

Putting Character First

ASCA World Clinic 2011



**“All you have is who
you are.”**

**Don & Ron Heidary
Orinda Aquatics**



*Thank you to Orinda
Aquatics swimmers past and
present for your dedication,
and humility, and for
putting Character First.*

*With love always,
the OA staff*

Introductory Comments

We appreciate you being here and very sincerely hope that we can offer you something that can be of service to your team. We truly believe we are standing here among people that change lives in a profound way. You, as coaches, have a passion for people and human potential like no other profession.

As we will allude to in this talk, where does our leadership come from? Who has the ability to challenge kids to grow physically and emotionally in ways that they never thought possible. I would argue that it is you, in your unique and influential role, providing invaluable inspiration, motivation, and guidance. Of course academics educate, business generates material gain, but athletes and its mentors, explore the physical with the emotional, the perseverance and triumph, the individual and the team.

Athletes are unique individuals who give everything they have to a demanding process – that offers no guarantee. And while most pursuits in life are quantifiable, the personal growth through athletics is immeasurable. And it is you who facilitate that process and growth. It is an honor to be a coach, and to be here with you.

We would also like to thank Guy Edson and ASCA for all that they do to support this great profession, and specifically John Leonard for his passion and support of this topic, the inspirational work he does, *and* for this invitation.

We all come to clinics hoping to find specific things to help our program – a training plan, innovative sets, drills, equipment, maybe networking. We cannot offer you anything like that, but some general, age-old concepts. Concepts, that while simple in nature and understanding, are becoming threatened in an increasingly complex world – a world that seems to closing in on our youth.

We have no propriety to any of this, and did not invent or create anything. If anything, we are living in the past.

We would look at this as more of a top-down, macro view - a rising tide concept that lifts all boats, from a competitive and from a life perspective. And although it may seem divorced from athletics (as some parents might suggest), we would argue that they are inextricably tied and therefore it is not only relevant, but should be a prerequisite.

Our starting position is to help develop high-character young men and women (regardless of age), and high-character athletes who will be leaders and difference-makers, here among their peers and teammates, and in the world.

As time and years go on, we become more convinced that what can and should be gained from sports, is truly invaluable and can be life-changing. For the countless hours committed, the physical, emotional, and financial commitment, and the sacrifices made, there has to be more than a time at the end of this process. We see these kids as not only wrapping their lives around a sport, a team, training, a process, and a coach, but in many ways, their emotional development, college path, and the person they become will be shaped by as well.

In swimming, we see too many careers unravel from overzealous parents and kids obsessed with times or ego. Both miss the big picture and they ultimately lose out in the broader areas of personal development and team environment. Parents ask their kids who they beat in practice rather than who they helped in practice and seem to care more about their kid's time and place rather than their effort and attitude. **Too few kids want to be a character role model.** And while parents like the idea, they generally want results. The process is getting lost and with it, so are the virtues of team commitment, work ethic, sacrifice, humility and on and on.

We have tried to deeply embed some general, character-driven concepts into our program so that there has become a blending of swimmer and team, athlete and people, and of sports and life, AND this becomes more a by-product of a life process.

And as they leave swimming and move into the world, we remind them, **"all you have is who are."**

Background

We have been coaching for over thirty years – large summer league teams, large high school teams, and Orinda Aquatics for the past eighteen years. We have maintained an aggressive position in this regard in all programs, at all levels and ages. The teams have all been successful and we believe the philosophical backdrop has been a critical component of that success. It also supports the notion that ***we can have both success and culture supporting one another.***

Quotes

We included several quotes which we use to help convey message to kids. We ask swimmers to choose a few that resonate, remember them, and repeat them often. And after purchasing dozens of quote books over the years, a kid came up to me and asked if I had this new app? – 55,000 Free Quotes!! I said, well first I needed the phone. So it became a \$400 free app!



- **Top Down**
- **Big Picture**
- **A rising tide concept that lifts all boats, from a competitive and from a life perspective**



“It is good to have an end to journey toward, but it is the journey that matters, in the end.” U. LeGuin

**Success may be a
zero sum game, but
character,
inspiration, and
leadership are not.**



Megan Liang is a “Disabled Swimmer” on our team and one of the most inspirational people you will ever meet. She lost her leg to cancer at age 7.

**So, it is not a coaching philosophy.
*It is a life philosophy.***

**How can you be a high-character athlete
without being a high character person?**

**How can you be a high-character team
without high-character
people/interaction?**

**Name one business, college, OR TEAM
that does not want character, humility,
work ethic, team commitment, and to
implicitly trust it's members.**



A few questions for you if you don't mind...

- **How would you define your character culture?**
- **What are the strengths and weaknesses?**
- **Is it influenced more by the institution/organization, coach, talent, social groups?**
- **Are there ebbs and flows based on personalities or is there continuity?**
- **Where does the leadership and inspiration come from – more the coach or more from the locker room?**
- **Does the environment add or detract from the competitiveness of your team?**
- **To what degree do you trust your group – left alone at a workout, an activity, or a hotel?**
- **To what degree do the older swimmers seek to mentor?**
- **To what degree do the younger swimmers seek to lead?**

Challenge the (*societal*) Status Quo

**"Find comfort in those who agree with you.
Find growth in those who don't."**

Where in our culture do we celebrate character and humility? We would argue that society is anything but character based.

How does one become humble, self-confident, positive, and selfless when marketing tells us that we are not good enough and society tells us success is the only measure of achievement? It is either self-doubt or EGO, and neither support athletics.

In pursuing a character driven culture, you may not only be saving your team environment, but saving some kids from themselves.

Society continued...

Teachers and coaches are “noble”, but...

- Pro athletes are idolized (ego driven, materialistic, not to mention...)
- Wall Street executives are envied for their money, power, etc
- Celebrities are worshiped for their popularity and lifestyle (and how many are really happy)
- Why are there so many character breakdowns in politics, business, etc?
- How many teen magazines are character, or service based? vs. fashion, or appearance based
- How many character based video games would sell?
- How many TV Shows are character based, vs. attitude, materialism, sex, promiscuity, language, alcohol, appearance, etc – “the EDGIER THE BETTER” says a popular TV network when they orchestrated 57 “F bombs” during prime time awards show.
- Even music (the language and the message) “explicit” vs. “clean” 10-1 purchased (if that!)

In an age where media and celebrity seem to create more false identities than products or music, we ask them to not follow the masses or the trends; but their heart and their conscience.

Why not?

- Why can't the most successful people be the most humble, and appreciative?
 - Why can't athletes instinctively put the team first and look to ensure the success of others even ahead of their own?
 - Why can't a child dream of being a leader as well as an Olympian?
 - Why can't kids welcome and embrace every challenge?
 - Why can't kids' best friends be their parents?
- In pursuing a character driven culture, you may not only be enhancing your program, but saving some kids from themselves

The Teen Landscape

- **Facebook obsession**
- **Facebook depression**
- **Video games (time/content)**
- **Destructive TV shows (Jersey Shore, Skins, Bad Girls Club)**
- **Texting**
- **Sexting**
- **Twerking**
- **Drugs**
- **Alcohol**
- **Cheating in school/academic pressure**
- **Music (language, message)**
- **Social Pressure**
- **Media/Marketing – you're not good enough**
- **Parental Pressure**
- **Overprotective parents**
- **Depression, anxiety, self-esteem**
- **Bullying**
- **Struggle for acceptance**
- **Need for “things” (to be happy)**

Are we raising resume's or high character individuals?

Two sides of the same coin (a hypothetical)

The Resume of a High School Athlete

- **3.8 GPA**
- **Eagle Scout**
- **School Office**
- **Popular**
- **Volunteer**
- **All American athlete**
- **Polite and respectful in public**

The Character of a High School Athlete

- **Heavy drug/alcohol use**
(on campus/at competition)
- **Lies to parents, coaches**
- **Cheats in school**
- **Self-absorbed**
- **Depressed, pressured, losing identity**

**“Prepare the
child for the
path, not the
path for the
child.”**

Unknown

***In an increasingly protective parent
society, this becomes harder.***

Where does character fit into coaching?

- **You don't get paid for it.**
- **You don't get (professionally) recognized for it.**
- **You will get push-back early in the process and the time you commit to it will cut into pure coaching.**



So who really cares, and at what level does it really make a difference?

Because...

- **Character is more important than success.**
- **People are more important than athletes.**
- **Life is more important than sports.**

“Character is the only secure foundation of the state.”

***And the real benefit may
very well be in the unseen.***

- **Self-esteem**
- **Self-awareness**
- **Accountability**
- **Connectedness**
- **Improved academics**
- **Saying no to a drug, alcohol, or sex introduction**
- **Choosing role models over social models**
- **A better family life**
- **A more productive college experience**
- **Being a better employee**
- **Dealing with a life crisis**
- **Becoming a true leader**
- **Making a difference in the lives of others**

And quite possibly in becoming a better swimmer and having a better team

How it “works”

Every day

Every minute

Every lap

Every one

Every thing

Every where



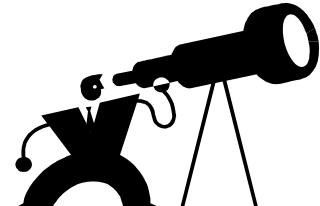
It must go from print to life

There must be an overriding anchor to your philosophy and it must link life and happiness to sports and performance.



It must be an organizational mandate (a “we” concept), a blanket wrapped around your team. (Not by “stars” or “the social elite”)

There must be a vision



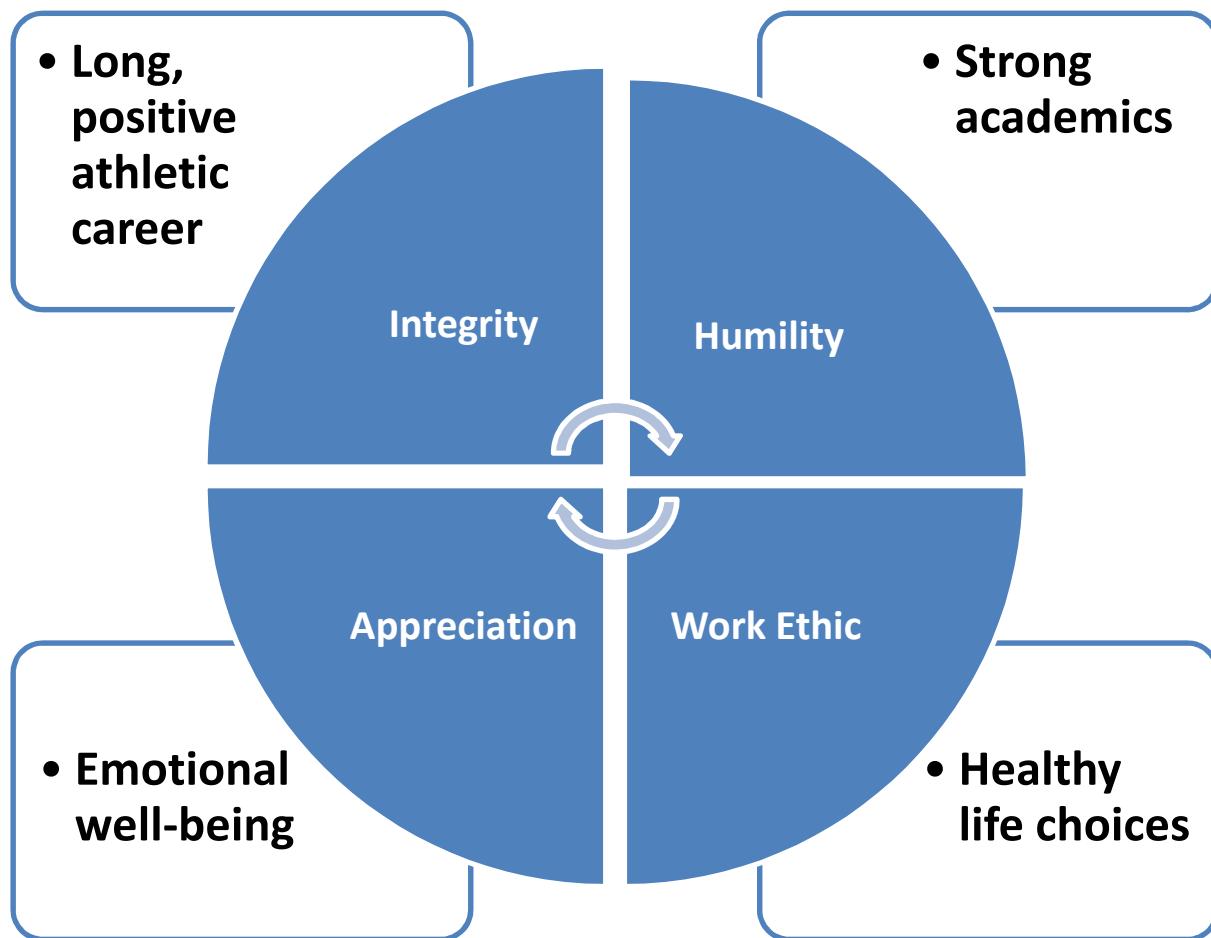
It must be sold, to...



Board, Parents, Coaches, Athletes, Community, anyone that will listen.

We made a proclamation many years ago that we will be a team driven character.

“How you do anything...



is how you do everything.”

Concepts

(that we employ/enforce daily)



We try to relate everything from swimming to life and from life to swimming.

Not defined by age
Ask rhetorical questions...

“Wouldn’t you like to inspire others and lead this team one day?”
Good, your training begins now!

Partners

You must move swimmers from participants/customers to...



Owners/stakeholders with accountability and a vested interest.



Customers will take. Partners will sacrifice.

The Team Concept

"When he took the time to help the man up the mountain, lo, he scaled it himself." Tibetan Proverb

- The team concept is a *life* concept and there is no better place to learn it than in an athletic setting.
- **Team is life** - your very existence is a display of teamwork, of family, friends, neighbors, classmates, those you like, don't like, community, co-workers, etc. **It is co-existing and co-producing.**
- It requires empathy, sacrifice, and an unconditional commitment to a greater cause.
- It requires an unyielding view that team always comes first.

This ability and understanding will serve athletes long after their careers have ended.



"When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion." Teamwork takes work. It is not created for you. It is created BY you.

Attitude (ALWAYS Positive)

➤ No complaints (ever)–about anything!

- It is positive or nothing. How many of you know someone that complain? Do you like it? Does it help?

➤ There is no reason or room for negativity in the life of a real athlete.

"If you complain about anything, you will complain about everything."

"A thing is not good or bad. Only your perception makes it so."

"Any fool can criticize, condemn, or complain, but it takes character and compassion to be understanding and forgiving." Dale Carnegie



Cheering in the rain (a “positive” thing!)

Embrace Work and Challenge

"Followers see the hard work they must endure to climb the mountain of success, while leaders see the success of climbing the mountain of hard work."

- If challenge creates growth and opportunity, why ever resist it?
- Take the path of "most resistance" is a theme we ask the kids to embrace.
- They should *welcome* the most challenging aspects of swimming and their life, and reposition them as a positive, growth process. (visualize – cold, hungry, crowded pool, bad swim)



Visualization/Trigger



"Adversity introduces a man to himself." unknown

"You will never be the person you can be if pressure, tension, and discipline are taken out of your life."

James Bilkey

"Life affords no higher pleasure than that of surmounting difficulties, passing from one step of success to another." S. Johnson

Service over Success

- Service is the key to humility, character, and ethics. It is found in the “daily duty” of supporting one another, giving back, and in random acts of kindness.
- It is humble and selfless leadership
 - First one to arrive and set up pool
 - Last one to leave and they clean up
 - Cheering for teammates before an important swim or after a bad swim
 - First to offer goggles or a suit to one who needs them
 - Fixes a broken lane line (that they did not break)



Forty cheering for one

“In the final analysis, there is no solution to man’s progress but the day’s honest work, the day’s honest decisions, the day’s generous utterances and the day’s good deed.” Clare Booth Luce

I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know; the ones among you who will truly be happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.” A. Schweitzer

People over Times

"There is more hunger for love and appreciation in this world than for bread."
Mother Teresa of Calcutta

- If people feel and know that you care about them as individuals first, they will do virtually anything for you and for the team.
- Unconditional, mutual respect must drive the coach-athlete relationship. This eliminates or minimizes lying, deceit, disrespect, etc.
- Be defined by compassion, service, effort, integrity (internal) as opposed to appearance, things, status, grades, success (external).
The gift vs. the wrapping.



"Humanity looks like bowing in the presence of kings and peasants, knowing there are no peasants in the eyes of God, and that we are all royalty." NDW

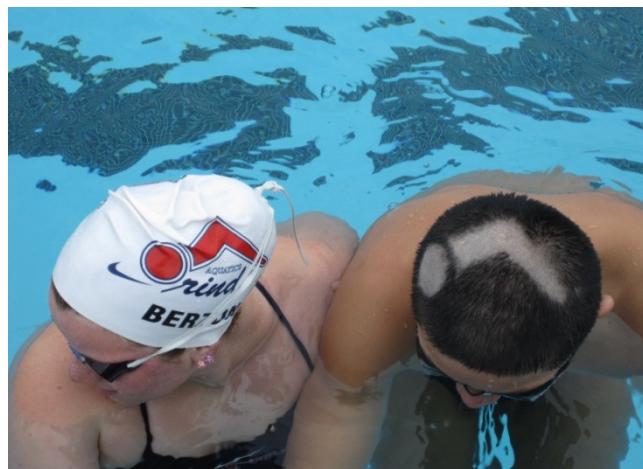
Humility over Ego

"Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less." Rick Warren

- An environment based on ego is toxic.
- We let kids know that if they have an ego, they have a problem (need attention) and that their need for attention will not be satisfied or tolerated.
- This reason alone would prevent swimmers from moving up into higher training groups on our team.
- Do not walk a path that *draws* attention but rather *gives* attention.

There is a quote that refers to two people who walk into a room, one says, "Well, here I am," and the other says, "Ah, there you are."

Needless to say, there should be room for only one of these two types of people on a team.



Build Leadership

"If people lead, the leaders will follow."

- Every team and athlete must know that the younger members are future leaders and role models.
- They should be nurtured from day one. Young swimmers are made aware of the standards and responsibilities and what is expected of them now and in the future. "*If I don't see a leader in you...*"
- **Hazing or "tradition" as it is euphemistically put, that makes people feel less or inferior, is not tolerated in any form and has no place in building young leaders.**
- Through swimmers (captains, seniors, and anyone of influence) and coaches, young athletes must see role models and leaders. **They must see a demonstration of work ethic, integrity, and a resiliency that inspires them.**
- On previous teams, we began this process with 6&unders (right/wrong, leadership, on time).



Team Attire

- Team attire is and should be a statement of pride and not a policy in and of itself.
- Your team attire is your representation of the team.
- Our swimmers do not compete in a meet or travel with the team if they are not in team attire.
- Coaches should lead the way in this regard.
- It is less that you are not in team attire and much more that is was not important to you.



A dirty team shirt is infinitely more important than a clean gray sweatshirt.

Team Travel=Team Integrity

"Integrity has no need of rules." (or chaperones)

Albert Camus

- Swimmers should travel with the absence of attitude, ego, or indiscretion. Our travel policy is very simple...
- *If you (swimmer) need to be watched (or babysat), you need another team. This really can define the character of your team.*
- Swimmers should carry themselves as mature, dedicated athletes (and individuals) on a "business" trip (parents have paid).
- If you as a coach, or your parents, feel that you need chaperones, you already have a problem.
- The travel expectations should be made very clear – On time, team attire, supportive (cheer), POSITIVE, purposeful.
- Penalties should be severe.
- Room Captains are critical to the leadership process.
- **We travel with over 50 swimmers and no chaperones.**



Embrace Academics

Athletes are Student/Athletes

- Our process and objective is to foster and support student-athletes at the highest level. Our team **must** commit to both.
- A diligent student represents a great deal more than his or her academics. **Academics and athletics work hand in hand and support and compliment each other.** The more an individual commits to either, the more the other is strengthened.
- Athletes that do not *embrace* academics are generally not leaders (in the student-athlete sense) and can become one-dimensional.



Appreciation (of Parents)

- This is probably the most significant sign of character. **"Gratitude is the mother of all virtues."**
- A young adult that does not appreciate the unconditional commitment and support of their parents would typically be unappreciative of other key support functions.
- A sincere awareness and gratitude for that which supports an individual is a critical component to a well-rounded athlete, person, and team.
- We devote meetings to this topic and make it clear that this is a part of our culture and mission.
- **Visualization - *Light on you – can't see those around you. Shift the spotlight from you to those around you.***



Orinda Aquatics Character Camp 2011

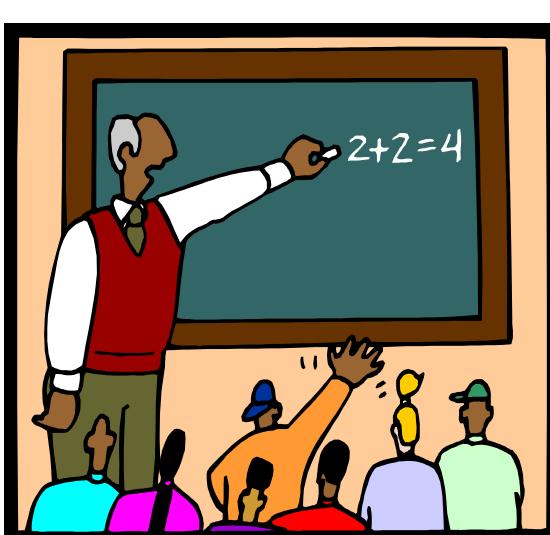


"Character is that which reveals moral purpose, exposing the class of things a man chooses or avoids." Aristotle

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Character Camp 2011 (cont.)

- **10-14 year-olds**
- **Open to the community**
- **Integrate life lessons and leadership into athletics**
- **One week**
- **One hour classroom and one hour pool each day**
- **T-shirt, Cap, and bracelet (Character first)**



“If not you, who?”

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Character Camp 2011 (cont.)

Topics

- **Leadership (good vs. bad) – ALL ages**
- **Attitude**
- **Work ethic**
- **Academics**
- **Parents**
- **Appreciation**
- **Drugs/Alcohol**
- **Compassion**
- **Selflessness**
- **Healthy goal setting**
- **Healthy disappointments/challenges**
- **Training with focus, purpose, and a team commitment.**



Questions

- **What is the best age to be a leader? – ANY AGE! WE ALL LEAD!**
- **Will you accept that you ARE a leader?**
- **Who will lead your team in the future? If not you, who?**
- **Can you make the team better? Now? Can you be a difference-maker? Now?**
- **What good can come from drugs or alcohol (name one)?**
- **Why do people (kids) move in this direction?**
- **If you walked in the pool gate and saw ten kids playing 4-square to your right and one kids sitting alone to your left, where would you go and why?**
- **If the coach asked someone to help with covers, in the wind and rain, what would you do and why?**
- **Would you rather be the fastest swimmer or the most respected?**
- **Your best friends should be your...(parents)**

The H/C Athlete at Workout!



- **Arrives on-time/early**
- **Arrives with a positive attitude**
- **Helps set up pool**
- **Welcomes teammates**
- **Positive in the locker room – ALWAYS**
- **Reaches out to a teammate every day**
- **First one out of the locker room and in the pool**
- **Has proper equipment at the beginning of workout**
- **Swims warm-up with focus, concentration, non-stop, with perfect streamlines**
- **Leaves wall on time (on intervals)**
- **Knows repeat times**
- **Counts all laps and repeats**
- **Wears team cap**
- **Doesn't stop until finished or coach stops you**
- **Knows each set swim objectives**
- **Swims with focus and purpose**
- **Pushes through challenging sets**
- **Remains positive through challenges**
- **Communicates with coach**

The H/C Athlete at Meets!



- **Takes ownership and responsibility**
- **Prepares the night before**
- **Talks to parents about meet details, plan, the day, etc.**
- **Prepares items – suits, goggles, towels, team attire, snacks**
- **KNOWS WHAT TIME TO LEAVE THE HOUSE**
- **Checks in with coach upon arrival**
- **Finds team area**
- **Team stretch**
- **Team warm-up (first one in) – focused**
- **Loudest/most spirited at team cheer**
- **Stays in team area**
- **Stays positive and focused**
- **Gets to know swimmers that you may not know well**
- **Checks in with coach before and after races**
- **Finds the value in every swim (never negative or upset)**
- **Focuses more on the “race” than the time; pace, walls, streamlines, etc.**
- **Cheers for teammates**
- **Warms down if possible**
- **Stays until the end of the meet (rec) & helps clean up team area**
- **Checks in with coach prior to leaving**
- **Thanks coaches and parents for their support**

The H/C Athlete at Home!



- **Appreciates parents – ALWAYS**
- **Is respectful at all times**
- **Supports family (recognizes “team” effort and role)**
- **Mentors siblings**
- **Embraces academics and takes responsibility**
- **Takes responsibility for practice schedule**
- **Takes responsibility for meet schedule**
- **Remains humble (especially with success)**
- **Always sees the glass as “half full” – finds the value/growth/positive in everything**
- **Communicates openly with parents about swimming (positive and negative) and always respects parents input/decisions**
- **Plans day and week with academics and athletics as a priority**
- **Uses technology wisely and purposefully**
- **Seeks out and follows *positive* role models**
- **Chooses positive friends**
- **Makes healthy life choices**
- **Seeks out life lessons and values from athletics and transfers them to life in general**
- **Thinks about leadership and “making a difference”**

The Coach's Role

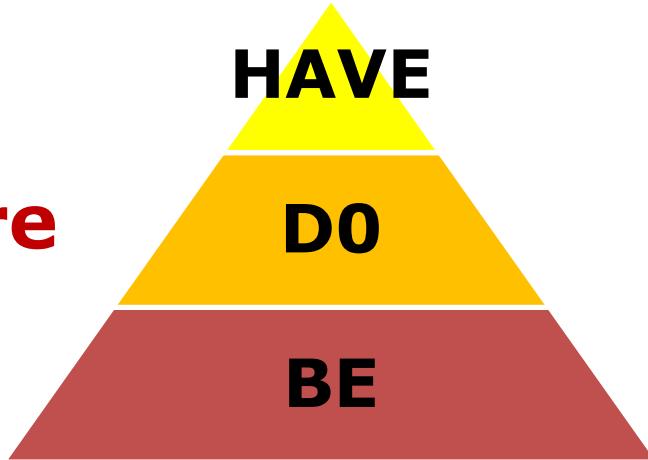
As a character leader

**From the big picture to
the “bigger” picture ...
then to the little picture**

Again...

*“If people lead, the
leaders will follow.”*

The Biggest Picture



Honestly, just how important is this to you?

That is the Be part of the pyramid.

If it is your life's work, then everything you think, say, and do will move you and your team in that direction. (*The Secret, Law of Attraction, Karma, Universal Laws, etc.*)

After my experience at Lifespring, it became the most important thing in the world to me.

My personal growth is important so I can transfer what I learn to my swimmers. You can't teach what you don't know. (2,000 quotes)

For both myself and my brother, it is the most important aspect of our lives.

Why it is so vital. Why you are so important.

Who can really influence kids in a significant way:

- **Teachers – 1 hr a day, 1 year, limited interaction**
- **Parents – in high school they rarely see their kids. And with kids now having all the media content in the world in the palm of their hands, parents' supervision is limited.**

I was having a conversation with a parent about my frustrations with drinking and social pressures and I said, “I don’t know how much longer I can do this.” And she said, “You can’t quit.”

“Don’t you understand. You are the last line of defense for these kids.”

She is right. We are the last line of defense to help these kids. That is our great role.

Be a person of impeccable integrity

- **The kids and parents will be aware of your values and what you stand for.**
- **Then you have the credibility to expect and demand character from your athletes.**
- **For me, I quit drinking any alcohol twenty years ago because I am so opposed to teen alcohol abuse.**
- **I believe I have credibility when I say that you don't need to drink.**
- **And it hasn't hurt our success.**
 - *we have won 12 High School Section Championships in the last 13 years and have a dual meet record in the last 10 years of 170 wins, 6 losses.*
 - *Our (Campolindo) free relays were ranked 3rd and 5th in the nation in the NISCA All-American rankings*
 - *OA finished 9th at December SC Junior Nationals*

**Try to be right all the time
or as much as possible**

**Only speak of what you are sure
about.**

Follow through aggressively.

Honor your commitments.

**Right or Wrong – their perception
of you has to be that you know
what you are talking about and
they should trust you
unconditionally.**

**Building that credibility and trust is
very important.**

***Never sacrifice respect for
friendship.***

Expectations need to be VERY clear (meetings, stories, letters)

Kids need to understand:

- 1. The tangible ways you want them to be and to grow, and**
- 2. That this growth is connected to their success and happiness later in life.**
- 3. That we will do virtually anything for them and expect virtually everything (character)**

Nader's caring

-asked coach to recognize another swimmer

8 years later ... a doctor

Peters Varellas

- the only time I ever got upset with him, he was late because he stayed to pick up garbage
 - Work Ethic in high school – never missed, never drank
- 8 years later ... an Olympic Silver Medalist**

Zach Disbrow

- won't get out of the water until the last person was done

5 years later ... a two-time West Point team captain

You have to have a core group of kids whom you can count on unconditionally, for anything, under ANY circumstance.

I put kids into 3 broad categories:

- **Group 1: Kids whom I can trust completely and count on unconditionally.** (now 40)
- **Group 2: Well intentioned kids whom I can mold (like clay).** (now 25)
- **Group 3: Kids who are not on board.** (now 0)
 - *We would watch them closely. They will try to pull kids down. Determine as soon as possible which ones can/are willing to change and work with them. The ones who aren't, figure out how to cut the cord.*

Coach Your “Favorites” Aggressively

Of the “non-favorites”,

- the kids who care will realize they need to be better to earn your attention.**
- the kids who don’t care, won’t care.**

The point is to make it obvious that the kids who do the right things (swimming and life) will get the most attention.

It has nothing to do with times or your personal likes and dislikes.

Giveth and Taketh Away

Giveth: Create value for your swimmers.
Build a strong relationship. Create
some kind of legitimate need.

Then make it **conditional**. “For me to
continue to support you, I need to you
to...

- Be at practice every day
- Train with focus
- Be positive in the locker room
- Make impeccable social choices

If they don’t,

Taketh Away: Cut the Cord.

*“Character is a by-product; it is
produced in the great manufacture of
daily duty.”* Woodrow Wilson

Some Basic Rules

- **Don't ever lie to me.**
 - *may jeopardize our relationship, permanently.*
 - *be honest and deal with the consequences.*
- **No bad language (ever), slang or condescending talk.**
- **No one ever talks when we talk.**
- **No low pants or inappropriate clothes.**
- **No two-piece suits (ever) – the girls respect this policy**

“Character is easier kept than recovered.” English Proverb

A Few Workout Rules/Guidelines

- **Everyone gets in together.**
- **Again, no one talks when the coach talks.**
- **Warm-up is non-stop and focused.**
- **Have integrity about doing everything correctly.**
 - *Stroke counts per lap*
 - *Breathing patterns*
 - *Underwater off the wall*
 - *Do ALL laps in every set, including warm up & warm down..*

Group Move-Up Guidelines (4 Criteria)

- 1 Maturity & Attitude**
- 2 Attendance**
- 3 Training Ability**
- 4 Times**

"Character is the basis of happiness and happiness the sanction of character."

Santayana

Punishment

(or as we call it, disincentive)

General concepts about punishment

- **Fair – so kids respect it**
- **Swift – so the issue is immediately dealt with**
- **Severe – needs to be impacting (unpleasant)**
- **Consistent - no double standard**
- **Forgiving – second chances when appropriate**
- **Never make a rule that you have to break**

Some Sample Punishments

- **Took an Olympic Trials swimmer out of both relays at our High School Championship Meet because she did something that wasn't "team oriented".**
- **Forfeited our most important dual meet of the year and gave up an undefeated season because four kids behaved, on their own, maliciously. Teamwork works both ways.**
- **Left three kids at the hotel in New York City because they were late for departure.**

Discipline without punishment

A kid from the Senior 2 Group doesn't help with lane lines one day.

- I pulled him out of the water during warm up and asked...
- "Would you like to move up to the Senior 3 Group."
- "Yes."
- "I have a question. Did you help with the lane lines today?"
- "Kind of." "I was near the reel."
- "Did you pull a lane line?"
- "No."
- "I know that because I watched you. No matter how hard you work, no matter how fast you swim, if you do not help every day, your chances of moving up to the Senior 3 Group are ... ZERO."

"By constant self-discipline and self-control you can develop greatness of character." Grenville Kleiser

The idea is to create an environment in which you don't need a lot of rules and silly punishments that are a waste of time and energy for everyone.

But rather an environment where kids rise above typical teen stereotypes and fully respect and embrace these virtues, and the team.

When expectations are clear and respected, discipline and punishment are rarely needed.

We have had minimal, if any, discipline or punishment issues in many years.

And we rarely, if ever, have to raise our voice.

We generally ask and it is done. And very often, we don't have to ask.

Team Workouts

- **Every Friday PM**
 - **Kids integrate**
 - **We usually do a challenge set or some type of workout game.**
 - **Pick a Door**
 - **Deal or No Deal**
 - **Lane Challenge**
- **Not enough to compromise the training of the top kids but enough to really allow the kids to get know each other.**
- **It creates a tremendous team bonding and camaraderie, integrating older (Senior) swimmers with younger ones.**



Friday Meetings

The majority of the discussion is about life:

- **Character growth**
- **Appreciation**
- **Adversity**
- **Integrity**
- Finance - Setting up an IRA (with graph) and the evils of credit/debt.
- Illness - one of our swimmers put together a power point presentation to share with the team about her very serious illness.
- **Forgiveness**
 - **a few years ago, I bought 16 copies of a book called Love is the Answer and let the kids read it every Monday before workout.**
 - **My conversation about forgiveness with a few senior kids at Nationals. Even if ...**



We had a girl come back last Christmas to say hi. She was in her late 20's. She asked if we were still doing the Friday meetings and if we were still giving the "Chicken Soup For the Soul" articles to the kids.

Key Articles

(10-1 Life to Swimming)

Life/Athletic concepts

- **The Butterfly (challenge)**
- **The Apple (selflessness)**
- **The Uncommon Professional (daily duty)**
- **“Being” Olympian JL (leadership)**
- **The “Bike” (sacrifice)**
- **A Warrior Mentality (work ethic)**
- **Good Luck, Bad Luck (stay positive)**
- **A Doing Less Story JL (affect on others)**
- **The RACE (perseverance)**
- **Disabled Swimmer Thrives on Challenge**
- **The Pressure to Cheat (integrity)**
- **The Butterfly Effect (little things can change your life)**

We often have intelligent, engaging conversations on the deck with the kids, just to break up the routine.

Topics have included:

- **Economics**
- **Politics**
- **Religion**
- **Gay Marriage**
- **Buying expensive clothes-\$250+ jeans**
- **2012 – End of Times**
- **Bad TV – Disney Channel**
- **Why they make bad TV ... \$**
- **Teen Stardom and its tragic consequences (REHAB)**
- **Facebook – value vs. addiction (some kids have actually quit).**
- **The millions of \$ of construction cost lost on a bridge project because of a rare salamander. Kids remembered that conversation six years later.**



Dealing with Teenagers' Issues

Kids' behavior problems are usually from being insecure, afraid, needing attention, family dysfunction, etc. If we can understand them better, often we can help them more.

Things we can do:

- Have a sincere conversation with them off the deck. Go to dinner or ice cream.
- Open up and share your similar life struggles with them.
- Share books you think may be helpful – ex. *Conversations With God For Teens*

Have a conversation with them speaking "generally" so as not to come across as attacking.

- **For the arrogant kid** ... my experience has been that kids who act out in this way are generally insecure and they cover it up with this bravado.
- **For the social/party kid** ... my experience has been that the most mature, secure, self-confident kids I have coached have never drank. They just don't need it. They do not need to impress anyone. And they will not compromise their values to be liked.

Three Recent Situations

All great kids, great attendance, work ethic, and demeanor at workout. All conversations were very serious and very emotional for the kids.

1 - Attitude – Swimmer was rebellious and disrespectful to family, home life in disarray.

Coach's response: "No leader on this team has ever been at odds with, or unappreciative of, their parents/siblings. It shows poor judgment, ego, and misaligned values. That is not you."

Result: Changed that day, home is harmonious.

2 - Negativity – Swimmer was critical at a travel meet.

Coach's response – "You will never travel again if you cannot seek leadership and deal with adversity in a more productive way."

Result – a different person – almost made Junior National cut (from first Sectional time a year ago).

3 – Swimmer experimenting with drugs/alcohol (on own time).

Coach's response – "We love you and the team loves you, but you will have to choose your "friends" or this team. Let us know".

Result – The swimmer stayed and is doing great.

Integrity/Cheating

The implication is: Don't expect me to be ethical when my personal interests are at stake.

A girl on our team talked to me about what to do in her class. So many other kids were cheating that her grade was lower because of it. **So we had a meeting about cheating.**

We got this email 3 years later: "Ronnie and
Donnie, Hello! I couldn't help but noticing in the news a story about a mass cheating attempt on a test at a major college involving more than 200 students. From a video taken by a local news station, a student is interviewed saying that "Everyone cheats in life" and something along the lines of, "there is nothing wrong with cheating to get ahead." The reason I'm bringing this to your attention is because I wanted to thank you for everything you have taught me. I specifically remember having a team meeting about cheating in life and in the classroom and how to protect your personal integrity during my sophomore year of high school.

I know that the confidence, pride, and love that both of you have for your swimmers did have a direct influence on my development as a student-athlete and as a person."

Drinking

It is not so much that they do it, but why they do it.

From a prior team captain, an excerpt from an email to me on drinking:

"I think I was fortunate to have a group of friends that did not necessarily equate having fun in high school with drinking. The kids who got the most out of the program are people who took to heart the so-called "big picture" philosophy that is the backbone of the program."

"... we reform others unconsciously when we walk uprightly."

Quote from the Simpsons: "Son, when you participate in sporting events, it's not whether you win or lose... it's how drunk you get." Homer Simpson

From an SF Chronicle article by Joan Ryan

A mother was disconcerted when a friend told her about the latest t-Shirts at Abercrombie & Fitch. "The t-shirts seemed too ignorant and irresponsible to be believed. Yet there they were, on the table in the store, high quality t-shirts for the pre-teen and teen market with sayings

"Don't bother me, I'm drunk."

"Bad girls chug, Good girls drink quickly."

"If you can read this you need another cocktail."

She says, "Today's teens have the best of everything and, in some ways, the worst of everything. They have amazing access to knowledge. They have conveniences we never dreamed of. But they have also been cheated of large chunks of childhood, pulled by movies and television, music and marketing, into an adult world for which their brains are not developmentally ready."

You become that to which you are most exposed." Denis Waitley

Our Drinking Issue

Our written response to the team in a letter and an aggressive meeting about a non-team related alcohol incident.

"Let's simplify the key issues for all of you to understand. We do not own your social life, nor do we want to. We do however own the team and have a responsibility to every member. That being said, ANYTHING that affects the team IS a team issue. Period. It does not need a memo attached or Board approval. One person or one action can become a "team" issue. Chatter in the locker room Saturday morning made it a team issue. If in your world, this is not a team issue, what is? Will you know when it is a team issue and when behavior threatens reputations, athletic careers, and even lives? We truly believe that we as coaches are infinitely better qualified than you to assess the effect on the "team". You do not have to answer to parents, or rumors. You do not sit in living rooms defining our team and its environment to perspective members, or sit in Board meetings answering questions.

What you did was not legal, not right, not positive, not conducive to being a serious athlete, not responsible, showed no leadership, hurt parents, and deeply affected coaches that have unconditionally supported you for most of your swimming lives. It is not obvious to us why someone could think this is "OK". And the fact that your peers or friends may have done this does not legitimize it but rather suggests that you need to find other friends and better role models.

We have seen, up close, every aspect of substance abuse from alcoholism to hard drug abuse to endless rehabs, an abyss of a mother's pain, and even prison. Please don't insult us by telling us it is "no big deal". Wait until your daughter tells you not to worry, that, "it's no big deal."

About five years ago, a swimmer walked on the deck of this pool and told us he wanted to join our team. We knew he was a known drug user. We pulled him aside and told him that we were aware of his reputation and his social life and while we would allow him a trial period, if we heard one word related to drugs spoken in front of any member of this team, at any time, he would be gone and regret this meeting. He chose not to join the team. You were about twelve years old at the time and neither you nor your parents were ever aware of a two-minute conversation that put your safety and the protection of this team ahead of a new member, added revenue, and his "social life". So you tell us where a "social life" ends and "team" character begins. We may not know the exact answer but we will always err on the side of caution, for you. And by the way, while some of you want to draw a line that separates this team from the rest of your life, we never have. We have never stopped caring about you or stopped supporting you when we leave the pool or take off our team jacket.

Some day you may have a thirteen, fourteen, or fifteen year old child and you will pray every time they walk out the door that they are safe and with good people doing the right things. You will pray that they can avoid drugs and alcohol, that they don't lie to you, and that someone is looking out for them. You will also hope that they might find an athletic program that places a premium on character and doing what is right. While you would not assume it, you would take comfort in finding overprotective people that run the program, people who actually care about your child as a person, even when they are not at practice. You will be grateful for a second pair of eyes to watch over them. You will care less about their success as an athlete than you will about their safety and personal well-being. Ask any parent.

Too often in this day, the coach is simply a spoke in the wheel of a teenager's life, and not a partner. Today, focus is more about being happy and being "right" rather than being respected and doing what is right. We cannot, and will not, fit into that world. We want to be your partner and not someone who is dismissed when he is not in agreement with you. We are not administrators enforcing rules, we are simply people who care passionately about you bringing out the best that lies within you and those around you.

As for insight into our reaction, it is not when we care this much or get upset that you should be concerned. For this you should feel fortunate. It is when we stop caring that the greater loss and the greater problem begins. And if you are not into the whole "character first, do the right thing" thing, you should know that every college coach we talk to asks about it and praises us for emphasizing it.

Should you disagree with this, that is fine, it simply means that our priorities and our philosophies are completely opposed to one another and that this clearly is not the proper environment for you."

Donnie & Ronnie

(Other) Things We Do

- Virtually anything to help them in life
- Extensive college support – letters, meetings, coach communication
- Go to Doctor's appointments
- Family meetings if needed
- Take to dinner, ice cream, etc.
- Talk about any issue
- Put life quotes on all workout
- Challenge them on personal issues – alcohol (see letter), academics, respect, humility, negativity, family, etc.
- Demand respect and integrity
- Friday meetings (see page)
- Team workouts (see page)
- Give numerous articles (see page)



Things We Get

(team of less than 100)

- **Great environment – positive, mature (most of the time), humble, caring**
- **NO disrespect or bad language**
- **No discipline problems**
- **Great attendance**
- **Virtually no burnout**
- **Nearly every swimmer (really) wants to swim in college**
 - One year the team had 35 collegiate swimmers. In 2008 the team had 12 (total) swimmers at the Olympic Trials)
- **Kids set up a 50 Meter pool every morning (covers, lane lines, flags, clocks – with no coach on the deck**
- **A very positive meet environment**
- **No parents problems, emails, etc.**
- **Kids do all meet set-up, take-down**



One at A Time, from Chicken Soup For The Soul

A friend of ours was walking down a deserted Mexican beach at sunset. As he walked along, he began to see another man in the distance. As he grew nearer, he noticed that the local native kept leaning down, picking something up and throwing it out into the water. Time and time he kept hurling things out into the ocean.

As our friend approached even closer, he noticed that the man was picking up starfish that had been washed up on the beach and, one at a time, he was throwing them back into the water.

Our friend was puzzled. He approached the man and said, "Good evening, friend. I was wondering what you are doing."

"I'm throwing these starfish back into the ocean. You see, it's low tide right now and all of these starfish have washed up onto the shore. If I don't throw them back into the sea, they'll die up here from lack of oxygen."

"I understand," my friend replied, "but there must be thousands of starfish on this beach. You can't possibly get to all of them. There are simply too many. And don't you realize this is probably happening on hundreds of beaches all up and down this coast. Can't you see that you can't possibly make a difference?"

The local native smiled, bent down and picked up yet another starfish, and as he threw it back into the sea, he replied, "Made a difference to that one!"



**"When we dream alone it is only a
dream, but when many dream together
it is the beginning of a new reality."**
F. Hundertwasser

“Success is always temporary. When all is said and done, the only thing you'll have left is your character.” Vince Gill

“Every relationship in your life has the fingerprints of your character all over it.”

**Thank you most
sincerely for attending
this talk. We truly
hope there has been
something of value for
you, your swimmers,
and your organization.**

**And thank you again to
John, Guy, and ASCA
for this humbling
opportunity.**

Ron and Don

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