

News for Swim Parents

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Motivation

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Years ago in the early days of MS Word and before the internet, I was writing an article on motivation when a squiggly red line showed up under the word “motivator.” I thought the proof editor was mistaken. I checked out Webster’s unabridged dictionary – the 2042 page edition – and guess what, the word “motivator” was not in the dictionary! So I went to the library and looked in the Cambridge-Oxford unabridged dictionary – the one that is 5 volumes in size – and “motivator” was not there!

The word is certainly in popular use, however. If you search Google you will find 13,100,000 hits. On Amazon.com there are 561 books with the word “motivator” in the title. And now, Word doesn’t underline “motivator” anymore and several online dictionaries I checked now include the word.

Is it odd that we have gone from an unrecognized word to one used regularly. I wonder if it means that at one time we expected motivation to come from within, but in today’s world which is filled with blame shifting, self proclaimed victims, and shying away from adversity, we now want someone else to be responsible for our motivation.

And of course that “someone else” is the coach.

When I first learned that motivator is not a recognized word I felt a huge weight lifted from me because I reasoned that if the word doesn’t exist then I need not think of myself as a motivator!

Instead I chose to think of myself as one responsible for creating the proper environment where motivation from within can occur, if the athlete is willing. What does this mean for the parent? You also are responsible for nurturing an environment where motivation can occur.

What is Motivation? Very simply it means striving to meet one’s needs.

Where does motivation come from? It comes from internal desires and external influences. Internal desires include intangible rewards, satisfaction, and self esteem. Internal desires are often influenced by external influences such as rewards or, unfortunately, fear of reprimand. Coaches prefer motivation by internal desires because these are the most long lasting, most genuine, and most satisfying. Motivation from fear is undesirable in our swimming world. Threatening and seeking to force swimmers do things is a sure way to drive them away.

What does it mean to say that “one is not motivated”? Commonly, it means that one is not a hard worker but more accurately, it usually indicates that a person has needs which are not being met in their present situation.

What kinds of needs are there? Many! Here are a few...

- The need to achieve, to be challenged
- The need to learn new information, improved techniques
- The need to be part of a team, or group
- The need to be unique
- The need to be recognized
- The need to improve weaknesses (not so obvious)
- The need to exhibit strengths
- The need to be cared for
- The need to have fun
- The need for structure, discipline.

The coach’s role is to identify the need(s) and then provide the right environment.

The parent’s role? It’s the same!