



HCKC's Head Instructor Erik In 'Teaching' Action

'TO BE OR NOT TO BE AN INSTRUCTOR. THAT IS THE QUESTION'

HCKC's General Manager James Kowalewski talks about how he became an instructor, how you can become an instructor, and how to become an instructor at HCKC.

Also, new programming for 2013 and a construction update

Dear James,

Good day to you all! While spring has had a few false starts this year, it has not seemed to dampen all our spirits with regards to our summer hobbies and activities. Paddling season is upon us and we could not be more excited.

Every now and then, we see themes emerge which, in a way, gives us a look into what the paddling community is 'into' each year. Last year it was by no surprise that the rapidly growing sport of **Standup Paddleboarding** (SUP) exploded on the scene. One could not open up an e-mail without some special offer from a group-buying site offering a major discount on SUP classes. In my estimation the area went from 3 genuine SUP paddling companies to over 20 within a 20km radius from the Harbourfront Centre, though some didn't have Paddle Canada Certification or insurance coverage. Not since windsurfing's explosion onto the scene back in the 1980's (as a result of being added as an Olympic sport in 1984), has the industry seen a sport grow so rapidly. We taught hundreds of people and this brings us to this year.

This year I'm very pleased to see that certification has become more of a priority. As one of the only centres who is certified to train and certify SUP instructors, I was comforted to see our May SUP Instructor Course fill up within 3 days of a posting I put on Facebook. This is a good sign that more companies and individuals are doing their due diligence to make sure that the paddling community is kept safe. This is by far our biggest priority at HCKC and the reason why we work so hard to certify instructors, who of course could potentially create competition for us in our immediate area. I see this as our responsibility to you, our paddling community.

We are the largest paddling training company in Canada. We have the greatest number of participants in our programming per year (over 8000 of you paddled with us last summer!), and we have been training and mentoring individuals to become

Table of Contents

[My Journey to become an Instructor - by James Kowalewski](#)

[How to become an Instructor - a Blue Print](#)

[Whats New for 2013!](#)

[Construction Update of Queens Quay](#)

Quick Links

[Paddle Sports Instructor \(Get your SUP, Canoe and Kayak instructor level in one course\)](#)

[Paddle Canada Certification Skills and Instructor Courses](#)

[Paddle Fitness Programming](#)

[Real-World Rescues](#)

instructors for over 30 years now. It is a fact that I am particularly very proud of, but one that we seldom acknowledge.

[Team Building](#)

So becoming an instructor is the theme we are seeing for 2013, and it relates to one of the most common questions I'm asked (after what paddling colour it is today). How does one become an instructor? I've chosen to take a different approach in response, and tell you the story of [my journey to becoming an instructor](#).

[Standup Paddleboard Instructor](#)



What got you into paddling? Tell us on Facebook

[Join Our Mailing List](#)

Also in this newsletter:

- [Whats New in Programing for 2013](#)
- [Construction progress update on Queens Quay](#)
- [Becoming a paddle instructor 'Blue Print'](#)

Sincerely,

James Kowalewski
General Manager
Harbourfront Canoe & Kayak Centre (HCKC)

MY JOURNEY TO BECOME AN INSTRUCTOR

by: James Kowalewski

As a certified instructor for over 15 years, I can tell you that there is no better feeling than playing a part to help guide someone into a new hobby, help an individual achieve something they thought was unattainable, and to be part of a journey that has inspired and directed one's life. As an instructor, it is an absolute privilege to see someone get inspired and trained, then to follow along with their journey and see where it takes them.



For me, it all started with canoeing. I was very fortunate to grow up in a family with a major love for the outdoors. This was nurtured through summers spent at the family cottage up on the Magnetawan River which consisted of endless hours of 'just playing'. Skills were taught by my parents, and skills were further developed as the desire to explore and test my limits grew. Its wasn't until I went to camp that I was first introduced to kayaking and went through a formal instruction process (at that time I was kayaking in an R5 kayak... I still have an R5 today).

My younger brother and I were constantly pushing our limits. We would take the skills taught to us from our parents and apply them into scenarios... what happens if we put our weight to this side in a turn, what that happens if we put the paddle there, what if we had to rapidly avoid that rock at top speed. I commend my parents for fostering and nurturing our exploratory approach to paddling as we were not always successful during the process. It must have driven them nuts, but also provided endless entertainment for the rest of the folk on the lake. This expanded to multi-day canoe trips, white water river reading/running, and attempting to execute the 'perfect run'. By the time we were at an age that we could take our first instructor level course, we had developed quite the range of unrefined, although highly effective skills. We could make the boat do what we needed, it may have involved leaping over seats while maintaining perfectly synchronized paddle strokes, but it was more fun that way. We would trouble shoot situations and develop techniques for dealing with situations, all the while teaching each other what we had just discovered. But this wasn't skill development as much as it was just pure play. If I were to give it a more formal instructional term, I would call it continuous 'self discovery'.

I do very much still remember the day when my brother Andrew and I realized that what we had developed, was something that we wanted to be able to share with others. We went to what used to be called the Canoe Expo that was held at the Etobicoke Olympium pool. Back then, all the vendors would bring their boats to this massive indoor pool and allow anyone and everyone the opportunity to paddle. Andrew and I had learned everything we knew in very low performing boats. When we had the chance to paddle higher quality and higher performance boats, our entire world opened up. We were able to do skills that we thought should be possible, but were currently very difficult in the crafts we had access to. We went home that night, with our paddling world blown wide open, with possibilities that we suspected, now confirmed. We set out the next day to become instructors. This also happens to be how we met Dave Corrigan and became a part of the Harbourfront Canoe and Kayak Centre family (at that time Dave was the General

Manager, and the Magee family who started the entire centre, were the owners). First priority was getting our skills standardized, and prerequisite certifications in place. At the time this was for canoeing and the certification was Lakewater canoe skills through the Ontario Recreational Canoeing Association (ORCA, now ORCKA). From there it was the instructor level and later to become a Canoe Tripping Instructor, followed by Instructor Trainer (which also included Lake Water Instructor and Moving Water Instructor). During that time frame the emerging sport of sea kayaking had arrived, and with my experience from camps, I took on that certification as well.

Over the next 15 years I can't tell you how many people I've had the privilege to teach (and it is a privilege). Some I never hear from again, but others still keep in touch. Some have continued paddling with that initial teaching under their belt, and others have gone on to far surpass my certification and skill levels. I've enjoyed this journey which of course is far from over.

It is not that I have been instructing 100% of the time, but it is something that has stayed as a constant with me through university, though my days working for Ontario Hydro, and working for a hospital. Its been my constant and my passion.

It all started with a curiosity...

James Kowalewski is currently the General Manager for the Harbourfront Canoe and Kayak Centre and still teaches the occasional course.

DETAILED INFORMATION - How to become an Instructor (the blue print)

The following is a blueprint to help guide those who may express interest in becoming a paddling instructor for canoeing, kayaking and standup paddleboarding.

1. It all starts with the desire to help others - There is no question that this is where it has to start. Like in the article above, it started with the question 'how?', and led to a desire to share it with others. It's this passion to share with others which creates some of the most passionate and inspiring instructors. That passion shines through and helps create and mold your style for instructing.
2. Skills standardization/certification - This should come as no surprise. In order to instruct, one must be able to perform at a certain level. This is the difference between being able to perform a skill (like sideways displacement), and being able to perform the skill with instructor quality. You've probably heard the expression, 'do as I say, not as I do', well this does not work for instructing. Students emulate what you do. If your demonstrations are in contradiction to your statements, it produces a disconnect in the learning for your students, and can restrict their achievements. It is also your resume to show your students that you have the experience to instruct to them.
3. Instructor Certification - Depending on what organization you wish to instruct for, or under which 'banner' you wish to instruct with, there can be choices here. At Harbourfront Canoe and Kayak Centre, we operate under two banners; Paddle Canada and the Ontario Recreational Canoe and Kayaking Association.
4. First Aid, Wilderness First Aid, Wilderness First Responder - This is one that I don't feel needs too much explaining. As an instructor, you're in a position of authority, and you are responsible for the total safety of your participants. It is your responsibility and duty to be up to date on first aid certification which pertains to the courses you are teaching. Standard First Aid /CPR is fine if teaching in an area with full access to medical support systems like an urban paddling centre, while Wilderness First Aid or First Responder is required if you're teaching in remote areas which do not have immediate medical support like some camps, or courses incorporated as part of an excursion trip (a single day or multi-day trip also directs what level of first aid you should obtain)
5. Instructing at the Harbourfront Canoe and Kayak (and SUP) Centre: While obtaining your Paddle Canada or ORCKA instructor certification is a must, its only the starting point. HCKC has a long history in programming. While some are standardized courses for certification like Sea Kayaking Level 1 and 2, others are in-house programs which have been highly customized over several years to best facilitate those who just want to learn, and are not interested in certification. It was with these types of programs in mind that we developed a peer mentoring program amongst our current and future instructors. You, as the reader, may have experienced this program already when there have been two instructors on your course- one in the lead position, with the second in a support position. This is our opportunity to pass along in-house knowledge, but to also observe and 'mentor'

prospective instructors.

Key items HCKC looks for in their instructors:

- **Personality** - Have you ever taken a course or gone to a presentation which was delivered from an individual who is mono-toned, and simply read off their cue cards? How non-inspiring is that? Now imagine getting your first experience in a kayak from someone who is enthusiastic and engaging. You don't have to be a comedian, but you do want to inject some of your personality and joy into your instructing style and presentation. Your students will respond! Instructing is more than just delivering skill sets, it's providing an overall positive experience.
- **Skills** - This is an obvious one, as instructors must be able to perform the skills with demonstration quality.
- **Dissect and teach skills** - I know many paddlers who are incredible paddlers, can perform skills with the utmost proficiency and execute them time and time again... but they cannot dissect and break them down into learning pieces for others to learn... all things we teach potential instructors.
- **Awareness** - This is the difference between paddling for yourself, and paddling with others in mind. This is by far the toughest thing to teach. If an awareness for other's safety, fears, and potentially dangerous situations is not already there, it's hard to influence as an instructor, as it's an approach to thinking... not thinking from your own perspective, but from that of the student in front of you. To expand, it's not paddling in situations or over distances that seem to match your average guest's skill set, but from that of the weakest paddler in front of you that day, and creatively challenging your stronger paddlers along the way. It's not doing what you think might be fun or exciting, it's addressing the concerns and fears of EVERYONE on your course, not just the proficient ones. This is all a mindset, a way of approach, and a way of thinking. I'll use the analogy of learning to roll a kayak. If someone is afraid of being trapped inside a kayak when they roll upside down, they are not thinking of body position and the path of the paddle to roll back up...they are thinking about getting that next breath of air. At that point, there is no learning of rolling, there is only an initial fear that must be recognized and then addressed by their instructor before the rolling teaching can even begin.

As a result, our mentoring program can be as short as assisting then leading on a few courses, but can be as long as mentoring for an entire summer. It is person-specific and this is our standard, and our commitment to the quality of our programming to the paddling community.

Example Blue Print for someone wanting to instruct Kayaking:

1. Previous paddling experience is equivalent to [Paddle Canada's Flatwater Sea Kayak Skills](#)
2. [Paddle Canada's Sea Kayaking Level 1 Skills](#) is obtained
3. [Paddle Canada's Sea Kayak Flatwater Instructor Certification](#) is obtained

If you are interested in becoming an instructor in multiple disciplines, take a look at the [Paddle Sports Instructor Program](#) which allows the candidate to obtain their SUP Instructor, Flatwater Canoe Instructor, and Flatwater Sea Kayak Instructor in one course. This course can also be taken for individual discipline certification, e.g. just SUP instructor, or just flatwater instructor.

WHAT NEW AT HCKC FOR 2013

REAL-WORLD RESCUES

While learning the rescue skills in a controlled environment is very effective, it's always recommended to then try them out where you will actually need them...in the natural world. Wind, waves, and other boats now can come into play, just like real life. Our Real-World Rescues Course is designed to be the next step for rescues after the pool course. It is intended for those who have rescue experience and is held amongst the Toronto Islands and Toronto Harbour. You can combine In-Pool Rescues with Real-World Rescues upon sign-up at a discounted price.

CUSTOMIZED TEAM BUILDING PADDLE/ACTIVITY DAY

To better diversify our current list of team building programs (the Culinary Paddle Adventure, Island Scavenger Hunt and the Incredible Island Race), we can now fully customize your teams paddling adventure. Combine from a list of activities and events to design your group's day. Be it a Standup Paddleboarding lesson and tour with an Island lunch at the end, or combining an island bike ride on 4 person bikes with your voyageur canoe tour, you can now pick from a list of activities to create

your group's unique experience.

THE PRO SERIES

This program is designed to provide professional-grade examination and feedback of your current paddling skills, intended to help improve your on-water kayaking performance. Program includes 3 evenings of assessment and group coaching. Another great opportunity to expand your skill level and to gain future paddling buddies. What To Expect:

- Continued Intermediate Skill Development especially focusing on your forward stroke, bracing, edging, and kayak maneuvering preparing for all weather conditions
- Video Analysis
- Expert Coaching

PADDLE FITNESS PROGRAMS

We have revamped our fitness programs to better facilitate individuals, groups, team coaches, and the fitness industry instructors. We are pleased to offer the following paddle fitness options:

- **Attention YOGA and Fitness Instructors!**
 - work with us to create a program option truly unique in your industry. Incorporate a paddle into your fitness program. Be it Standup Paddleboarding, kayaking or a group voyageur paddle, use our boats as the warm-up, reward, the workout main, or even the vehicle to your workout location. Let us do what we do best (paddle) and you can do what you do best (your fitness program). Consider incorporating paddling once a week, month or even just once to stand out in your industry.
- **Attention Teams, and Coaches!**
 - Introducing the Team Paddling Card. This is a customized group rental card to be used for group paddle training purposes. It is based on a 2 hour rental structure and will require an initial paddle safety assessment of your team.
- **Personal Paddle Coaching** - Want to use paddling as your vehicle to fitness? We can do that. Be it to prepare for a specific race/event, improve your overall paddling ability, or wanting to improve your overall fitness in a unique way, taking on a personalized paddling coach can take your approach to paddling in an entirely new direction!
How does this differ from a private paddle lesson? - Paddle coaching is intended for those who wish to use the activity of paddling as their means for fitness development. Be this for a lifestyle approach, targeted skills development, or simply with fitness in mind. It also provides the opportunity to have continuity between paddle sessions. Private lessons are directed towards paddle skills development specifically, and are typically done as a single event. While all our instructors are well qualified to teach paddle skill development, we have a few who are specialized as paddle and fitness coaches.

VIDEO STROKE ANALYSIS EVENING

This program is excellent for those who wish to get more power, efficiency, and correction to their forward paddling stroke. The forward stroke skills are used all the time and the ability to get feedback on how to go further, faster, and easier is time well-spent. You will be video taped at the beginning of the course, then after viewing yourself and getting stroke improvement feedback, you will be video taped again with additional viewing and feedback. A great way to improve your forward paddling no matter what stage you are at in experience.

[Check out our website for more new programming](#)

CONSTRUCTION UPDATE OF QUEENS QUAY

Well, there is good news and there is not so good news.

The not so good news is that there have been complications with water-mains for the street construction of Queens Quay directly in front of our paddling shop. The good news is that there will not be any road closures. While they have reduced Queens Quay car lanes down to a single westbound lane at present, they have kept the parking lot just north of our building open and plan to keep it that way for the entire summer. In addition TTC buses are still servicing the area. What you may want to consider this summer is some extra time to get down to the water as there will be some traffic spill-over to Lakeshore Blvd. As we find out more, we will be passing it along. Keep looking at our home page for updates as we will be placing updated information there throughout the summer.

[Forward this email](#)



This email was sent to james@paddletoronto.com by ask@paddletoronto.com | [Update Profile/Email Address](#) | Instant removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) | [Privacy Policy](#).

Element Racing | Mailing:1474 Heartland Blvd | Oshawa | Ontario | L1K 2P3 | Canada