

Hi everyone!

Hope everything is going well and everyone is home safe. Some of the life lessons I've learned and hold closest to heart come from swimming. I wish to share my insight with everyone and hope you can benefit from reading. :)

I'm currently swimming at Columbia University in the City of New York, majoring in Computer Science and specializing in Intelligent Systems. I'm enjoying life in the city and hope to make more memories in the big apple after I graduate. College was an enormous adjustment for me in the classroom, in life, and especially in the pool. I was convinced that swimming in high school and club would be the same in college, but I was wrong. The team culture, camaraderie, and expectations of every individual is an entirely new world, but so is the support network around you. Being surrounded by like-minded and incredibly talented individuals that are all held to an exceedingly high standard creates a drive in you to achieve the best and hone in on improvements that you need to make in order to achieve success.

College, no matter where you go, is a breeding ground for self-exploration and self-understanding. It teaches you to open your eyes and see things from perspectives you never realized exist. This change, although may feel sudden, is gradual and requires patience. You learn to appreciate, embrace, and eventually overcome the challenges that used to keep you up at night but no longer do. However, appreciation for the challenges you face often doesn't come until you're on the other side. At times you will feel trapped, like you're in a never ending cycle, or even hopeless, but with patience comes success. Be more understanding toward yourself and become someone that sees the bigger picture and understands where each step of the way lies.

I've been swimming with Dana for 12(?) years now and the most significant lesson I've learned is, when facing adversity, to take a step back (and a deep breath) in order to evaluate my emotions, mindset, and environment. When we just started swimming with Dana, she would make us draft goal sheets every season. I absolutely hated making these, not only because I never really knew what I wanted but also because I hated failing to achieve what I wrote down. I thought it was torturous and just another excuse for Dana to yell at us more during practice. Little did I know, these goal sheets weren't as much for her as they were for us. Writing something down turns a dream into a concrete goal that is achievable through a step-by-step process. You can use this to either motivate or ground yourself in times of difficulty. You can pick apart what's written down and create new goals or new steps along the way. And when you've finally achieved it, the sense of achievement you feel from checking/crossing off that goal is overwhelming. To this day I still make goal sheets and stick them on my locker.

Another issue I faced was being uncomfortable with failure, which eventually evolved into a fear of losing. The thought of losing to my competition paralyzed me both behind the blocks and throughout the race. It distracted me from becoming fluid and adaptable during high pressure situations. My view of failure shifted from a focus on what I can control to becoming distracted by external factors and it often cost me. When I lost control of my fear, it greatly impacted my confidence. Through working with a great support network around me, from Dana's motherly advice to performance psychologists at school and even teammates who experienced the same issues, I was able to better understand myself and what I needed to do in

order to reshape my thinking. What I realized was the importance of focusing on internal factors and ignoring the external. Determining my strengths and weaknesses, addressing them, then figuring out step-by-step processes greatly improved my performance and my sense of self.

Your days might not be what you had imagined, it might even feel like you're in the wrong place heading in the wrong direction. But if you can take a step back and look at the bigger picture, you'll be able to control your emotions and adapt your mindset accordingly. Everyone is suffering in a different way through the current situation. Unfortunately, most of us have never encountered anything like this so we don't have any experience to fall back upon. Things look bleak and it feels like we're going through hell. But as Steve Harvey says, "if u going through hell, keep going. Why would you stop IN hell?"

Close your eyes. Take a deep breath. Feel the air fill your lungs. Pretend you're the only one living in your own little world. Focus on what you can control. And smile.

—

Albert