Shark Week Pro Tip: ‘Try Not to Act Like Prey’



Biologist-adventurer Forrest Galante shares some things to keep in mind if you find yourself playing Marco Polo with a shark.

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Forrest Galante is a biologist and adventurer who scours the land and sea in search of animals long thought to be extinct, with the goal of bringing research and funding to revitalize their populations. It’s exciting, inspiring, and as you might imagine, crazy dangerous. Forrest has faced not-so-happy hippos and all manner of “that could have gone south very quickly” situations on his travels. But happily, he still counts all of his fingers and toes.

For Shark Week 2020, Forrest headed to the Maldives to search

for the Pondicherry, a shark that had not been seen for decades due to reckless fishing practices. You can find out if he finds a finned friend by watching “Extinct or Alive: Land of the Lost Shark” on Discovery Go.

For this week’s episode of Get a Real Job, I spoke with Forrest about his disdain of shark cages, his love of adventure, and his dread of that most feared creature of all: publicists. Here are some takeaways from that conversation. Thanks, as always, for listening!

Swimming outside the box

“I hate cage diving. I’ve done it once in my life in South Africa. And I was a complete waste of time. I mean, nothing against anybody that wants to go and do it. I think it’s a great and very safe way to go and see these animals. I don’t dive with sharks for the thrill, but I certainly don’t mind the thrill. I’m no adrenaline junkie, but when you have a tiger shark that weighs 2,000 pounds swimming at you at full speed and you use nothing but your hands to stop it from biting, you get a little bit of adrenaline! But when I’m down there, I’m doing work that is pertinent to the species. You gotta be there working with the animal and that’s not sitting in a metal box.”

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Sharks are just like puppies

“I’ve been in the water with great white sharks, bull sharks, tiger sharks, and all those species. But compared to working with certain other species, they’re puppy dogs. When you’re in the water working with a saltwater crocodile or in the same freshwater ecosystem that houses hippos, that’s really scary. Let me stress this — and I’ll stress this to everybody: Don’t

go and try this! Don’t watch someone like me on TV and just get in the water with sharks. I can do it because it takes a lot of understanding and patience and a number of other words. It’s not easy and it can be very, very dangerous.”

So how do you become a shark specialist?

“A lot of people don’t see that when I started my career, I spent years of my life counting ants and picking weeds. That’s how biologists get started! Once you’ve mastered that, and you’ve proven your work ethic, you move on to rats and then foxes. You don’t hop in and go, ‘I’m going to be a shark scientist. I’m going to jump in the water and start tagging sharks with a spear!’ Like, it doesn’t work that way. You gotta start at the bottom and earn your street cred.”

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