

“Teaching Hard Work to Parents as Well as Children”

By John Leonard, August 2011

The titular quote above came from the former President of USA Swimming, Coach Jim Wood of the Berkeley Aquatic Club of New Jersey, in response to a question: “What can we do to improve American Swimming?” at a USA Swimming Steering Committee meeting last January.

Jim, as many of you know, is a 40 year plus veteran of the coaching scene, and owns his own pool and program and has been a leader in USA Swimming for many years. He currently is President of USA-Aquatic Sports, the umbrella organization for the Aquatic Sports in the USA, as they report to FINA. He’s produced Olympians, National Champions, great age group teams and runs a highly successful swim business and swim school.

His statement rang a bell with me.

I do talks for parents all over the world, as well as in the USA. I part-time coach my own team here in Fort Lauderdale, so I can stay current with all the things coaches face on deck in our sport. A considerable percentage of the parents that coaches deal with regularly have changed significantly from 10-20 and certainly 30 years ago.

I always ask parents what factors have led to their current success in life. Invariably, the majority have stories of hardships faced, challenges met, hard times overcome, on the way to a solid life and family, fiscal security or any sort of success you want to mention.

After these stories, a majority of parents say some variation of: “Boy, I don’t my kid to have to go

through that!"

I am always floored. "You mean, you don't want your child to experience the same formative experiences that you are describing as the "thing that made you what you are today?"

Invariably, they look at me blankly and then slowly it dawns on them what they are saying and the eyes go to the floor and you can almost hear an audible "Hmmm.."

The natural response of any parent is to *protect* their child.

But let us not confuse "protect" with "shelter." Children only really grow up under some pressure, some need to overcome something..the need to stretch, try harder, grow...in short to GO TO WORK on something they care about.

The harder the work, the more satisfying the growth, maturity and individual strength created.

When we do something for our children that they are capable of doing themselves, we make them weaker (not stronger). We want strong, independent children, yes? ... Yes?

When we let children do for themselves, they learn to work for what they want.

Just like you and I did. Most parents did. Hard work is good. For all of us.

Have confidence in your child and let them grow. They will prove themselves as strong or stronger than you.

But they need you to "give them something" to get there:
The *Freedom* to do the hard work themselves.