

Event List

I took the opportunity during the recent Great Alaska Open to talk to a number of coaches who 'get it done' at a high level, and do so consistently. I asked them bluntly, "What is it that makes your program great?" Not one of the answers mentioned how much yardage they do, or how many laps they swim, or number of practices they have each week. The answers that made the most sense to me centered on how they coach the athletes. Not just the relationships, but in the defining of the groups that train together, and then defining what those groups may need to learn for long term-success and the development of all events.

Not one answer talked about how fast they can get the athletes to swim at 10, or even 12 years old. Of the many things changing in how swim clubs operate now versus 15 to 20 years ago, that is clearly the biggest difference. It is clear that long-term success in swimming is directly related to skills learned and the development of an 'event list' that will allow an athlete to stay in the sport and real success. We started a process last year, and have stepped up our efforts this year, to expand event lists for all our swimmers, at all levels. It is happening before our eyes here at MSST, as our most successful swimmers are doing so with a number of events. This past Senior Meet was a prime example of the most successful swimmers finding multiple events to final and be successful with.

A big part of "Midnight Sun Excellence" will be in our athletes having "big event lists". Parents, be prepared to see this happen to your athletes.

"In order to succeed you must fail, so that you know what not to do the next time".

Developing a Mental Routine for Practice and Meets

The ability to have a good mental routine for both practice and meets is essential to obtaining a desired performance. I encourage swimmers to focus on a few basic mental skills to help them with pre-meet anxiety. First, develop a consistent goal-setting routine for practices, but focus on two or three simple goals instead of time goals. For example, "Take a deep breath before each interval set." When you practice goal setting, it helps to direct and guide your focus. Second, begin practicing relaxation techniques. Anyone can find a relaxation CD at a music store or online. Start to practice relaxation techniques four to five times a week and see if you can learn how to control your anxiety before practices and meets. (Plan on feeling more excited and anxious before a meet). Finally, have a pre-race mental routine that focuses you on the controllables in your race (e.g. your feelings/thoughts when you swim fast). So when you get behind the blocks, take a deep breath, let go of your tension and focus on a cue (one word/phrase) that describes how you feel when you swim fast. Then get the butterflies in formation and go!

"A positive attitude may not solve all your problems, but it will annoy enough people to make it worth the effort."

Goal Setting

"Excuse me, Sir", Alice inquires. "Could you tell me which road to take?" Wisely, the caterpillar asks, "Where are you going?" Somewhat dismayed, Alice responds, "Oh, I don't know where I am going, Sir." "Well", replied the caterpillar, "If you don't know where you are going, it really doesn't matter which road you take."
(Alice in Wonderland - Lewis Carroll)

Set Goals. Make your intentions clear by declaring specific goals that you may use to direct your training efforts.

Make a commitment. Make a commitment to reach your goals and to do the training necessary to get there. Put your goals down on paper. Writing them down helps to solidify a commitment. A commitment is important. Once you have set a long term goal, you have decided to make the journey. Without this commitment you will question each step along the way. Commit to the training program. Do not allow yourself to make decisions as to your level of attention to each step along the way as each set; each workout and each session is critical to the end result. It does not make much sense to have to decide upon each individual step along a path that you have already committed to.

Use Your Goals to Direct Your Training. You must ask yourself "what must I do to reach my goals." You should realize that you teammates are important variables in the equation that will determine your successes or failures. Training goals are important to the eventual outcome your stated goals and the overall performance of the team. Of course you should keep your goals flexible. They should be a standard against which you train. Readjust your goals as your practice performance improves.

Act Consistently with Your Goals. Check and recheck your practice behavior. Is your behavior reflective of your goals?

Protect Your Goals. Encourage your teammates. Pay attention to a job well done in practice. Encourage each member of the group as you encourage them to strive for more. The way you act and communicate with your teammates has a way of coming back to you. Set a norm and challenge each of your teammates to rise to the highest possible level of performance. Do not let it be "cool" to goof off or perform in a lethargic fashion. Remember your goals and take good care of them.

Do Not Limit Yourself. Human potential is limitless. It is thinking that we have reached the limits that limit what we do. Believing more is possible opens the doors to unexpected excellence. This type of attitude will direct your activities in much more desirable and productive direction.

COMPLACENCY ONLY PRODUCES MEDIOCRITY - IT IS IMPORTANT TO RAISE THE LEVEL OF YOUR GOALS A LITTLE HIGHER EACH TIME YOU WORK OUT.

"Success isn't a result of spontaneous combustion. You must set yourself on fire."

Handle Tough Practices Mentally

The secret to getting good in this sport is learning how to mentally handle the really tough practices. Here's how: When things get really hard for you in training, you need to be able to keep your swimming goals close at hand. That is, when the going gets tough, you have to be able to consistently ask yourself, "How is what I'm doing *right now* going to help me get to my goals?" When you train, you can't just let yourself mindlessly go through the motions. Instead, you have to have a purpose or good reason for working hard. You have to have something meaningful that you *really* want to accomplish in this sport. Your goal can be achieving a certain time this year, beating a particular opponent or earning a college scholarship. The trick is to be able to take this goal with you when you train to help remind yourself of why you're working hard. By bringing what I call this "big enough why" with you into the pool on a daily basis, you will find it much easier to work your hardest through those tough sets.

"Success is dependent on effort."