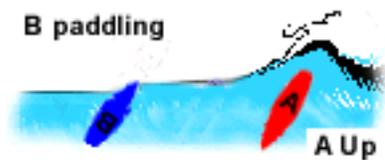
Where there is a clearly rideable left and right shoulder, Surfer B is not entitled to cross under the peak to the shoulder occupied by Surfer A, or vice-versa.



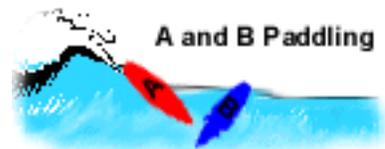
Surfer A may cross under the peak to the unoccupied right-hand shoulder (or vice-versa). In doing so, the left-hand shoulder will become available for other surfers to catch.



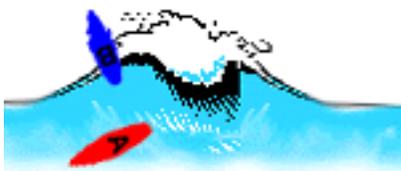
Both surfers are entitled to take off and ride the unbroken wave section, but neither has right-of-way over the other. One (or both) must pull off the wave to avoid a collision.



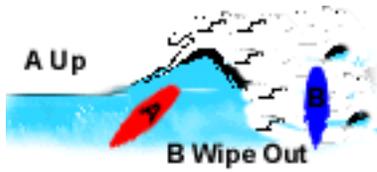
Surfer A, riding the wave, should try to avoid Surfer B who is either stationary or paddling out. Surfer A has priority and Surfer B must try to paddle out of the way so as not to interfere with Surfer A.



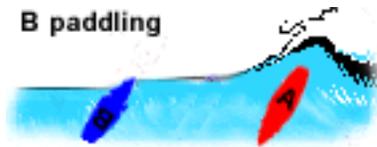
Surfer B is paddling toward, and inside Surfer A, who is also paddling for the wave. Surfer B is attempting to “snake” Surfer A’s wave. Do not snake waves.



Surfer B has thrown the board. Never throw your board. It may injure you or others.



Surfer B has been caught inside. When caught inside, stay in the whitewater and go around the break to get back out.



Surfer B is paddling out. When paddling out use any rips or channels and paddle around any surfable sections. Do not paddle out through the lineup. Once in the lineup, do not set up in the “first-in-line-for-takeoff” position.

A quick summary of the above is provided in the figure below.



### The Official NSSIA Code of Ethics

Organizations and surf schools accredited by the NSSIA subscribe to the following NSSIA Surf School Code of Ethics.

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The keyword for the conduct of surf schools is "Low Impact".

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Surf schools operate in the surf, which we share with the surfers in the water, so we must always be respectful of the surfers in the water and remain low-impact on them. This means going down the beach away from any congregations of surfers. This is both safer for the surf school student, and it leaves the good waves for the surfers in the water.

Beginners need whitewater, and traditionally go down the beach from surf breaks with more experienced surfers.

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The surf school student needs to be instructed to stay out of congregations of surfers in the water and any kind of crowded surfing conditions. This is a safety issue, not a "localism" issue.

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Below is what a surf school student needs to be able to accomplish in the surf in order to surf among other surfers and not be a danger to himself or other surfers:

- Until the surf school student can move his surfboard around quickly and with agility to where he wants it to go, then he needs to stay out of any crowded conditions, out of any congregations of surfers in the water at any given surf break.
- When riding a wave, the surf school student also needs to know how to turn well enough to avoid running over a surfer paddling out in his path.
- After the student is able to paddle well enough and turn, then he is ready to handle more surfers around him in the break. Always be sure to stress these two points to surf students, and further, emphasize that staying out of crowded surfing conditions is a safety issue, and not a "localism" issue.

### **NSSIA Surf School Code of Ethics in Summary**

**SCHOOL AREA:** Stay out of existing popular surf spots where people are surfing.

As a surf school on a public beach, it is important not to take the beginners into surf spots where people are already surfing. The beginners, traditionally, go down the beach away from the peaks with the expert riders.

**STUDENT TRAINING:** Paddling Ability of the Beginner

Be sure to emphasize to the beginning surf student that until they can paddle their surfboard quickly and with agility through the waves, and have some control over where their board is going, it is important that he stay out of any crowded situation.

**STUDENT TRAINING:** Turning Ability of the Beginner

Until a beginner is good enough and has enough control over his board to be able to turn and not run over a surfer in his path, it is also best to stay out of the crowds.

### **NSSIA Instructor Code of Ethics**

Any individual who receives the NSSIA Certified Surf Instructor (CSI) or Certified Coach (CC) designation agrees to abide by this code:

- Act honestly, justly, responsibly, legally, and protect your students at all times.
- Work diligently and provide competent training that advances the surf instructor or surf coaching profession
- Teach, mentor, and coach with honor.

- Value your NSSIA certification
- Discourage improper training techniques, and do not consent to bad business practices
- Discourage unsafe practices, and preserve and strengthen the integrity of public faith in the NSSIA
- Observe and abide by all contracts, expressed or implied, and give prudent advice to students or athletes
- Avoid any conflict of interest, respect the trust that others put in you, any those training jobs you feel fully qualified to perform
- Stay current on training and coaching skills and encourage continuous self-learning
- Do not become involved with activities that could injure the reputation of other NSSIA certified professionals

### **World Paddle Association SUP Surf Etiquette**

- Know your ability and the surf break you are going to surf. Beginning SUP surfers can be a bigger danger to those in the water and to yourself if you do not know the dynamics of a SUP board and the power of the wave.
- Know the restrictions where you can or cannot SUP surf as SUP surfing may not be suitable at a given break and or area. If you don't know ask a lifeguard or someone that has knowledge of the particular break.
- Be conscious of others in the water both paddling out and where you are in the surf line up. A SUP board will get away from you much further than a surfboard and also drag you further going through a wave and when you fall. Give yourself twice the distance you would on a surfboard from others on both sides and behind you when paddling out and especially when you fall, be sure to plan ahead and give ample room to those paddling out.
- Be respectful out in the line up particularly when you are not at your home break. If you are not a local or even are a local don't paddle around everyone to the priority position and or outside. Work your way into the line up by catching some in between waves and gain respect of others that are out in the water.
- Once you are at the main peak or line up, be willing to give up some waves to others and even call out set waves that may be coming. This will go far for you to catch waves and gain respect from surfers. An experienced SUP surfer can catch twice as many waves as a traditional surfer and everyone is trying to catch their fair share, so be fair and share as much as possible.
- Take a break and sit on your board when you can. This will show other surfers that you are willing to pass up waves and give some waves to others.
- Go out of your way to be kind and help others. In most cases you will be judged by others even before you get in the water.

- Help those who don't know. If you see a beginning SUP surfer that does not know surf etiquette, inform them in a kind way about the rules and or restrictions. In the end it will benefit all of us in the water.
- WEAR a LEASH! Don't try to be cool and think that you don't have to wear a leash. All it takes is one fall to wipeout someone else's day or life. If you follow these simple guidelines when you are in the water with surfers you will gain a lot of respect from others and for the sport of SUP surfing. "We set the standard today for what will happen in the future of SUP surfing". "Keep the Vibe"

### **Surfer's Code**

The following "Surfer's Code" from Shaun Thompson's Book is a good read for all instructors.

I will never turn my back on the ocean  
 I will paddle around the impact zone  
 I will take the drop with commitment  
 I will never fight a rip tide  
 I will paddle back out  
 I will watch out for other surfers  
 There will always be another wave  
 I will always ride into shore  
 I will pass along my stoke  
 I will catch a wave every day  
 All surfers are joined by the ocean  
 I will honor the sport of kings

### **The Bottom Line**

The final items an instructor should think about is to not just practice but be an example for what you preach. Don't surf overly aggressive in the water, particularly around beginners (you were one once) and around older surfers who have a hard time catching-waves, you will be there someday. You



don't need every wave. Never paddle to the inside of one of these surfers just to get a wave. Surfing should be fun for everyone as a lifelong sport.