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## Creating Internal Confidence in Your Swimming

By Will Jonathan//Contributor | Monday, September 17, 2018

Visit Will Jonathan's website at [willjonathan.com](http://willjonathan.com) (<http://www.willjonathan.com>).

People often make the mistake of thinking that talent is what makes people successful. They see someone like Caeleb Dressel smashing records and breaking barriers and automatically leap to his talent being the difference maker. However, that's not the case. Let me ask you the following question:

**If Caeleb Dressel had absolutely zero confidence in himself as a swimmer, would he be as successful as he is?**

You can have all the physical talent in the world, but if you don't feel confident in yourself and your capabilities, then that talent won't count for anything because it will never get used. Your lack of confidence and self-belief will suppress your talent from ever expressing itself when you go to compete.

You can always tell whether or not a swimmer is feeling confident when they swim. If they're feeling confident, you can literally see it in their body language and in how they swim. Their body language exudes confidence behind the block. Their stroke is sharper and more determined. Their turns off the wall are more quick and powerful. Their overall swim is

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infused with a very visible sense of desire and competitiveness. If someone tries to pass them during a race, they fight back and refuse to be taken over. If they find themselves behind, they dig deep within themselves to try and claw back into the race.

Unconfident swimmers are the opposite. You can always tell when a swimmer isn't feeling confident, as once again, it shows in their body language and how they swim. Behind the block, they're constantly slapping, pounding, and hitting themselves because they're super nervous. Their body language exudes, "I'm scared to swim." Their stroke looks sloppy and hesitant. Their turns off the wall are slow and weak. Their overall swim looks heavy, weighted, and cumbersome. If someone starts to pass them during a race, they throw in the towel and give up. If they find themselves behind, they assume the race is behind them and that they have no chance of winning.

A confident swimmer will think only about the performance he wants to see happen. He doesn't think about the performance he **doesn't** want to see happen. A confident swimmer is never afraid to push themselves beyond their pain threshold if the situation demands it. A confident swimmer wants to swim against the best and thrives off of a challenge. A confident swimmer doesn't fear a race. They're not afraid of a bad time or a bad swim. A confident swimmer believes she can still come from behind to win even if she misses a turn. A confident swimmer doesn't waste mental energy comparing herself to other swimmers. She will instead focus on her own strengths and what makes her great as opposed to always concerning herself with what everyone else is doing and how their accomplishments stack up against her own. A confident swimmer is comfortable in their own skin and doesn't need validation or recognition from others in order to believe in themselves.

The great thing about confidence is that it can be trained, developed, and improved. Confidence is a skill. It's not something a person is born with. It's not something given to you or bestowed upon you at birth. And, because it's a skill, that means it can be practiced, learned, and mastered just like any other skill. When working with my swimming clients, I talk about how there are two different kinds of confidence. There's External Confidence and there's Internal Confidence.

External Confidence is when your confidence comes primarily from external sources, or sources outside of yourself.

**Results – The times and cuts that you get.**

**Rewards – The medals, trophies, and prizes you win.**

**Status – Your ranking or stature within your team or the sport as a whole.**

**Praise – The compliments and recognition you receive from others.**

**Comparisons – Measuring yourself and your accomplishments compared to others.**

Drawing the bulk of your confidence from these things is a dangerous trap. What's the problem with trying to gain confidence from external sources? It's simple: **External sources of confidence are temporary.** If you look at each of those sources, you'll notice that each of them are condition-based and, most importantly, are completely outside of your control.

If you depend on results, rewards, status, praise, and comparisons in order to feel confident in yourself as a swimmer, then what's going to happen to your confidence once your results get worse, you're not winning rewards, your status goes down, people stop praising you, or you can no longer favorably compare yourself to others? Your confidence is going to disappear right along with them.



What you need and what you want is Internal Confidence. Internal Confidence is when your confidence comes from sources, not from sources outside of yourself, but from you. It's when your confidence is created and fostered from within, not from things outside of you.

**Thoughts – What you think and the way you talk to yourself on a daily basis.**

**Images – The image you have of yourself as a swimmer.**

**Values – The principles and ideals that you hold dear and believe in.**

**Worth – The love you have for yourself regardless of weaknesses or flaws.**

**Growth – The progress and improvements you make in swimming.**

### **Thoughts**

You know the phrase, “If you tell yourself a lie long enough, you’ll start to believe it”? It works because the more you tell yourself something, the more your brain believes it to be true. You could be the best swimmer on planet earth, but if you constantly tell yourself that you’re no good, that you don’t have what it takes, that you’re an awful swimmer or that you’ve “lost it” and you’ll never get it back, then your brain will simply absorb those thoughts, believe them as truth, and help you perform in a way that matches those thoughts.

The opposite is also true. You could be someone who isn’t the best swimmer in the world or someone who’s never won anything. If you constantly tell yourself that you know you’re good enough, that you have what it takes to make it, that you’re not afraid to go up against anyone, that you’re capable of greatness in the water and that you can overcome any challenges or obstacles to succeed against all odds, then your brain will take in THOSE thoughts and believe them to be true. It will help you perform in a way that matches those confident thoughts.

### **Images**

As a swimmer, whether you realize it or not, you have an image in your mind of the swimmer you think you are. You see yourself in a certain way. That image is overwhelmingly influenced by your environment and your experiences that you go through in your sport and in your day-to-day life. Every time you’ve had a bad race or failed in the pool, the image you have of yourself was slightly chipped away at. Every time you swim a great race and experience success, that same image of yourself is improved and enhanced.

To build internal confidence, you need to craft a confident image of yourself. The best way to do this is through **Visualization**. Visualization is the process of visualizing images in your mind in order to train your brain to act or behave a certain way. Every day, for a set period of time, spend time visualizing yourself, not as the swimmer you currently are, **but as the swimmer that you want to be**. See yourself having strong body language behind the block. See yourself swimming with the kind of confidence and determination you’d want to have in your competition races. In doing so, you’ll be crafting a confident self-image that matches the confident images you visualized in your mind and your brain will try to help you perform and act in a way that matches those images.

### **Values**

As human beings, many of our decisions, actions, and behaviors are very much driven by the values that are most important to us. Values play the role of acting as our internal compass, helping to guide us in the direction of the decisions we want to make, the actions we want to take, and behaviors we want to exemplify. That's why identifying and understanding what your own core values are is so important. If you don't identify them and understand them, then you become like a compass without a needle.

Knowing your values can be a huge source of internal confidence and self-belief. When everything is crumbling around you, and things aren't going your way, you can always fall back on feeling confident in yourself because you know that you're the kind of person who knows what they want, knows what they believe in, knows what they stand for, and is willing to stand behind those values no matter what. You're strong enough to stick to your guns no matter how hard things get. That is true internal confidence.

### **Worth**

Personally, I don't think anyone can ever truly develop real, lasting, internal confidence and become the best version of themselves as a swimmer unless they develop a high sense of self-esteem and self-worth. In other words, you have to learn to love yourself. You have to reach a point where you can accept who you are and the attributes you have, and that includes everything – Strengths, weaknesses, admirable traits, embarrassing flaws, everything. You have to be able to be at peace with your own imperfection.

You're a human being first and a swimmer second. You're someone's son or daughter whom they love. You're someone's best friend and closest ally whom they trust unconditionally. You're someone's inspiration and source of motivation that they look up to. You are worth more than a time on a board. You're more valuable to the world and those in your life than whatever results you produce in the pool. Embrace who you are, accept that person, and love that person. Internal Confidence blossoms once you do.

### **Growth**

Results will swing. Sometimes they'll be great, and sometimes they'll be awful. Sometimes you'll get amazing results, and sometimes you'll get terrible results. The one constant that never changes is your growth. Every time you swim, every time you leap off a block into the pool, every time you take a stroke, and every time you kick underwater and turn against a wall, there's an opportunity for you to improve and grow. Not only that, but most importantly, there's an opportunity for you to draw confidence from that improvement and growth.

Did you do a better job starting off the block? Draw confidence from that growth. Did you do a better job of executing your underwater kicks? Draw confidence from that growth. Did you produce a better stroke in training this week? Draw confidence from that growth. Did you make faster turns off the wall? Draw confidence from that growth. Whether big or small, there are so many sources of confidence available to you if you simply look for the ways in which you are constantly improving and growing.

The voice inside your head, the image you have of yourself in your mind, the values you hold onto and live by, the love you have for yourself, and the growth you incrementally develop throughout your career are the best sources of confidence you have. Embrace them, utilize them, and feed off of them. You don't need results, rewards, status, praise, or favorable comparisons in order to feel confident in yourself. True, lasting confidence always comes from within.

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