

Professionalizing the Coaching of Swimming''

By John Leonard

Coach Peter Daland frequently reminds me that swim coaches evolved from the old days of “bath attendants”, who spent all day at the (overheated) pool, in their bathrobes, providing towels to patrons. Naturally, since these gentlemen (no ladies to our knowledge) spent all day observing the motion of humans through water, they became a source of information on how various people succeeded or failed in doing so. Hence, the birth of Swim Coaching.

Not very glorious.

I was led by the request of a new ASCA member lately, to research the concept of “Profession”. Here’s what I found.

It comes from Latin (heck, I guess everything comes from Latin) *Professio*, **meaning public declaration**. This comes from the fact that long ago and far away, when a person made a commitment to a profession, they were automatically branded a member of a religious community, openly declaring a faith or an opinion. Sound familiar?

Nowadays, various things have been tacked on to that original concept. Now, it’s a body of people involved in a vocation that requires a specialized body of knowledge and experiences. Heck, in one way, for many of us, its still a “Brand”, like Ford, or GE, or Heinz Catsup. Still doesn’t sound too glorious. We’re branded as “a Coach” which triggers many reactions in people’s minds, based on their past experiences with those who call themselves a coach.

Another factor in the definition of a profession today, is its “universality”. Coaching swimming is indeed a global profession today, with people practicing it on most of the continents. Additionally, the idea of a profession is imbued with the concepts of a “discipline” and an “order” to the vocation.

How do we measure up against this standard? What has the ASCA provided that helps us meet those expectations from the public we serve?

First, is there a common philosophy? I would say yes, there is. It is very simple. We are in place to assist those who wish to swim in a more satisfactory fashion. This can range from learning to swim, to setting world records. We exist to serve our clients. Within that context, multiple philosophies of “how to” exist, largely to the benefit of the public we serve. Diversity provides a learning process and improvement process for everyone we can touch with our collective efforts.

Second, is there a common body of knowledge? Yes, we’re improving. With our 5 required Certification Schools and 14 additional Enrichment Schools, the ASCA has created and continually improves and evaluates and expands, the skills and abilities of its members. Globally, there is no uniformity, but the programs of Australia and the USA are considerably similar and efforts through the World Swimming Coaches Association under President Niels Bouws of Germany is leading inevitably to agreement worldwide on the basics of a common body of knowledge. Already, with international clinics, the education possibilities of the internet, and other

sources, information and education is accessible to any individual with a computer who wants to coach. ASCA serves clients with its education in Africa, South America, Europe, Oceania, and North America.

Third, is there a formal Education Process? Yes and no.

In the USA, thanks to our partners at USA-Swimming, we have “required” education for our newest coaches before they get a coaching license. Above Level 1, education is required only for Certification by the ASCA. The good news is that 7800 (and growing daily) coaches have committed themselves to Certification and the required education process it includes. This VOLUNTARY association clearly is superior to any forced mechanism we can create. The market, our employers, have a way to require and demand continuing education from our profession.

Again, the globalization of this process through WSCA can only strengthen our professional status.

Fourth, are their standards of Entry? There are in USA-S swimming. All new coaches, within one year of starting to coach, must complete the Level 1 Coaching School through ASCA and USA-Swimming. Unfortunately, no such standard exists for NCAA Coaching assistants or High School Coaching. (though individual states have some requirements for HS coaches.)

Fifth, are their Guidelines for behavior? In 1991, the ASCA passed the first ever Code Of Ethics in Olympic Sport coaching. 12 other Sports have followed suit. If you’re an ASCA Member, you are educated and informed on behavior by the ASCA Code of Ethics, which is a key protection for those whom we serve.

Sixth, does the profession have consistent Communication mechanisms in place? Yes! With the American Swimming Magazine, the ASCA Newsletter, and the Journal of Swimming Research, we provide information from the anecdotal to the rigorously scientific, on a monthly basis, in addition to 18-20 live clinics a year and the ASCA website, www.swimmingcoach.org for fast communications of ideas.

Seventh, do we have leaders who serve as mentors and role models and are they active in leadership roles both formal and informal?

Yes, the ASCA Board and more recently the ASCA Fellows Program provides a set of mechanisms to evaluate past efforts, think about and plan for the future of the profession and then pass on accumulated wisdom to future generations of leaders. Our leadership role and individuals are highly active, highly visible, and provide key links from our past into the bright future.

The work of creating, maintaining and improving a profession is never done. Your ASCA Board and Staff works daily to build the brand of which you are a part.....The Swimming Coach.