

Self-esteem and Confidence - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

The opportunity of being in contact with so many people has shown to me that all over the world a large number of swimmers, even at the very elite level, are struggling with loss of confidence and lack of inner belief and self-esteem. This seems to be an ongoing problem for many swimmers, and so today I am going to resist the temptation to teach any techniques, and simply drive home a powerful truth which must become embedded in the minds of all potential swimmers of the future.

There seem to be swimmers all over the globe who are constantly questioning their own talent and ability, comparing themselves to others and pulling their own confidence down. There are some who wonder if their best swims have passed them by, others who doubt their own ability because they haven't swum a PB for a long period, and others disconcerted because they feel that younger swimmers are catching them up or passing them, and they don't know why.

A 15 year-old tells me that for 6 months he's been in a slump, not getting any better, practicing and practicing and yet often thinking he's actually getting worse. On top of that, his coach had left, the only person who made him feel like someone believed in him and his swimming. Another person, a swim parent from Utah, is concerned about her two daughters, both excellent swimmers, who get greatly disappointed when they do not achieve personal best times, and fears them burning themselves out. Yet another wonders if she is ever going to realize the dreams she set for herself years ago.

The important thing to know about 'slumps and plateaus' is that they are completely normal! Nobody can constantly swim their best times all the time, not even the greatest of champions. Because we only hear about the fabulous achievements of champions such as Ian Thorpe, Susie O'Neill, Lenny Krayzelburg etc, we come to assume that they are putting in these performances every day!

The fact is they, like you and every other swimmer, are human and will often experience lapses in between the great swims. But what makes them true champions is how they cope with these plateaus, and then bounce back even stronger than before. Now that is what a champion is all about! A State level swimmer I am working with recently overcame a major slump which was caused by the death of a close relative. She achieved 2 PB's and qualified for the State finals. This is the stuff champions are made of. Occasional lapses are normal. Plateaus are natural. It's how you respond to them that matters most. Humans improve, then plateau, and then improve further....this is how improvement works.

This does not mean to say that we should be complacent when we have plateaued out for a while. We should always endeavor to move forward and look at new ways of improvement. Personally I have never found complacency to be a problem with swimmers, as any serious swimmer I have met has always had the attitude of further advancement. This is possibly because only serious swimmers seek out mental training anyway.

What if other swimmers don't appear to be experiencing the same problems? Then those swimmers are going through their own problems, which you probably don't even know about. Every great swimmer must overcome adversity to achieve greatness, it cannot be plain-sailing all the way, or everyone would be a great swimmer!

Your abilities are unique (as are those of every human being) and cannot truly be compared to other swimmers, so dispatch with this form of self-depreciation, and begin boosting yourself up. I also believe that many confidence problems could be alleviated by simply opening up the communication lines with the coach. Simply having a chat with them about the situation may produce some views or suggestions which can help the situation and ease a worried mind, because I believe that many swimmers bottle their feelings inside of them and tell no-one.

But the point today is that swimmers are human beings, not machines, so ups and downs are inevitable, but know this; the fact remains that most swimmers possess within them the ability to dig deep and bring out that special performance when it counts most. This includes you!

You have the innate ability right now to put aside slow training times, recent bad performances or even sickness and demonstrate to the world what you are truly capable of. This makes it absolutely essential for us not to tear down our confidence each time we experience a lapse, or do not perform up to our expectations. This period can simply be where our mind and body is becoming accustomed to the present level of swimming, before we prepare to move ahead and bring down the times even further.

You have within you the ability to bring out a great swim at any time, regardless of your recent performances. Why? Because within your mind at this moment lies the memory of every great swim you have ever performed in the past. Every single swim. Those past glories and experiences will remain with you forever, and you can bring them out once again, at any time. This means that once you have done it before, you can do it again!

Freakish achievements happen in sport all the time, and they may be just about to happen to you. So if you are one of the many swimmers who are bordering on desperation about your recent performances, know that you have the potential to change it. Believe in yourself, because the only limits we have are the ones that we impose upon ourselves. Free yourself of the chains that have been holding you back, and go for it!