

August 2007



KETCHIKAN KILLER WHALES

Whales Tales

The Hardest Thing about Coaching

By Tim Welsh, University of Notre Dame

Reprinted from the American Swim Coaches Association website, swimmingcoach.org

So what is the hardest thing about coaching anyway? It is a simple question. We all understand what it means. No doubt we all have some idea about how we would answer it. It seems like a simple question that will have a simple answer.

However, when we asked the question by e-mail recently to a group of coaches from across the country, the answers we got were far from simple, and very far from unanimous. Even the process of how we asked the question went from simple to complex in a very short time. It all began on a peaceful morning in February. [I was sitting on the pool deck with Joel White, our women's assistant coach, and we were looking at the water while we were waiting for swimmers to come in for a morning warm up. We were just sitting there, talking a little, when Joel turned to me and said simply: "What do you think the hardest thing is about coaching?"

Phew. Pause. Gulp. Wow. Inhale. Exhale. "You know what?" I said to Joel. "That is a really important question." We didn't talk much more because swimmers came in to swim, but I thought about it a lot more. Then, I wrote to John Leonard, and I asked John what he thought about putting the question to a lot of coaches and then trying to collect and collate the answers. "Do it," John said. And just as simply as that, the question went out by e-mail to a group of coaches, and from that group to another group, and another group ... until the e-mail had circulated to a lot of coaches all across Indiana and all across the country.

In less than a month, we received some 50 responses, also from all across Indiana and all across the country. "The use of e-mail to create this forum is a wonderful thing," wrote Chuck Warner from Rutgers as he passed the question on to other coaches in New Jersey. "Thanks for the question," wrote Randy Julian from the USA Swimming Office in Colorado Springs: "I think ALL coaches should go through this exercise and have this discussion with their staffs." John Leonard, who saw most of the responses, wrote that he thought the question might have "hit a

cord." Not everyone, however, was so complimentary. Writing from Florida, ASCA's Guy Edson did not like the question at all. "I'll be the contrarian," wrote Guy. "I don't like the question." He continued: "I don't like throwing the question out there because it creates a frenzy of negativity. When I read the email I fell into the trap and went searching through my experiences for the most negative things I could think of. What a rush of images! But then I caught myself and thought: 'Why am I doing this?' I would never ask my swim team: 'what's the hardest part of workout?' Consider instead: 'What's the most challenging part of workout [coaching] that you have nevertheless found a way to overcome?' That is the question we should be asking.

In fact, several of the responses did go directly from identifying the hardest thing about coaching to defining a more perfect world of coaching. Chuck Warner, again writing from his Rutgers position during this very difficult year for Rutgers' men's team, lived Guy Edson's dictum by writing a very similar sentence on two different days from the two different sides of the question. "The hardest thing about coaching," wrote Chuck Warner on one day, "is keeping the spirits of our athletes high when yours are not." A few days later, Chuck wrote back: "The best thing about coaching is going to a practice that has joy and laughter in it. You are down, and they pick you up." Both of these sentences refer to and are in the context of the decision by Rutgers to drop men's swimming after this season. Turning a potential negative into a positive is, I think, one of the points Guy Edson is making. The "joy and laughter" practice is reminiscent of Eddie Reese's famous dictum that "the magic is in the kids." True to form, Eddie Reese, in his response, did remind us again to focus more on the athletes and less on the difficulties involved in coaching the athletes.

Overall, perhaps predictably, but none the less interestingly, few of the responses identified the hardest thing about coaching as something that happens when a swimmer is in the

water. Most of the responses identified things that happen out of the water as the hardest thing about coaching. From his vantage point in the National Team office, Mark Schubert put it this way: "Dealing with everything that has nothing to do with coaching... all the issues... that take place away from the pool that have a vital influence on what happens in the pool is the hardest thing about coaching."

Karin Adams, one of Chuck Warner's coaching colleagues in New Jersey, after a detailed and emotional story wrote with a full and loving heart what we heard from several young coaches: "... [we] realized that the hardest things about coaching don't happen in the water. They happen in our emotions, our minds, our hearts ... So many directions we can all go in pondering the problem and the solution..."

Parents (the "bad kind") took some of the heaviest criticism from coaches identifying the hardest thing about coaching. "It's trying to get parents to understand the big picture ...not the age group championships ...but eventually jrs, srs, ntl, and ON!" wrote Don King from up in the North West. "It isn't the kids," wrote another. "They have good days and bad days, but they are kids. The hardest part for me is the nit-picking adults."

"When I interviewed for my job," wrote Jim Voss from Duneland, Indiana, "one board member told me that 10% of the people were going to love what I did; that 80 % would go along with it; and that 10% would hate it." So, wrote Jim, I try to deal with the positive 90%, but "as a wrap - my answer - the 10% parent." John Krick from Crown Point, Indiana, wrote that it helped him when he was advised to think of people in his club each playing a role. A person can play one role only: coach - parent - child - official, he writes. "I thought that was appropriate," he said.

"I think the answer to this question [the hardest thing about coaching] changes as our society values and morals change," wrote Meg Gates Osborne from Heritage Christian School in Indianapolis. "Presently,



Head Coach

Martin Reichgott

Coachmartin@kpunet.net

(o) 247-7946 * (c) 254-1945

Board of Directors

Cathy Tighe, President

Art Maioriello, Vice President

Sarah Corporon, Secretary

Lorraine Johnson, Treasurer

Trevor Stephens, Meet Director

Charlene Stacy, Ways & Means

Angie McCleary, Membership

Assistant Coaches

Jen Walton

Aubree Sambrano



August Birthdays

Bekah Bowers, 8/4, 15

Danyel Burton, 8/6, 13

John Coss, 8/7, 8

Shawn Sande, 8/25, 9

Alec Simmons, 8/27, 9

Janelle Stacy, 8/16, 14

Leif Stephens, 8/15, 7

Kyra Welker, 8/19, 8



The K-Files: Getting to Know ... the KKW Board

President: Cathy Tighe

The Board wants you to know who your club representatives are, so this edition of the newsletter has a short bio on each of us. I am your newly elected Board President. When my daughter Kaitlyn wanted to join KKW two years ago, I really knew nothing about swimming or the club. Since then, our family has learned more than I wanted to, but the more I learn about it, the more I know there is still to learn. The short answer to why I ran for a Board position is that someone needed to. The longer answer is that I think the swim club provides a great opportunity to our kids, and I wanted to be a part of that. I figured if I joined the Board, I could help make the decisions that run our club. So what do I expect to get out of this? I'm not exactly sure yet, but I want the kids to have a wonderful time that will create memorable experiences for them. I think one way to do that is to create an environment that the whole family is comfortable in and can have fun with. I hope to increase parent participation for two main reasons. One, if everyone does a little, then a few won't get "burn-out" which in turn affects attitude which affects the overall environment. Two, I feel participation is one of the best ways to learn about your child's interests, and that knowledge helps create a positive environment and opens a door to conversation with your child. If you have any questions about how things work, feel free to ask any of your Board members or other parents. Especially for the new parents: we all felt a little lost when we first joined the team, so no question is a silly question (yes, I believe this is a family club, so if your child is a swimmer, you are part of the "team" that makes it all happen).



Vice President: Art Maioriello

Art's daughter Ashley, 9, swims for KKW. Art served as the VP last year and has agreed to serve another year as his way to stay involved with the team.



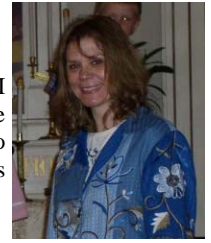
Secretary: Sarah Corporon

My name is Sarah Corporon. My son Merek has been swimming with KKW for a year now. I decided to get involved with KKW because I wanted to be involved with my son's swimming and once I did, I discovered I have had a lot of fun with the kids who are in KKW. I was privileged to chaperone my first swim meet this past year and I realized that even though I was a "newcomer" to the program, it was fairly easy to fit right in and help out with the organization. I accepted the "write in vote" to become secretary of the board of KKW because I wanted to help out in a way that I knew I was capable. I am hoping that I will be an encouragement to new folks that join or have joined recently to become involved with Ketchikan Killer Whales, as it is a spectacular program and it can only get better as we each contribute as much as we possibly can.



Treasurer: Lorraine Johnson

I am a mother of three, two of them are swimmers. I teach preschool at First Lutheran and am a part time bookkeeper. I am on the board because I have two children swimming with KKW, and I feel parents should be involved with their children.



Meet Director: Trevor Stephens

Trevor has served as a stroke and turn official for many years. This year, he has agreed to take on the position of meet director, working to ensure our meets and time trials are well organized and run smoothly. He has three children, Isabel (12), Maddy (11), and Leif (7), who swim with the team.



Ways and Means: Charlene Stacy

Charlene's daughter, Janelle (14), has been swimming with KKW for a number of years. Charlene has taken on the Ways and Means position to help organize and coordinate our fundraising efforts.

Membership: Angie McCleary

The thought of being the Membership Chairperson never entered my mind, but when asked if I would consider this position, I agreed. Swimming is very popular here in Ketchikan and is something you can do all year long, despite the weather. I would like to let people know how rewarding swimming can be and hope that we can share our experiences with KKW with as many people as we can. The more exposure of our team, hopefully more new families will join.



The SEAK 12 & under Relay team at the ECSC Summer Invitational in Eugene, Oregon in July. Kiera O'Brien (KKW), Dakota Isaak (GSC), Carissa Anderson (GSC), Mia Ruffin (KKW), and Riley Walsh (GSC).



Don't forget to turn in you're A&P receipts!

the feeling of 'entitlement' by athletes [which is] being enforced by parents is inhibiting coaches from being able to truly teach life skills and values." Speaking for a lot of coaches who made a similar comment, Meg continued: "I realize that parents want the best for their kids" but sometimes winning isn't the best. "In my opinion," concluded Meg, "a pool, lane lines, and some black lines are just a place for kids to learn life lessons. It's not about the time or place. It's about how you got there and what did you learn inside those lane lines."

Younger coaches and coaches of younger swimmers frequently turned to values learned (and questions to be asked and answered) that go beyond the sport itself as the hardest thing to do "correctly" and well. "Knowing everything," is the hardest thing, wrote Lee Willing from Austin, Texas, "trying to come up with the best answers when athletes expect you know ALL answers." "My biggest fear," writes Jeff Mercer, from Pendleton, Indiana, "is not doing it right in regards to the swimmer... In my mind is the constant yearning to know the end result."

The hardest thing is the "constant questions you need to ask yourself about each swimmer, and each program you design." is what Brian King writes from California. It is "the constant quest for improvement." And even when you are finished and you know the answer, "there are still improvements to be made," writes Brian. Meanwhile, in the middle of the country and from his work with coaches in all the Central States, Randy Julian stresses that "maintaining that core conviction about what you are doing" in the midst of all the distractions from inside and outside is the hardest thing about coaching.

As the e-mail conversation continued and responses came in from around the country, it became more and more clear that common issues exist all over the place. So much so that this email circuit began to function almost like a high level and very upscale blog spot with coaches thinking, sharing, reaching out, looking forward (they said) to whatever summary might come from all of the answers. There maybe nothing new under the sun, or under the water either, but sharing similar experiences and ideas and thoughts with other coaches in similar situations can be helpful, supportive, educational, even liberating. What is inspiring and very perceptible about the comments received is that coaches of all ages and of all age groups care passionately about their swimmers and about their sport and want to do a good job of teaching and helping their team members. "It's a helping profession," writes John Leonard. "We teach; we educate; and we assist."

Clearly, as swimmers age and as coaches gain more experience or coach older swimmers, some of the answers to the hardest thing about coaching question begin to involve individual swimmers in the decision and the answer. For me, it's "finding out how to motivate each swimmer," writes Alex Steger from his Thunderbolts team... but also, he continues "the more time I spend coaching the more I believe in Doc Councilman's X-Factor talk."

"Teaching responsibility to each team member," writes Bill Wadley from Ohio State, "to the extent that they understand that they are indeed the one person who can make the biggest difference in their swimming performance." Personal individual responsibility. That is a long way from nit-picking parents and entitlement, but that too is part of the answer to this very big question.

"After a lot of thought," writes Bailey Weathers from his USA Swimming Office in Colorado Springs on this theme of personal responsibility. "It comes down to one simple thing." The hardest thing about coaching "is watching an athlete make a mistake or mistakes that will negate many of their good efforts

and intentions." Armanda Juntunen, who also noted that sometimes at big clinics, a young coach's thoughts "aren't worth a stink" wrote bravely in this forum. She agrees with Bailey Weathers. The hardest thing about coaching, she writes "is watching swimmers with great potential not care, or fall short for lack of trying." The sound bite on this topic, however, came from none other than John Leonard himself. "Unrealized potential," he wrote, "is painful to watch."

Sometimes, however, everyone (swimmers, coaches, parents...) appears to do everything right, but things still don't work out. What then? "Aye, there's the rub." Stuart Faux, writing from his Quantic Sharks team puts it this way: "I think the hardest thing about coaching is dealing with an athlete who does all the right things and works as hard as he/she can all year, only to come up a bit short at the end of the season." We have all been there, and we all recognize Stuart's wisdom when he says: "That situation is hard from two perspectives. One - convincing the athlete that if he/she 'gets back up on the horse' and keeps doing the right things, success will eventually come. [That] can be a tough sell sometimes. Two - the feeling within ourselves that we have somehow let that person down and not done our job as a coach to help them reach their goals."

Mark Hesse from Sugar Creek Swim Club says much the same thing. He writes that: "the hardest thing in coaching is seeing the disappointment of an athlete or team whom you know has done all the right things and worked hard but did not reach their goal(s). Your heart (at least mine) aches for them as you and they search for answers and justification for this perceived failure." Our heart aches too, Coach. So does Jimmy Tierney's at Northwestern. The hardest thing about coaching, he thinks, is: "motivating an athlete after a season without major success."

Long time Johns Hopkins coach George Kennedy is known to all as a sensitive soul. His heart aches too in situations such as Mark Hesse and Stuart Faux describe. But also, George reminds us, "the hardest thing about coaching is to each year get the swimmers to understand it isn't about the taper." It isn't just about how many race pace 50's is the correct number of race pace 50's, even though, as George also notes, how many race pace 50's you do is always important. Rather, says George, "it is about understanding that it is about the entire season; what you did to get prepared for the season; and the balance of work and rest in our LIVE"- Really, he says, it's "more about the 20-22 hours a day that are outside of a coach's control ... and since we are all (to some extent) control freaks, this is very hard." Check, George. Got it.

"So, if you take this to be the hardest part." George continues, "then the real CHALLENGE for a coach is to provide the opportunities where each swimmer can 'let go' and rid themselves of the limitations that they place on themselves." The move that George just made from what is hard to what is a challenge to be overcome is a move that several coaches made in their replies. It is also a move that is directly in line with Guy Edson's advice earlier.

Another way to listen to George Kennedy's report on the hardest thing about coaching is to hear him saying: "it's not about the taper; it's about your whole life." It is, of course, but still, what a huge statement. Keep going. The next sentence goes like this: the hardest thing about coaching is that it involves your whole life, and the whole lives of each of your swimmers too. It doesn't get any bigger than that, or any more noble either.

Coaches writing in this forum, however, were not trying to make coaching any bigger than it already is. Rather, they were sometimes wondering if it were

possible to make coaching any smaller, so that it might fit more neatly into the whole rest of their lives. In short, they were worrying about the (inevitable) "B" word: "Balance."

"My knee jerk reaction [to what is the hardest thing about coaching]," writes Brian Hindson from Central Indiana Aquatics "is parents ... but really, I think it is finding the time to do everything I want to do for the kids, the team, my friends, my family, and me." Tyson Wellock puts it even more simply. The hardest thing about coaching, he says, is "balancing between the needs and commitments of your athletes and their parents, and the needs and commitments of your family." And then he adds: "We don't even have kids yet. I can only imagine." Indeed, Tyson, indeed. "Finding the happy point of 'I've done all I can' seems to be the most elusive thing to me and therefore the toughest part of this sport," writes John Zack from Portage High School. "Knowing when you have given enough," he says "is the toughest thing." Then he adds a sentence heard in many coaching households: "Now my wife [or husband] on the other hand feels that I give enough and sacrifice enough ... but honestly, you have to wonder if it really is."

Balance. Balance. Balance. It comes up everywhere. Every coach has asked and had to answer questions such as the ones above. Once upon a time, even John Leonard challenged us to "diversify" (staying away from the "B" word for a minute) our lives when he wrote this: "If all you do is coach, what can you bring to your coaching?"

I wrote the words "once upon a time" and "even" John Leonard because the "B" word, "Balance", particularly when it occurs in a phrase such as "a well balanced life," is currently in disrepute in many high performance circles, including the ASCA Office. Guy Edson speaks every year to the ASCA Fellows about the virtues of "imbalance;" George Block, speaking last September to the 2006 Fellows Class at the World Clinic, said: "Give me the passionate unbalanced person every time." A backward glance from this perspective at George Kennedy's hunt for ways to help his athletes "remove the limitations they place on themselves" does cause a person to wonder whether removing those limitations makes the swimmers more balanced or more unbalanced in the direction of high level performance. And, if this is not enough, turn to the spring issue of the ASCA Newsletter (Volume 2007, Issue 3). There you will find a reprint of a Fast Company article by Keith Hammonds entitled "Balance is Bunk!" in which he states emphatically: "The quest for balance between work and life, as we've come to think of it, isn't just a losing proposition, it's a hurtful, destructive one (p.3)." And, a few paragraphs later, he adds "All our striving for balance is only making us crazy (p.3)."

What to do? What to do? And what to say to a 30-something person who is married with children, who loves both children and spouse, and who wants to coach, and stay married, and stay sane - not to mention the thought that if this person who wants to coach is a woman, the challenge can be even harder? Is it possible to coach and "have it all" as the saying goes? Let's face it, Keith Hammonds continues, "leadership [in a competitive environment] requires commitment, passion, and to be blunt, a lot of time (p.3)." Needless to say, coaching is leadership; and coaching certainly does require "commitment, passion, and ... a lot of time." Everyone agrees on that point.

So, is that it? Is balancing coaching within the coach's whole life the hardest thing about coaching? "Yes," for some coaches; but also "No," not necessarily for all coaches. What does seem to be true is that all coaches do have to answer this balance, passion, commitment, time challenge for themselves in order to build a career in coaching. It does (one hopes any-



Coming Events

August 6

Practice schedule changes
10 & over 9-11
9 & under 10-11

August 15

Tryouts-bring a friend to practice

August 18

Time Trial 9-11 am
Swimmers on deck at 8:45 am

August 24 & 25

Kayhi Home Meet

August 25

No Practice

August 30

Last Day of Summer Practice

September 10

First Day of Fall Practice

September 10-15

Lollipop Week
Bring a friend to practice!

September 14

KKW Potluck 6:30 pm

Have ideas for future issues of Whales Tales?
Contact Natasha O'Brien
obrien@gci.net

Continued from page 3 ...

way) help that several strategies for meeting this challenge are included in Keith Hammonds article.

Indeed, the more responses we read, the clearer it became that "what is the hardest thing about coaching?" is a very big question. Eddie Reese made it even bigger, when he asked: "What is coaching (theoretical vs. actual)?" Mick Nelson in the USA Swimming Office had an answer for him. It is "sticking to a plan," wrote Mick. And the plan is to "recognize people's efforts," to "appreciate people," to "give people more than they expect," and "to use common sense." Easier said than done, of course, but that is precisely Mick Nelson's point. The hardest thing about coaching is doing these four things on a consistent basis. John Leonard almost got the whole definition down in three words: We "teach;" we "educate;" and we "assist." "Everything else," he says, "is too sophisticated for my simple water boy brain."

One more challenge, and then the list is done. Dave Salo, writing from his first year desk at the University of Southern California, wonders if changing jobs is the hardest thing about coaching. "The hardest thing about coaching," Dave writes "is the first year of a new assignment." Then, he explains:

The first year is 'theirs.' It takes a few years for it to become 'mine.' And then in time it remains important for there to be an appreciation that it is 'ours' and that we are all on the same page.

There is much more wisdom here than can be unpacked in a couple of sentences. Working together, working synergistically (if we want to use a New Age

type term for it), working with mutual inter-dependence is what brings about the highest levels of excellence. This is a definition worth reading over and over again. This is coaching writ both small and large. Achieving this is certainly one of the hardest and most valuable things about coaching. In other ASCA contexts, this is what "'The American Swimming Team" is about: an appreciation over time that "it is 'ours' and that we are all on the same page."

Back to the topic at hand. With all the challenges that are now on the list of the hardest thing about coaching, did anyone consider not coaching? No, not even close. In fact, Ira Klein pointed out that the hardest thing of all may be not coaching at all. "The hardest thing about coaching," writes Ira "is stepping aside and from the sidelines watching others do it."

Why do we do it? Mark Hesse knows why, and a good guess is that all of the participants in this conversation will agree. We are not talking about the hardest thing about coaching, now. We are talking about the best. "The best thing about coaching," Mark Hesse writes for all of us "is 4, 5, 8, 10, or 15 years later, when you hear from or about [your former swimmers] and all the things they have done, and achieved, and have just been in their lives. Their realization of how they were transformed by the process of striving [while they were swimming] is their next step towards true greatness. For family and friends, it is heartwarming. For their coach, it is truly priceless."

Yes, Indeed, Mark. Thank you. And thanks to all for contributing to this on-going conversation.

KKW Classifieds



WHO? KKW SWIMMERS & FAMILIES
WHEN? FRIDAY, 9/14, 6 PM
WHERE? 1ST LUTHERAN CHURCH
WHY? START OFF THE NEW YEAR, GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER, MEET NEW MEMBERS, MEET NEW BOARD MEMBERS, HEAR FROM THE COACHES, & ... HAVE FUN!

SEE THE BOARD FOR WHAT TO BRING

WANTED!

Mobile Carnival Booth

KKW wants a booth on wheels to make dart booth organization easier, faster & more efficient! If you can build it or know where to find it, let the Board know.

Thank you to our sponsors!



Check it Out!

Go to the KKW site to shop online through igive.com/kkw, and a percentage of your purchase goes to KKW.



Also check out cafepress.com/kkw for your cool KKW gear sent straight to your home!



247-SWIM

Ketchikan Killer Whales

www.ketchikankillerwhales.com