



The Relationship of Parent, Swimmer and Coach... A 3 Legged Stool
By Coach Mike Werner

Have you ever seen a 3 legged stool? They are pretty sturdy, dependable, supportive and balanced. You can use them for about anything. In competitive swimming, things like trust, loyalty, friendship, goals, dreams and hopes are stacked on them. What happens if you remove just one of the legs? The balance shifts and sways, things can and usually do slide easily from the top.

Trust and communication are two of the most vital elements to a coach, athlete and parent relationship. Coach, athlete, parent...a 3 legged stool. Without the elements of trust and communication, the interactions between individuals would be meaningless. In order for this relationship to be successful, let alone healthy, there has to be trust and communication between the coach, the athlete and the parents.

Trust is established through communication, both verbal and non-verbal, and must be demonstrated by all persons involved. The parent trusts the coach to the maximum extent of the coach's ability to look after the well being and development of their athlete. The athlete trusts the coach to develop, enhance and refine their skills through motivation, experience and trial and error. The coach trusts the athlete and parent to believe in their knowledge and ability to develop and guide the athlete in the way best determined by the coach.

The most successful relationships have trust between all sides involved, not just one or two sides. Unfortunately, this isn't always the case. How can an athlete develop their skills and reach or surpass their potential if they don't trust the coach? How can an athlete trust their coach if they know their parent does not trust the coach? How can the coach trust the athlete and/or the parents if they are not dedicated and committed to letting the athlete become the best they can?

When an athlete and parent first become involved with a program and coach, and the coach with them, they begin to earn each others trust. As the coach, athlete and parent begin to understand one another, their trust is strengthened. But in order for this relationship to remain successful, there must be communication between all persons involved.

Communication must not be an assumption; it has to be a constant. All persons involved must be the one to initiate the communication, not wait for the others to come to them. Lack of communication is when trust begins to waver. When one side stops communicating with the other sides, the level of trust will change. The most important thing that needs to happen at this point is to re-establish communication. More often than not, the coach or parent or athlete will argue over whom stopped communicating with whom. This is futile and useless. All sides need to put the accusations aside and get on with fixing the communication breakdown. Once communication comes back on line, trust can start coming back into the relationship.

The bottom line is to make sure that all sides involved with the relationship are communicating. Communication is the underlying element to trust, and together, they determine the successfulness of every relationship.