

The DIGNITY of HARD WORK

By John Leonard

At certain times, certain things in our society catch my ear. I cannot help but reflect on them.

In recent weeks, I have heard people and heard of people saying that certain types of work were "beneath them."

Wow.

My Dad worked at a desk. My grandfather was a commercial fisherman in the days when that was Labor, not mechanized labor. My great-grandfather was a farmer. Somewhere back in there was an Irish horse-thief who was given the choice of emigrating to America, or contemplating life for a short period of time while swinging at the end of a rope. Luckily for me that ancestor was not a guy who would cut off his nose to spite his face, as my Dad would say.

My Dad appreciated his life of "ease" working at a desk. He appreciated his father for giving him the education to allow him to do that.

My Dad taught me that there was great dignity in hard labor. Without it, our streets would be dirty, our garbage burning in our backyard as it does in much of the third world, our crops unplanted and unharvested, our children unwashed, our toilets dirty.

I have seen USA Swimming Team Captains, Coaches, and Managers cleaning dirty toilets in foreign lands for meets when the toilets needed cleaning in order to keep our teammates from getting sick.. I

have seen Olympic Team Head Coaches working at the Olympic Games in the stands as Marshalls in order to get in and see the swim meet. I have heard of the great John Wooden teaching people to put their socks on properly to keep their feet healthy.

My Dad taught me that there is great dignity in any labor. The indignity is in not having useful labor to do, and having to live on the labor of others. Any others. My Dad taught me to love and appreciate and respect the opportunity to work and be of service to others. To respect those who do the "real work" of the world...the work that gives us such a nice world to live in.

But out of work people saying that some form of work is "beneath them?" Young people saying that their first job is "boring and dull?" People refusing to do jobs that involve physical labor? or distaining it? Preferring idle hands and brain to physical labor?

This baffles and discourages me.

How does this relate to swimming? Coaches are in a unique position to reinforce the value of physical labor of all sorts. To teach and relate the mind-clearing aspects of repetitive useful labor. To teach respect for the athletes uniquely privileged position of having the opportunity to labor "BY CHOICE" and not by necessity, for food and shelter. To respect those who DO have to labor for food and shelter and appreciate the challenges of their lives.

Let me say it loud and clear.

I believe there is no work that is beneath me.

There is no work that does not hold Dignity.

Any work that serves the common good is full of dignity and worthy of respect from each of us.

The only thing that is beneath ANY of us is a lack of willingness to work to contribute to our world.

That value I want my children to absorb and pass on.

Don't you?