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Learning To Prepare For The Best

John Leonard

As I write this in early January in Fort Lauderdale , the air temperature is a “balmy” 42 degrees....well, balmy if you’re from Green Bay , Wisconsin , maybe. Here in South Florida , that’s a cold wave. We swim outside, and the water temperature is 75 degrees....the heaters can’t keep up when the air is this cold. The wind chill factor, according to Channel 7, is...well, we don’t want to know the wind chill with a nice brisk 20 mile an hour wind coming off the Everglades .

My phone rings at 5 AM and a small voice on the other end asks plaintively, “*Do we really have swim practice, Coach John?*” Yes, we really do.

WHY? Is the next question, which I wrestle with myself on the 15 minute drive to the pool....why put teenagers in the water on this cold and nasty morning when both they and I would prefer to stay snuggled in at home for another hour or hour and a half.

Now, I KNOW why, but can I express it to my swimmers? Yes, I’ll try. Everyone, on the day after the high school state meet, vows that “next year” they will A) make a final, B) Make the meet C) win an event or D) write in your own goal here.

It's easy to vow to do something the day after, when you are excited, full of the promise of life and get up and go. It's a lot harder to REMEMBER what you wanted to do in early January when it's 5 AM and cold outside. Then it's a lot harder and a lot easier to rationalize, "it's just one workout".

The problem is, when teenagers begin to learn to rationalize, they get really good at it really fast, and pretty soon, the ACTION required to fulfill the commitments to those goals/dreams, falls prey to the rationalization. And after you rationalize the decision you want to make the first time, it's so much easier to do it the next time, and the time after that, and pretty soon, the goal is just a dream, because you're rationalizing yourself into thinking, "I'd like to do that if everything could be perfect for me, and it would never be cold in the morning, or no social events would ever conflict with practice, and time with my friends always went the way I want it to."

But things never go perfectly. The ONLY thing you can successfully predict is that obstacles to your goal WILL come up, and little or nothing will go smoothly. And that consistency in preparation is the only way to raise the percentages of the chance you will reach your goal.

Read that again...."raise the percentages of the chance..." Not a guarantee. If it's a good goal, there are no guarantees, EXCEPT that if you don't prepare correctly, according to the plan, you won't raise your chance of success, you'll lower it.

So why go to practice at 5 AM in the cold? Because it's part of the plan, and it raises your chance of success. But most of all, because you have told yourself that you will commit to doing it. And if you let yourself down, who won't you let down? Prepare for a chance for success. And feel really good about doing that.

Because not very many people do.