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# Lifeguarding

for  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
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Learn about the  
certifications required

Navigate lifeguard career  
paths and opportunities

Read up on training tips  
and focused workouts

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Veteran Ocean Lifeguard/EMT with  
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# Lifeguarding

by Cary Epstein &  
Cameron DeGuzman

for  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
A Wiley Brand

# Lifeguarding For Dummies®

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# Introduction

Welcome to *Lifeguarding for Dummies*! You have this book in your hands, so we imagine it must be for one of several reasons. You're in the market for a new job and this is the hundredth book you've picked up. Perhaps you've earned your lifeguard certification and don't quite know what to do with it. Maybe the colder months are winding down, and you're looking for a fun and exciting way to keep busy in the summer. Look no further!

The lifeguarding career is perfect for anyone in search of a job with flexibility to work full-time, part-time, or even seasonally. You learn how to act as a first responder to various emergency scenarios and serve your greater community. It is a career with no age bias, teaching you skills that you can apply in any situation. And you become part of an elite team of lifesavers (see Figure I-1).



Cary Epstein (Author)

**FIGURE I-1:** A LIFEGUARDS ONLY sign closes off the designated lifeguard area from the general public.



WARNING

At the time of writing this, lifeguard shortages are affecting pools, beaches, and parks around the United States. Empty lifeguard stands and towers are forcing communities and municipalities to shorten their hours and scale down their staffing, putting the

general public at risk. There is no better time to become a lifeguard and ease this situation!

So you think you can swim?

## About This Book

If you've decided on a career in lifeguarding, you are in luck! This book is all encompassing, and there is very little we don't cover surrounding this topic. We can't think of any other publication that shares so many different angles of the profession. This isn't a manual or a brochure telling you how to join your country club as a lifeguard, nor is it a lifeguard cheat sheet for those currently employed. *Lifeguarding for Dummies* gives you a full 360-degree perspective on one of the most beloved and respected professions in the world.

You can learn every aspect of what it takes and means to be a lifeguard by reading this book. We dive into the various career opportunities that exist once you become certified. We explain how lifeguarding has grown into a worldwide community that goes back over 100 years, rich in history and lifesaving tradition. We throw in tips for becoming a lifeguard as well as workouts to help you kickstart your swimming and running training.



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

Note that web addresses and programming code appear in monospace font. If you're reading a digital version of this book on a device connected to the Internet, note that you can click the web address to visit that website, like this: [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com).

To make the content more digestible, we divided it into five parts:

- » Part 1: Getting Started with Lifeguarding
- » Part 2: Lifeguarding in the Different Facilities
- » Part 3: Training and Preparation
- » Part 4: Exploring Other Lifeguarding Activities
- » Part 5: Part of Tens



# Foolish Assumptions

People in general have a natural tendency to make assumptions about others. As lifeguards, we (Cary and Cameron) make assumptions every second we are on the stand or in the tower. In this book, we also make a few about you, dear reader:

- » We assume you know what lifeguarding is and you have seen lifeguards at work or in action at some point in your life. If not . . . let's just say you've been swimming in all the wrong places!
- » We assume you know how to swim, or at least you *think* you know how to swim. Everyone's definition of swimming is different; if you have a competitive swimming background, you know what we are talking about. However, not all lifeguards have a competitive swimming background (nor do you need one!). If you're not sure where you stand, try one of our swimming workouts in Chapter 8 to assess your strengths and weaknesses.
- » We assume that you are physically, mentally, and emotionally fit to face some of the most extreme health emergency situations and are aware and ready to tackle this fast-paced environment.
- » We assume you are willing to enter that same, and potentially dangerous, water that almost took the life of a victim.

## Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, icons in the margins highlight certain types of valuable information that call out for your attention. Here are the icons you'll encounter and a brief description of each.



TIP

The Tip icon marks tips and shortcuts that you can use to make your day-to-day duties on the job run smoothly.



REMEMBER

Remember icons mark the information that's especially important to know. To siphon off the most important information in each chapter, skim through these icons.



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

The Technical Stuff icon marks information of a technical nature that you can skip over if you're in a hurry.



WARNING

The Warning icon tells you to watch out! It marks important information that may save you headaches, especially because it is entirely possible you will run into these types of situations on a day-to-day basis.

## Beyond the Book

In addition to the material in the print or e-book you're reading right now, this product also comes with some goodies you can access on the web. Check out the free access-anywhere Cheat Sheet that includes tips and advice. To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and type **Lifeguarding For Dummies Cheat Sheet** in the Search box.

## Where to Go from Here

The best part about this book is that you do not need to read the whole thing cover to cover if you don't want to (although we think you should!). Depending on the stage of the lifeguard search you're in, or if you are already a certified, employed lifeguard, you will likely approach this text in a different way.

The book is broken into 19 easy reading chapters and five main parts. Simply open the Table of Contents and find the area you are interested in. From there, the world is your oyster! You want a macro-perspective on the career, turn to Part 1. Want to know your employment options, look at Part 2! You can read this book sequentially or jump around as you see fit without feeling lost about any one particular topic. It's meant to be a fun, easy — but informative — read. (Cary and Cameron, shown in Figure I-2, hope you enjoy the journey!)



*Cary Epstein (Author)*

**FIGURE I-2:** Authors Cary Epstein and Cameron DeGuzman at Jones Beach State Park.



# 1

**Getting  
Started with  
Lifeguarding**

## **IN THIS PART . . .**

Understand what it takes to be a lifeguard and take a deeper look at what goes on day-to-day in this profession.

Become familiar with the lifeguard's encounters with nature, the science of drowning, various first aid techniques, and the different kinds of equipment you'll use.

Learn about the rich history of lifeguarding as well as how the original lifesavers have evolved into the aquatic rescuers and watermen we know today.

## IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding the importance of lifeguarding
- » Discovering the basics about water rescue and safety
- » Following a day in the life of a lifeguard

# Chapter **1**

## Lifeguarding 101

**W**elcome to the world of lifeguarding, “the best job you will ever have.” While we admit that is a pretty bold statement to start off with, ask anyone you know who has spent any amount of time lifeguarding and see what they have to say. This lifeguard world is filled with culture and tradition that goes back decades, and we are very excited to share it all with you in this book.

While stereotypically you might think of lifeguarding as a teenager’s job, across the United States and around the world, there are dedicated people (including some who have given their lives to save others) who are proud to call themselves professional lifeguards. Think of Aquaman . . . but a realistic day-to-day version! We cordially invite you to kick off your shoes, grab your most appropriate bathing suit, and dive right in!

## The Importance of Lifeguarding

Drowning is one of the leading causes of death across the United States and around the world. It is considered one of the most avoidable ways to die. How is it avoidable, you might ask? By simply swimming and recreating in waters protected by lifeguards, swimmers greatly reduce their risk. The majority of drownings are avoidable, but human nature just can’t resist the temptation

of getting wet. Did you know that 74 percent of fatal pool drownings happen residentially? When no lifeguards are present, public pools and beaches post signs that read “Swim at your own risk,” yet people ignore the posted warnings and tragedies happen. Everyone thinks bad things can’t happen to them. If that were the case, then bad things wouldn’t happen to anyone. Frankly, this attitude can get you in a lot of trouble!



REMEMBER

At the end of the day, if there are no lifeguards on duty, you really shouldn’t be swimming . . . and yes that goes for people who are good swimmers too!

## The Perks of Lifeguarding

Although there are waaaaay too many perks of the job to list in one chapter, we figured we would share some of our favorites!

- » **The beach, pool, or park is your office.** When you are told to report to work, this is where you are going! This couldn’t be any more atypical. Your views of the sunset (if you’re not working indoors) will be way better than your friends’ who work typical 9-5 jobs at their desks, guaranteed!
- » **You have the best seat in the house.** People actually pay to come to your job, but you get paid *and* get the best seat in the house! Everyone wants to sit up on the lifeguard stand, chair, or tower . . . but they don’t get to visit the Royal Palace and sit on the throne! Being high above the ground looking down on all brings both pride and power.
- » **No shoes, no shirt . . . no problem!** Try showing up to a traditional office and stripping down to a speedo or your favorite bathing suit. You’ll never have a problem deciding what to wear either, since as a lifeguard you need to be in uniform at all times (no heels, no laces, no ties, no briefcases, no belts . . . no problem!).
- » **Being outdoors (unless you’re indoors!)** While there most certainly are indoor lifeguarding jobs, we think that one of the best perks is getting to work outside. The warm blanket of sun covering you from head to toe, the gentle breeze that slightly blows your hair, the sweet scent of sunscreen infiltrating your nose, ending with a gorgeous sunset. And yes . . . you get paid for all of that!



- » **When the ocean is closed to the public for big surf, it is open to you.** This is a great opportunity for you and the lifeguard team to train. While we recognize the hazards of getting in the water during a high surf advisory, this is how ocean lifeguards fully prepare for the worst! Each agency has its own rules and regulations when it comes to putting guards in the water on these hazardous training days.
- » **Use of all the fancy equipment.** All the toys! Each specialized piece of equipment has a purpose and the only way to get proficient with them is to take them out. Grab a kayak, surfski, or rescue board! Get trained to row or operate the jet ski or motorized lifeguard boat!
- » **You get paid to work out!** Staying in shape is an important part of this job, as we will discuss in Part 3, but not many jobs pay you to work out. Yes, you read that correctly. Go to the gym on your own time or work out on the clock! In many cases, lifeguard shacks and areas have a variety of workout equipment to help you maintain your lifeguard physique.
- » **You develop lasting friendships.** It is not uncommon to make lifelong friends on the job. Due to the close-knit nature of the work, coupled with trainings and teamwork, you will quickly find yourself developing friendships with fellow lifeguards that can last a lifetime. These may be the people in your wedding party and at your children's first birthdays. Crazy as it sounds, you might even meet your future partner on the job (trust us, it has happened on more than one occasion)! P.S. Lifeguard weddings get wild!

## Developing skills that will benefit you beyond the water

Being a lifeguard, you get much more than just a lifesaving skill set. There are many, many benefits that you develop from working as a lifeguard that transition into other jobs and industries.

### Increased self confidence

Self-confidence and self-esteem take time to build up, especially for teenagers. Some of us never get our self-confidence up to a level we are happy with, even into our adult lives. Lifeguarding is an extremely serious job that requires making life and death decisions. At the end of the day, knowing that the decisions and

actions you made helped keep people safe will absolutely lead to a boost in your own self-confidence!

## Communication skills

Working in this role requires you to speak to all kinds of people, including your fellow coworkers, and adult and juvenile patrons visiting your facility. You need to be able to clearly express your thoughts and communicate with the public. Sometimes people just want to walk up to your lifeguard stand or chair to chat or ask a question. But in more serious situations, being able to delegate tasks with clarity and efficiency goes a long way when the clock is ticking.

## Leadership qualities

Leaders are made, not born! Let's face it . . . some of us are better at leading than others. That doesn't mean that you can't learn to be a good leader. Leadership qualities take time to develop. As a lifeguard, there is no doubt you will find yourself in situations where you need to use these skills! Lifeguards who possess this skill set may find themselves being offered leadership positions or administrative titles, such as aquatics director, coordinator, captain, lieutenant, boatswain, and so on. These positions not only earn you more responsibility but also more money.



TIP

You do not need to be in an administrative or leadership position to be a leader. Some of the best lifeguards we know display incredible leadership skills. They are not bosses or administrators . . . just plain old salty lifeguards. Be the best version of yourself, and, in time, your leadership qualities will grow.

## Teamwork

In almost all circumstances in this job, you need the rest of your crew to help you out. Whether you find yourself in a multi-person rescue or simply need backup to cover your chair when you jump in, you must be able to rely on your coworkers. You also need to be reliable in any situation that arises. Lifeguards often work closely together with the common goal of executing a rescue and saving someone's life. Without the ability to work as a team, the likelihood of a successful outcome significantly decreases.



REMEMBER

Teamwork makes the dream work!

## Problem-solving skills

Some lifeguards might say that no two rescues are the same. Many certainly are similar, but when it comes down to it, you were tasked with a situation at hand and it was ultimately you who had to make the decision. This builds off the point about self-confidence. As you become more comfortable making autonomous decisions for the safety of others, you will realize that all this time you were dissecting the problem and coming up with the most efficient and sensible way to bring a swimmer or patron out of danger.

## Handling stress

Stress is part of everyday life. However, as a first responder, levels of stress can be elevated, based on what you saw or actions you took while administering medical aid or performing a water rescue. Professional lifeguards learn that it is healthy and okay to feel stressed. You will learn not to compartmentalize your feelings and learn that there are ways you can express how you feel without being afraid of looking weak. Learning how to handle and recognize post-traumatic stress disorder will help you tremendously — not just as a lifeguard, but in everyday life as well. *Critical incident stress debriefings* (CISDs) are common practices after a serious rescue, especially when there is loss of life.



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

A *critical incident stress debriefing*, or *CISD*, is a process that occurs soon after a traumatic incident, typically 24 to 72 hours after the event. It is led by a designated facilitator and designed to support recovery to those exposed to high levels of stress or trauma. It may link employees to counseling and treatment services if needed.



REMEMBER

You should never feel ashamed to talk about your stress or anxiety. In most jobs, services exist should you need or want to talk to a professional.

## Meeting all types of people

We touch on this in far more depth in Chapter 7, but you will meet people from all walks of life in this career, providing a massive network arguably more diverse than any other profession.

While lifeguarding is typically thought of as a young person's job, the reality is that you can't have 20, 30, or even 40 years of experience and still be a teenager! One of the unique parts of this

job is the age difference between the younger and older guards. Unlike a traditional “office,” where friendships are formed in a more structured setting, it is not uncommon for professional yet more casual friendships to form between guards of different ages. It’s not rare to get dinner after work with a table of lifeguards in their 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s.

Most people’s closest friends are within a few years of their age. As a lifeguard, true friendships are formed despite differences in age, based on their shared commonalities and love for lifesaving!

The love of the water and saving lives attracts people from all walks of life. Some choose this as a full-time job and others as part-time work. In later chapters, we go into more detail about the varying options you have as a lifeguard. Regardless, you could be working with people from different careers and backgrounds. One second you could be listening to someone’s experiences working on Wall Street, and the next moment you could be talking to someone working in public safety, medicine, or education, to name just a few. They each have their own story and journey to share with you, as long as you are willing to listen. The common denominator that brings all lifeguards back to the lifeguard chair is their passion for water safety.

## **Maintaining a healthy lifestyle**

Generally speaking, maintaining a healthy lifestyle is something that goes hand in hand with being a lifeguard. Since this job is extremely physical at times and requires a certain level of fitness, it is not uncommon for people who care about their health and fitness to be drawn to it. There are many ways to maintain a healthy lifestyle and we hope you follow some of our suggestions in the following sections.

### **Practice healthy eating habits**

You are what you eat! What you put into your body not only affects how you look, but also how you feel. You don’t necessarily have to feel 100 percent all the time, but you should always be ready to exert a lot of energy at any given moment. Emergencies can go down in the blink of an eye. Eating healthy means maintaining a balanced diet that is comprised of all the major food groups and nutrients.

## Get in your cardio and don't forget to lift!

The job calls for you to be physically fit, and what better way to maintain fitness than intense cardio and lifting? The daily duties of the job help you maintain physical fitness without even realizing it. Swimming and running on rescues, treading water, and pulling victims to safety are all workouts in and of themselves. Call this a perk of lifeguarding; as mentioned earlier, you are getting paid to work out!

## Get an appropriate amount of sleep

Most people have a hard time in this category, but getting the right amount of sleep each night can make or break you . . . especially as a lifeguard. Your work requires you to focus and concentrate. It's not a good idea to be tired, sluggish, or sleepy while on the job. On average, you should be getting a minimum of eight hours of sleep a night. So many great things happen while you are sleeping, so you are cutting yourself short if you aren't getting enough. If you want to feel your best and function at peak performance, consider setting yourself a bedtime and sticking to it. We promise you won't regret it.

## Take care of yourself and your body

As a lifeguard, the first step in any situation is to make sure that the scene is safe. You are in no state to help others if you are not in the proper shape. Be sure to take care of yourself to avoid injury and illness. When in doubt, err on the side of caution and rest or take the day off. The job relies on you being healthy in order to make the facility safe for everyone else — and that means attending to your physical, mental, and emotional health.

Being a lifeguard fosters the perfect environment for your mental health. You are surrounded by a fun group of coworkers in a fast-paced, exciting environment. There will be times when the job gets stressful, of course, but if you do not allow negative feelings to overtake you, you will become stronger and more prepared for all types of situations.



REMEMBER

Don't be afraid to put yourself first! As the 1940's fitness pioneer Dan Lurie always said, "Health is your greatest wealth!"

# The Tough Side of Being a Lifeguard

While lifeguarding most certainly has its perks, don't be fooled . . . the job can and will be difficult at times. We don't often talk about the tough side of being a lifeguard, but the reality is, it does exist. Dealing with the public does present its challenges. In the following sections, we address some of the more common difficulties about the job and offer our best advice on how to handle them.

## Being the bad cop

While lifeguards are known for their ability to make rescues, they spend the majority of their days trying to prevent them! They do that by enforcing a list of predetermined rules, which are set up by the facility. All of the rules are in place for safety reasons, but some seem more apparent than others. Being the bad cop isn't always easy, but it comes with the job and you must own it!

Some of the most common “bad cop” rules you will have to enforce include:

- » NO running
- » NO lifejackets or flotation devices in the water
- » NO glass bottles on the pool deck
- » NO ball playing in the water
- » NO roughhousing (chicken fights, dunking, and so on)
- » NO loud music (or music at all)
- » NO diving
- » NO sitting directly in front of the lifeguard stand or tower
- » NO swimming in unprotected waters
- » NO surfing
- » NO fishing
- » NO swimming while fully clothed

While these are just some of the more common rules you will most likely need to enforce, it is important to think about how you will deliver the message. Just because you need to be the “bad cop” doesn't mean you need to be nasty. You know the old saying,