

Did You Ever Skip Practice?

by Katrina Radke

1. *Sometimes I don't want to go to practice. Did you ever skip practice?*

We are all human. It is easy to think we are supposed to be perfect or strive to be so! In my day, I prided myself on showing up 30 minutes before practice to do extra dryland before the actual team practice started. However, I am the first to admit that I am human too! Of course I still went to practice even if I didn't want to go – well, 99% of the time.

I do remember one time where it was snowing heavily. It was the middle of winter in Philadelphia area, where I went to high school, at Germantown Academy. My Coach, Richard Shoulberg often would still hold practice in the morning before we would find out if school was cancelled. On this given day, we had been told school was cancelled.

A good friend of mine, David and I (both seniors and captains of the team) decided to go to the Pocono Mountains (about 90 minutes away) and go skiing. Meanwhile, little did we know, but school ended up happening, but several hours later. There had been a scheduled assembly and Coach Shoulberg hadn't told us about it. Since David and I were captains, we were supposed to speak at it, and nobody knew where we were. Well, needless to say, people got worried.

In the end, we were safe, except the few scrapes I had from racing my friend down the ski hill. We had to take responsibility and apologize for not having told our parents or coach where we were. A big lesson for an 18 year old whom at times, thought I knew it all.

In this case, we wanted to have some fun, and did. Do I recommend that you do this? No, at least not in this way – we all have to find our own way, and take ownership for our choices, and recognize that there are consequences. Sometimes we just need a mental break, or need to ask for support from our teammates to help us get through a bad day, or week!

Continue to focus on what you really want – what motivates you. What is your vision? This will help you know how committed you want to be. Appreciate the little steps that you do take toward your goals, and also be honest with yourself about when you do slack off. The process of committing to training and learning what makes you feel good as you test what your body and mind can do, you will often surprise yourself...and in terms of missing practice, nine times out of ten, you will feel better by having gone to practice. Remember, the key is to feel good about you. Great things come from here.

2. *You say we should do what we love, but isn't it supposed to hurt to swim fast?*

Great question, and interestingly, Olympic Gold Medalist, Nancy Hogshead and I had a few emails go back and forth on a similar topic this past week. We must first find and then do what we love. This will give us enough motivation to stay committed even when adversity shows up, (such as pain from exerting ourselves), so that we can manage it. All of us deal with obstacles. The difference is how we choose to respond to them. We get to trust that we are and will be okay even as we go through it. In my book, I share steps to help you with this.

I know, for me I found the water to be my sanctuary. I felt most at peace there. It doesn't mean that everyday was rosy, but I could most easily find it there, when I was having a "bad" moment, or felt pain. You don't need to stay there in the struggle. Focus on what works – get deeper than the apparent obstacle to find it.

Effortlessness comes from committed training, being willing to go through the struggle, but also learning to not get too attached to it. See it for what it is and then let go. You will know what you can handle. When you feel

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good from testing yourself, you will also know when you might need to back off. Then, make sure you appreciate all of the enjoyment that comes from feeling your body doing what you love, and the many rewards that come from it, too.

Use these little tests along the way to see what you are made of on a given day. As you train yourself to find that thin edge between pushing and relaxing to swim fast, you find that place where you can let go, let your body take over and do its thing. It is here where you can be in the flow/zone/immersed, etc. In here, you realize your power.