**Defend your Process – Oliver Poirier-Leroy**

Here’s a question for you, while you are sitting at home, dry-docked and anxiously awaiting getting back in the water…

How well do you defend your process?

You know, the set of things that you aim to do each day in order to improve?

Things like:

Giving your best effort

Staying focused when things are trying

Eating like a champion

And so on.

How well do you defend your process against doubt, low motivation, and uncertainty?

How to defend your process

A staggering few will think deeply on what it takes for them to perform at their best.

Instead, they will swim and workout by the seat of their chlorinated pants, hoping that things will click on their own, or that they will magically out-swim their preparation, or that they will “feel like it” when it matters.

Elite swimmers (and performers) understand what it takes to get themselves to perform consistently at a high level and stick to creating those conditions for themselves.

They defend their process.

Against distractions, against fleeting motivation and fatigue, against the pressure of big moments, against doubt, uncertainty and adversity.

Instead of going into the heat of a hard workout or competition without a plan, defend your process.

Here is a simple 3-step process that you can use when you are feeling frustrated and stuck, whether it’s in the middle of a hard set, lining up for the big race, or working out from home and you are feeling the siren call of Netflix and a large pizza.

**1. Hit pause.**

Ever notice that things tend to spiral out of control when we are frantic? Rushing makes us feel out of control and powerless, a ripe scenario for the downward cascading of negative thoughts. It can look something like:

“This set is impossible… I’m not doing well, so what’s the point?... I knew I wouldn’t swim well on that practice… Because I stunk it up today, my goals are basically shot.”

Hard to stick to your process when things take a tumble right out the gate.

The key is jumping in and hitting pause at “This set is impossible.” Pressing pause gives you a chance to slow things down, detach yourself from negative thinking, and be cool with how respond.

**2. Take three big breaths.**

We have become a society of shallow breathers. Shallow breathing exacerbates frustration and stress, making it easier for those negative thoughts (“This is way too hard”) to take root and push you off of your process.

After you’ve hit pause, take a series of deep, controlled breaths.

Doing so almost instantly reduces stress levels and blood pressure, helping you to clear your mind a little and avoid knee-jerk behaviors.

(Plus, breathing like a champ helps you relax and increase your ability to tolerate intense exercise. Kind of all the wins.)

3. Shift into high-performance self-talk.

Okay, now that we have pumped the brakes on the negative self-talk, and calmed the old anxiety donkey down a little, it’s time to replace those negative thoughts with something a little more helpful.

Generally, the self-talk that you use to sabotage yourself is consistent.

You use it because you’ve used it in the past, and it’s become familiar and habitual.

Take a moment to think about the kind of self-talk that you frequently use to sabotage your process:

“This set is too hard… I am not swimming fast enough, so what’s the point… Everyone else is swimming faster than me…”

Write it out.

Seriously.

If you are serious about defending your process, this means being serious about doing the things necessary to stick to it when it is the most difficult.

Now replace those bummer forms of self-talk with something a little more constructive, something that will help you defend your process.

“This set is too hard” >> “This is set is hard… but I’ve done harder sets in the past.”

“I am not swimming fast enough, so what’s the point” >> “I am not putting up great times, but I can swim with excellent technique and nail all my turns.”

“Everyone else is swimming faster than me” >> “How other swimmers perform is irrelevant, what can I do to become a better swimmer today?”

Take a few minutes to try out this little exercise in process defense.

Try it this week.

And let me know how it goes.

PS: Want help building your own process, your own mindset blueprint for success in your training?

**In my book, *Conquer the Pool: The Swimmer’s Ultimate Guide to a High-Performance Mindset*,** there is a full section devoted to “the process.” You will learn how powerful and reassuring focusing on the process can be, how to build your own process that is tailored to your individual goals, and plenty of tips on how to show up every day and execute like a champ.