

American Swimming Coaches Association

NEWSLETTER

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ASCA'S FIRST PRESIDENT IN THE YEARS 1959 AND 1960



Phill Hansel

It is with great sadness that I report the passing of Texas Aquatic Legend, PHILL HANSEL. Please keep his family and friends in your thoughts and prayers.

PHILL HANSEL'S BIO:

Phill graduated from Purdue University with a bachelor's in Physical Education Degree in 1949. He was captain of the swimming team in 1948 and '49. He was also elected class of 1949 President and was chosen to be in Who's Who in America colleges and universities also in 1949. His first coaching job was at the Multnomah Athletic Club in Portland, Oregon. While coaching there he developed his first two National AAU Champions. The champions were Judy Cornel in the butterfly and Mureen (Mo) Murphy in the backstroke. Mo was a member of the 1952 Olympic swimming team. Phill Left Portland to come to Houston, Texas primarily for the warmer summer climate. He knew that the famous Shamrock Hilton Swimming pool was the ideal location for a soon to be organized AAU club team that he developed into arguably the strongest team in the south and southwest. Hansel managed the pool and coached the Shamrock Hilton team for five summers. In 1957, he was hired to be the men's swimming coach of the University of Houston. He asked for and was granted permission to coach women swimmers along with his men swimmers. Carin Cone, a transfer swimmer from the New York Women's Swim Association joined the Shamrock Hilton team and enrolled at the University of Houston. Since Carin was already a many times AAU National Champion and a previous

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FITNESS

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Phil Hansel

member of the U.S. 1952 Olympic team, she was a great addition to the local swimming competition. In 1959, Hansel took three of his U of H Swimmers to the National Women's AAU championships in Florida and finished in second place in the team standing, the highest finish ever for a University women's team in an AAU Championship. In 1966, Hansel entered his men's and women's Shamrock team into the AAU Long distance championships held in Lake Ponca, in Ponca City, Oklahoma. His team made a clean sweep and won both national team titles. When the U.S. Congress passed the title nine legislation mandating equal athletic programs for women as well as men, Hansel and the U. of H. were already pioneers in the development of women's competitive swimming. Phill was immediately named the U of H women's coach to coincide with his men's coaching responsibilities. That team was led by 18-time National Champion Carin Cone. That year, Carin established three World Records in various backstroke events. In the 1960's Hansel was elected President of the American Swimming Coaches Association. He also incorporated the Phill Hansel Swimming Academy to be the place to go for 'learn to swim' lessons in Houston. The Academy has taught hundreds if not thousands of Houstonians to swim. Hansel was the swimming coach at the U of H for thirty nine years. He was the Singapore swimming coach for the 1964 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. Phill also served as U.S. National swimming team manager for the 1991 Pan Pacific team when they went to Edmonton, Canada and as well as when they went to the World University Games in 1993 in Buffalo, New York. He was also the team manager for the U.S. Olympic team in 1992 in Barcelona, Spain. During his last nineteen years of coaching the U of H team, the team placed in the top twenty leaders at either AIAW or the NCAA championships. Hansel was also honored as swimming coach of the year in the Southwest Conference in 1976, '85, and '86. Phill was inducted the national association of hall of fame in 1999 and into the U of H athletic Roll of Honor in 2008. Phill retired from coaching at U of H in 1998 because of a stroke. Phill said, "After all is said and done, swimming is a lot of fun!"

PHILL HANSEL - BELOVED SWIM COACH SPLASHES ON

Phill Hansel died on August 6, 2010 at the Houston VA hospital after 85 years of living and a brief illness brought on by a fall. He was alert, promising to teach the nurses to swim and cracking bad jokes until the end. Phill was born in Chicago, Illinois on February 18, 1925. He and his brother Vernon moved frequently due to his father's work as a carpenter on large construction projects, and this taught them to meet and connect with people quickly. Phill graduated from Purdue University in 1949 with a Bachelors Degree in Physical Education. He was captain of the swimming team in 1948 and '49. He was also elected class President in 1949 and was chosen to be in Who's Who in America Colleges and Universities also in 1949. His college years were interrupted by service in the Navy from July 1943 to March 1946. He served in the Philippines as Athletic Specialist 1st Class. Sadly, during his Navy service Phill's brother Vernon was killed in 1944 while in flight training as a navy pilot.

For over 50 years, Phill Hansel promoted swimming excellence in Houston and around the world. He had a way of challenging each swimmer to challenge themselves - to set aggressive goals, work hard and keep a positive attitude. He was more concerned about developing his swimmers than winning and would often say "If you can't win, make the winner break a record". As a result, he coached many record breakers. In a little known effort to improve the swimming experience, Phill even worked with swimsuit manufacturers in the 1950's to design

the first streamlined, multi-colored tank suits, bringing comfort, improved speed and fashion to the pool.

EARLY COACHING CAREER

Phill's first coaching job was at the Multnomah Athletic Club in Portland, Oregon. While coaching there he developed his first two National AAU (Amateur Athletic Union) Champions - Judy Cornel in the butterfly and Maureen "Mighty Mo" Murphy in the backstroke (also on the 1952 Olympic team). In 1956, Phill and his wife and children left Portland to come to Houston, Texas, primarily for the warmer climate. He knew the famous Shamrock Hilton swimming pool ("World's Largest Hotel Pool") was the ideal location for a new AAU team, and it was there that he developed the strongest swimming team in the southwest. Hansel managed the pool and coached the Shamrock Hilton Swim Team for over a dozen years. The pool was then demolished along with the hotel to make room for Texas Medical Center development. Coach Hansel then formed the Houston Swim Club, which worked-out in various swimming pools.



PHILL HANSEL SWIMMING ACADEMY

In the 1960's, Hansel was elected the president of the American Swimming Coaches Association. He and his wife Jan also developed the Phill Hansel Swimming Academy, a private school for 'learn to swim' lessons in Houston. Phill helped many of his star swimmers work their way through college by hiring them to teach swimming lessons at the Academy. Today, UH champion sprinter Ang Peng Sion operates a swim school in Singapore. The Phill Hansel Swim Academy instructors have taught thousands of Houstonians to learn to swim and be safe in water.

PHILL'S OLYMPIC-SIZED GENE POOL

He is survived by his children and grandchildren: Ginger Elaine Hansel and husband, Peter Van Overen (Austin, TX); Vernon Edward (Hansel) Tejas and wife, Carole Tejas (NY, NY) and sons Nickolas Tucker Lynch and Cayman Bryce Irvine; Phillip Sand Hansel II and wife, Janice Hansel (Village Mills, TX) and son Zachary Sand Hansel; David Robert Hansel and wife, Christine Hansel (Denton, TX) and children Christopher William Hansel, Crystalline Autumn Hansel, Kyle David Hansel and Allison Anne Hansel; Janus Augusta (Hansel) Lazaris and husband, John Alexander Lazaris (Houston, TX) and sons Alexander J. Lazaris and Nikolas Lazaris; Carin Maureen (Hansel) Trant and husband, Rickey Wayne Trant (LaPorte, TX) and children Lynette Lynn (Trant) Munoz, Alicia Marie Trant and Rickey Lee Trant; Joshua Isak Hansel (Houston, TX); Holly Elisabeth Hansel (Houston, TX); step-daughter, Ashley Michelle Cox (Houston, TX) and three former wives: Janice Elaine (Hansel) Muetzel, Nancy Kay Hansel and Barbara (Cox) Hansel.

He was predeceased by his older brother Vernon Ellsworth Hansel Jr. and by his parents, Vernon Ellsworth Hansel Sr. and Astrid Sand Hansel. ⑧



Excerpt from **The Right to Lead**

By John Maxwell

What gives a man or woman the right to lead? It certainly isn't gained by election or appointment. Having position, title, rank or degrees doesn't qualify anyone to lead other people. And the ability doesn't come automatically from age or experience, either.

No, it would be accurate to say that no one can be given the right to lead. The right to lead can only be earned. And that takes time.

THE KIND OF LEADER OTHERS WANT TO FOLLOW

The key to becoming an effective leader is not to focus on making other people follow, but on making yourself the kind of person they want to follow. You must become someone others can trust to take them where they want to go.

As you prepare yourself to become a better leader, use the following guidelines to help you grow:

1. Let go of your ego.

The truly great leaders are not in leadership for personal

gain. They lead in order to serve other people. Perhaps that is why Lawrence D. Bell remarked, "Show me a man who cannot bother to do little things, and I'll show you a man who cannot be trusted to do big things."

2. Become a good follower first.

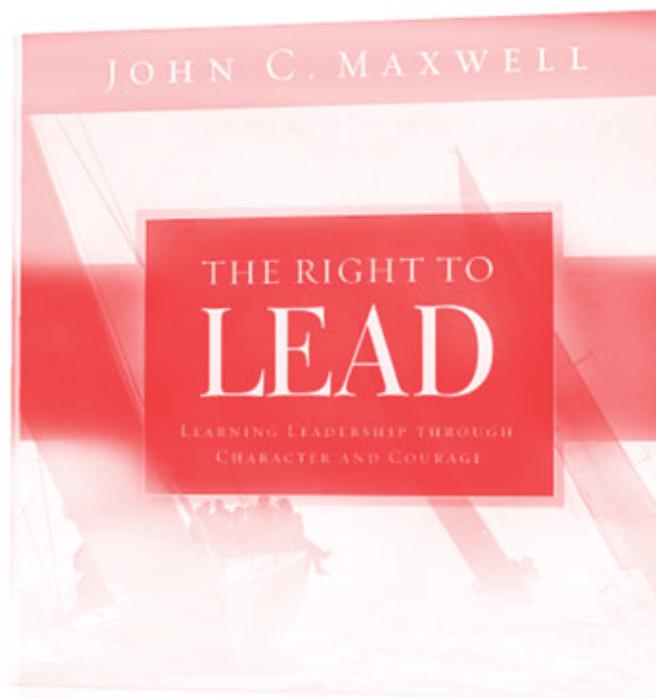
Rare is the effective leader who didn't learn to become a good follower first. That is why a leadership institution such as the United States Military Academy teaches its officers to become effective followers first – and why West Point has produced more leaders than the Harvard Business School.

3. Build positive relationships.

Leadership is influence, nothing more, nothing less. That means it is by nature relational. Today's generation of leaders seem particularly aware of this because title and position mean so little to them. They know intuitively that people go along with people they get along with.

4. Work with excellence.

No one respects and follows mediocrity. Leaders who earn the right to lead give their all to what they do. They bring into play not only their skills and talents, but also great passion and hard work. They perform on the highest level of which they are capable. ⑧





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College Swimming by the Numbers

Distributed by Bob Groseth at the ASCA Board Meeting, August 2, 2010

Thanks to Bob. JL

Number of member Universities/colleges of the NCAA in 1989 — 753 women/752 men

Number of member Universities/colleges of the NCAA 2009 — 1069 women/1069 men

% of members who sponsored swimming in the NCAA 1989 — 46 %women/ 50.1% men.

% of members who sponsored swimming in the NCAA 2009 — 47.7% women/**36.8% men**

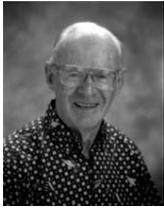
Number of Female athletes in NCAA swimming in 1989 — 6, 218.

Number of Female athletes in NCAA swimming in 2009 — 11,626.

Number of Male athletes in NCAA Swimming in 1989 — 7,746

Number of Male athletes in NCAA Swimming in 2009 — 8,868.

1989-2009 — TEAMS DROPPED	DI	DII	DIII	COMBINED
Women	35	35	60	130
Men	64	38	65	167
1989-2009 — TEAMS ADDED	DI	DII	DIII	COMBINED
Women	37	57	103	197 (UP 37 teams)
Men	18	42	89	149 (down 18 teams)
NET CHANGE: 1989-2009				
Women	2	22	43	67
Men	-46	4	24	-18



Coach Harry Meisel

Rest in Peace Coach, You'll Be Missed!

**HARRY MEISEL:
HE TAUGHT
ORLANDO KIDS
SWIMMING,
PERSEVERANCE**

'He taught the young ones, the inglorious ones.'

*By Rene Stutzman,
Orlando Sentinel*

U.S. Olympic swimmer Jilen Siroky Bower was 5 years old, growing up in Casselberry, when she started swimming for Coach Harry Meisel at the Rollins College pool.

"He watched me and gave me the chance and let me be part of the team when other coaches didn't," said the 28-year-old auditor who competed in the 1996 Olympics and now lives in Chicago.

Susie Aspinwall of Orlando had three children, now ages 40, 41 and 43, who swam for Meisel. They started at age 6.

"They all went on swimming scholarships to college," she said, at the University of Wisconsin, University of Michigan and Miami University in Ohio.

For five decades, Meisel coached Orlando-area children, specializing in teaching boys and girls ages 5 to 12 how to swim.

He died Sunday, July 25th of brain cancer. He was 87.

Friends, swimmers and family members remembered the Orlando resident Tuesday as a no-nonsense man who taught children not only sports fundamentals but also how to work hard, train hard and play by the rules.

"He believed in Pete and Repeat. Repetition," said son Kevin Meisel, "and he did it daily and unselfishly, whether it was in the classroom or on the pool deck."

Meisel was a lifelong physical education teacher and coach. He taught at Orlando Senior High School, then Boone High, then Bishop Moore High. He coached a variety of sports, including football, basketball, tennis and tumbling.

In 1962, he joined the physical education faculty at Rollins College, where he retired in 1997 and was named professor emeritus.

But it was his work with young swimmers that he most loved, said sons Kevin and Steve Meisel.

He led swimmers to 20 state swim championships and taught thousands of young people to swim.

"He was great with kids. Loved kids," said Skip Foster, assistant athletic director at the University of Florida, formerly its swim coach who helped lead the school to three NCAA championships.

Meisel taught them not just how to swim and compete but also "being on time, doing things the right way, not making excuses and trying to do the best every time you stepped on the block," Foster said.

Meisel was a big University of Notre Dame fan and, after a son-in-law joined the faculty of its business school, began attending Notre Dame football games.

"The next thing, he'd begun diagramming and mailing directly to Lou Holtz plays, football plays. I don't know if Holtz appreciated it then," said Kevin Meisel, but more than a decade later, Holtz moved to Lake Nona, next-door to Susie Aspinwall, who had three swimmers coached by Meisel.

A package then arrived at the Meisel home. Inside was a Notre Dame baseball cap. Written on the underside of the bill: "To Harry, the best coach ever, Lou Holtz."

"Harry was not only successful, he was significant. When you're successful, you dial that in. When you're significant, you help other people be successful," Holtz said Tuesday. "That lasts a lifetime, and Harry certainly did this."

Meisel was named to the Central Florida Sports Hall of Fame in 1987 and the W.R. Boone Sports Hall of Fame in 1999.

"He taught the younger ones, the inglorious ones," said Aspinwall. "I was laughing, remembering Harry used to love to have a meet Thanksgiving Day."

Meisel was a World War II Army veteran and fought in the Battle of the Bulge. He also was president of the committee that erected the Battle of the Bulge monument at Orlando's Lake Eola Park.

Meisel is survived by his wife of 60 years, Jeanette; five children, including Karen Hales, Mary Meisel and Teresa Crant; and 10 grandchildren. 8

Philosophy

Maybe We All Have This All Wrong

By John Leonard

As I age, I am returning to the baseball fan I was as a young child. I am sitting here this morning (June 3, 2010) and listening to ESPN out of one ear. Armando Gallarraga has lost a perfect game (one of only 21 in history) on an umpire's bad call. The pitcher responds on TV with total graciousness, accepting that we are all human and all make mistakes. The umpire completely and freely admits his mistake and the historical gravity of that mistake and apologizes in a public way on TV that leaves no doubt in anyone's mind when he says "no one feels worse about this than I do." If you are a sports fan, this is Fantastic. In an era of amazing CRAP coming out of people's mouths as it relates to bad calls in sport, both of these men get it PERFECTLY correct.

The athlete is gracious and the umpire accepts his responsibility and apologizes.

This makes me immediately remember that baseball is the only sport that records the ERRORS of the player. But holds the decisions of the officials as sacrosanct. And maybe, must maybe, that is exactly how it SHOULD BE.

It is, as Mr. Gallarraga says, "just a game." As all of our sports are "just sports."

Because of the intense passions and the immense amounts of money involved (primarily, I might add, in the socially uplifting (sarcasm there) act of GAMBLING) ...we have instant replay every time we turn around. Everyone says we have to "get it right" and

never make a mistake. What if we didn't have instant replay? What if we didn't need a lawyer every time somebody thinks they got a bad call? What if the enjoyment of a GAME was not dependent on everything being re-evaluated every time someone feels "wronged." It's a game, it's a game, it's a game.

If it's a GAME, and not life and death, we could just choose to be joyous and gracious and all do our best, and accept the results of the officiating.

Except for the money, of course. Money in our society seems to top everything. I never ever thought I would find myself siding with the unctuous and overbearing Avery Brundage but money in sport IS in fact the root of all evil.

Huge congratulations to Mr. Gallarraga and the umpire, Mr. Jim Joyce. Beautifully done. I hope we all remember this much longer than who had the 19th and 20th Perfect Games.

This was the PERFECT SPORTING RESPONSE.

Well done.



John Leonard

OH FINGERS, TO BE TOGETHER OR NOT TOGETHER? THAT IS THE QUESTION!

Editor's Note: Coach Milliman is one of the oearly officers of the ASCA along with Coach Hansel, and is still an active swimming coach.

The hand shape and positioning of the fingers continues to come up as a subject of interest and some confusion. I have listened to teachers, coaches, parents and swimmers all coming up with different views over the years. Views expressed like "Cup the hand to hold the water," "fingers together for more power," "fingers apart less force." Most recently this subject came up at a Swimming Coaches clinic that I attended.

As early as the 1960's "Doc" Councilman, at one of the early American Swimming Coaches Association Clinics, referred to studies testing various hand positions in the water from closed fist, to open hand (fingers spread). This has stuck with me over the years and I have continuously emphasized the "relaxed" hand with the fingers slightly apart. The majority of the new, younger swimmers that I have observed adopt the relaxed hand naturally.

My curiosity on this subject, just to see if I have been missing something new, I googled "Hand position, in swimming." The results were quite interesting. The most recent one from the Journal of Biomechanics entitled: "The Optimum Finger Spacing in Human Swimming," printed last year by Alberto Minetti, Georgios Machtsiras, and Jonathan C. Masters. I would encourage the curious to take a look at this article. The research is very well done. The article includes graphs and photos. Disadvantages of the hand with 'closed' fingers is discussed. In the concluding paragraph, the authors state "It is fortunate that the (absolute) optimum spacing appears to correspond to the "natural" resting posture of fingers."

Mike Milliman

Advertisement

Water-Clogged Ears

Tips for avoiding this irritating condition.

Is swimming part of your regular exercise regimen? Do you spend countless hours in a pool each week providing instruction? Maybe you shower after an evening run or workout in addition to your regular morning shower. Situations like these can result in water-clogged ears, an uncomfortable condition that makes hearing difficult.

Preventive measures such as wearing earplugs while in water and having professional ear cleanings can be helpful in discouraging a buildup of water in the ear, but it's also a good idea to have an ear drying aid, such as Auro-Dri, handy to dry up any water that becomes trapped. Auro-Dri Ear Drying Aid is a fast-acting ear drop treatment specifically made to help dry and relieve water-clogged ears on contact.

Aaron Peirsol, three-time Gold Medalist in swimming and Auro-Dri spokesperson, explains: "Water-clogged ears can be painful, annoying and even make it hard to hear. Spending as much time as I do in the pool, I frequently count on Auro-Dri to effectively remove any water that gets trapped in my ears."

Keeping your ears water-free should be a priority every time you swim or shower, so be sure to have an ear drying product on hand with you at the pool or gym, as well as in your medicine cabinet at home. With reasonable care you should be able to avoid the discomfort and inconvenience of water-clogged ears. Of course, if you should experience fever, pain or pressure in the ear, consult a physician right away – your hearing is too valuable to take any chances!

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Three-time
Gold Medalist
In Swimming



Expand, Preserve and Protect Collegiate Swimming Programs

Letter from National Team Head Coach Mark Schubert

Dear John:

Thanks for the great article on Expand Preserve and Protect our College Swimming Programs. Nothing is more important than "the Dream" of competing in college swimming for our Club and High Schools athletes.

Coaching College Swimming is a difficult job. Training athletes, conducting competitions, recruiting, and rules compliance can seem overwhelming at times. However, today's college coach must do so much more to protect the legacy of their programs. Endowment of scholarships is key for the growth of college swimming. That should be the expectation of every college coach. Bill Wadley at Ohio State and Frank Comfort at North Carolina are shining examples of coaches who have been proactive in this area.

The College Coach must work to make their teams relevant on their campuses. It takes EFFORT to make sure the stands are full at dual meets and that the general student body is excited about their swim team! Work with your local USA Swimming LSC to bring club swimmers to your events and get them excited about your program. Additionally, involvement in charitable activities on campus gives not only the swimming and diving team a good reputation, but the athletic department as well.

It is not enough to attempt to "save" programs that are in peril of being eliminated, it is up to everyone, especially the college coach, to make college swimming better, so our sport is never considered for elimination by their athletic departments.

Mark E. Schubert
National Team Head

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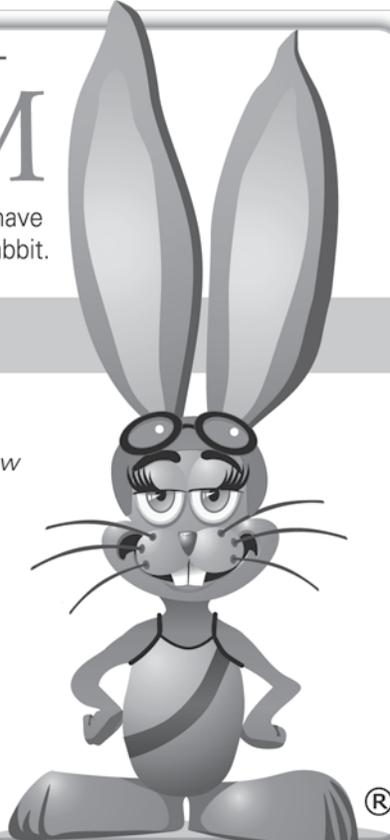
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A cartoon illustration of a grey rabbit wearing black goggles and a black swimsuit, standing with its hands on its hips. The rabbit has long, upright ears and a friendly expression. A registered trademark symbol (®) is located at the bottom right of the rabbit's feet.

Working Successfully with Parents

By Coach Chris Fraser
Assistant Coach / International School Bangkok (ISB)
Nichada Thani, Thailand

I frequently coach young age group swimmers or sometimes older age group swimmers who are new to the sport. I make it a policy to recognize achievement with this group wherever I can find it. More seasoned swimmers know where achievement is and when they have grasped it. For the most part even the parents of experienced swimmers understand the parameters of achievement. This wide-angle theory of recognizing achievement in novice swimmers keeps children interested and involved in the sport. It enables both the child and the parents to celebrate all those trips to the pool and the hard work in the water. The best vehicle for achieving this purpose was posting times after a meet. I would post first-place swims, personal best-time swims and, of course, first-place best-time swims. Sharing the publicity kept the dream alive in new swimmers. The kids bought in to this right away, possibly by virtue of A and B honor roll awards in school. Children enter the sport of competitive swimming clearly knowing the difference between winning and losing. They get that graphic understanding from television and from games and, sadly at times, from their parents. One side wins by virtue of the other side losing. I teach them that in racing sports there is another kind of winning. This is possible because we can precisely measure each and every performance. Every time you post a best-time you have positive proof that you have performed better than you ever did before that swim. More kids felt that they were striving forward. They

were clearly more motivated after posting the meet results.

One meet I had a seven-year-old boy cut five seconds off his best time in the 50-yard freestyle. He came in fourth place in the event against a field of more experienced kids. The point was that he recorded his best-time by five seconds! The child came out of the water and said “I lost again coach.” I said, “You came in fourth place, but you cut five seconds off your previous best-time! You are a personal best-time winner today, son, and if you keep on working hard and improving then first-place is going to happen to you.” That little boy lit up like a Christmas tree. A few minutes later his father approached me and asked for a word. He was trying not to be angry, but he clearly was

angry. He said, “Coach, my son came in fourth and he told me that you said something to him about being some kind of winner against himself. I don’t want you to deceive him. One of the reasons that I got him involved in this was to teach him the difference between winning and losing. I had to learn it the hard way playing football.” I said, “I need you to answer a question for me. Which is better, to come in first-place and swim five seconds slower than your previous best-time or to come in fourth and swim five seconds faster than you’ve ever swum before that competition?” The man thought about it and then blurted out that winning was winning and that was all there was to it. It was at that moment that I had a swim coach epiphany. I now realized that I had to educate parents as to the difference between a game and a race. I needed to make them realize that first-place was great, but a new best-time was greater and the best of all was a first-place best-time. I felt that my point was obvious, but I also saw that he had no depth of field in racing sports. The big difference is that there is no defensive position to racing. Your opponent is not trying to stop you from doing your best

continued on page 12 >>

“I needed to make them realize that first-place was great, but a new best-time was greater and the best of all was a first-place best-time.”

“Sometimes what is needed most is plain communication in our sport . . . If you are not part of the solution (educating people) then you are part of the problem (losing kids).”

because that is what he is trying to do, as well. It was frustrating for both of us.

I was certain the boy’s father would understand my point, but the truth was that neither of us understood the other. He honestly did not understand racing at all. I had to get back to the meet, but I knew that I was in danger of losing this family. The boy’s father felt I was violating his concept of athletic dogma. I asked both of the boy’s parents to come to the pool thirty minutes early before Saturday morning practice. When they arrived I thanked them for coming and we all sat down with coffee. I explained that achievement in swimming is measured by a stopwatch far more than colored ribbons. I further

explained that a swimming meet was not a gladiator arena. It was a theatrical forum designed to entice each swimmer to perform better than ever before that meet. And we have a definite means of determining this achievement which is called a stopwatch. The boy’s mother quickly saw my point and thanked me for communicating it. The boy’s father, on the other hand, was holding fast to his hard won football values. I knew that I had my work cut out for me with the father, but at least I was not going to lose the family. The boy was a great kid and I did not want to lose him. I told the boy’s parents that I was going to call a mid-season new parents’ meeting to clear-up these issues.

This made me realize that I needed to meet with new parents separately before the start of the season. I grew up swimming so I knew that your best-time was the heartbeat of progress. Gamers, for lack of a better term, did not understand this value in their win or lose world. I had to explain that in a game there are both offensive and defensive postures. It is possible to play poorly and still win. How might you ask? Because it is also possible that your opponent could play even more poorly than you did. This simply does not happen in swimming or track and field. How many times have you heard a TV interview with either a college or pro quarterback who said, “We made a lot of mistakes out there today; lots of things went wrong, but luckily we came away with a win.” Did you ever hear an Olympic gold medal swimmer being interviewed and say “I swam really poorly today.” My start was bad and I missed all my turns, but somehow I pulled it out because the other seven lanes swam even worse than I did.” You have never heard that and you never will! The other idea that I had to get across was that the stopwatch could absolutely measure a personal best performance because a stopwatch is not interpretive. A stopwatch is both quantitative and finite in its measurement. It eliminates the ubiquitous conjecture found in every game as to which player or team was the greatest of all time. There was nothing interpretive about the performance of Michael Phelps in Beijing. The timing system proved it and the world saw it.

Sometimes what is needed most is plain communication in our sport. It starts with recognizing the problem and then being empathetic in its explanation. If you are not part of the solution (educating people) then you are part of the problem (losing kids). ③

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- Gregg Troy, Head Coach, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

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- Steve Bialorucki, Head Coach, Old Dominion Aquatic Club, Virginia Beach, VA

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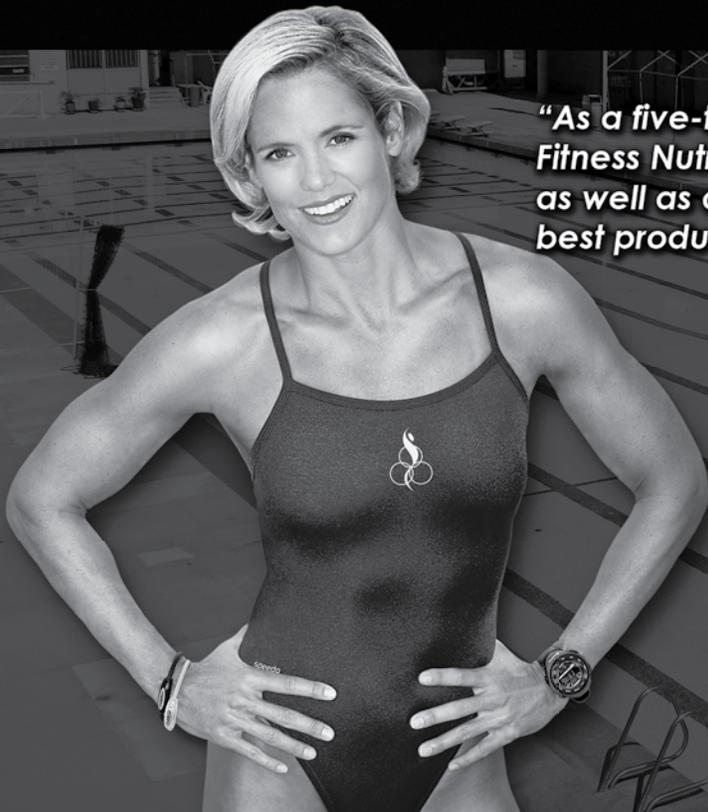
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Mindsets

Developing Swimming Talent Through a Growth Mindset

By Coach Howard Schein

University of Illinois Laboratory High School; Champaign County YMCA HEAT Swim Club with Carol S. Dweck, Stanford University.

About a year ago I read a very short but laudatory book review by George Block in the **ASCA Newsletter**. I promptly read *Mindset* by Stanford psychology professor Carol Dweck and was amazed at the immediacy of the new lens that Professor Dweck gave me for looking at the swimmers I coach. I sent the review to Carol, a friend from her days at the University of Illinois, and asked her if she'd write an article that introduced swim coaches to her ideas. This article, modified from an article Carol wrote for **Olympic Coach** (V 21 #1 2009) and from **Mindset**, is the result of our collaboration:

Coaches are often frustrated and puzzled. They look back over their careers and realize that some of their most talented athletes—athletes who seemed to have everything—never achieved success. Why? One answer as seen through Dweck's lens is that they didn't have the right mindset.

Dweck's research identifies two mindsets that people can have

about their talents and abilities: a fixed mindset and a growth mindset.

Those with a fixed mindset believe that their talents and abilities are simply fixed; they are born with a certain amount and that's that. Swimmers with a fixed mindset who have a lot of natural talent may achieve great results early in their careers, without major effort, because of that natural talent. Being singled out as special and praised early on for their achievements can foster in them a sense that they will continue to be able to do well without the efforts that others have to make. This may be true, to a point. But with most of the swimmers who rely primarily on natural talent, there comes a time when they plateau. Since to that point they have always been special without having to sweat, struggle, and practice like other athletes, they may become so frustrated when they encounter obstacles or plateaus that they give up. The fixed mindset in these swimmers leads to the (false) belief that their natural talent will always keep them at the top of the heap. When they are not at the top of the heap, they experience so much shame that they often can't bear to go on. They can't give up their position of specialness, so they never progress to fulfill their potential.

Fixed mindsets in swimmers can show up in other ways as well. Coaches frequently find swimmers who, very early in their careers,

define themselves by stroke and distance, e.g., "I'm a 100 fly guy" or "I'm a breastroker gal." This is especially the case in high school and college swimming, where swimmers frequently carve out their niches as specialists. Some refuse to leave their niches, even when the process of learning other events can help them in their specialties or can lead them toward new successes. Frequently this occurs because engaging in new events may initially set them back to lower levels of success in terms of winning/losing and times. Like the "natural talent" swimmers, they are so afraid of losing their positions as "winners" such that they actually hold themselves back from improving.

Have you ever coached swimmers who felt that every race had to be their best swim or that they had to win every race? And when the swim wasn't their best, or if they didn't win, they were devastated? These are fixed mindset swimmers.

People with a **growth mindset**, on the other hand, think of talents and abilities as things they can develop—as potentials that come to fruition through effort, practice, and instruction. They don't believe that everyone has the same potential or that anyone can be Natalie Coughlin, Dara Torres, or Michael Phelps. But they understand that even Natalie, Dara, and Michael wouldn't be who they are without years of passionate and dedicated practice. In the growth mindset, talent is something you build on and develop. It is not something people are given and that stays constant. Growth mindset kids are the athletes who look at each swim with an eye toward analyzing what needs to be done, both in practice and in the next race, to improve on each performance.

Almost every exceptional athlete has had a growth mindset. Rather than resting on their talent, they constantly stretch themselves, analyze their performances, and address their weaknesses. Dara

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Torres has certainly defied myths about age through her training and dedication. Using new training methods that better suit her body's needs as she grows older certainly points to her willingness to accept new challenges that keep her moving toward newly defined goals.

Dweck contends that research repeatedly shows that a growth mindset fosters a healthier attitude toward practice and learning, a hunger for feedback, a greater ability to deal with setbacks, and significantly better performance over time.

As coaches, we can use the Mindset lens as one of our tools for working with our swimmers. Obviously, the Mindset lens is not an exclusive tool, but it can help give powerful insights to what drives our athletes. Importantly, keep in mind that Dweck's description of mindsets is a description of belief systems, and as such, they are able to change.

The belief behind the growth mindset, that talent can be developed, creates a passion for learning. Obviously, for racers, the ultimate measure of success is increased speed. But, working toward attaining speed is a continuous process because, no matter how fast swimmers race, they always want to go even faster. When racers define themselves with concrete characteristics ... "I can beat all of the people I race," or "I am a 00:48 hundred free swimmer," they define themselves in a fixed-mindset mode: by "product" rather than by "process."

In the growth mindset, we ask,

- ⊙ "Why waste time proving over and over how great you are when you could be getting better?"
- ⊙ "Why hide deficiencies instead of overcoming them?"
- ⊙ "Why look for teams/coaches who shore up the self-esteem that you have derived from

your talent instead of looking for training environments that will challenge you to grow?"

- ⊙ "Why seek out the tried and true instead of experiencing that which will stretch you?"

The passion that swimmers have for stretching their abilities and finding value in the effort of doing so, even (or especially) when their races are not going well, is the hallmark of the growth mindset. This is the mindset that allows people to thrive and grow during some of the most challenging times in their lives.

How many times have you heard freestylers say, "My kick sucks?" Do they resign themselves to this statement because kicking is unrewarding, they hate it, and consequently rely on arm power, or do they challenge themselves to develop a stronger kick?

How do the mindsets work and what can coaches do to promote a growth mindset?

Before addressing these issues, let us first answer some other questions that are often asked about the mindsets.

Questions About The Mindsets

Which mindset is correct?

Although abilities are always a product of nature and nurture, a great deal of exciting work is emerging in support of the growth mindset. New work in psychology and neuroscience is demonstrating the tremendous plasticity of the brain—its capacity to change and even reorganize itself when people put serious labor into developing a set of skills. Other groundbreaking work (for example, by Anders Ericsson, et. al (1993)) is showing that in virtually every field—sports, science, the arts—only one thing seems to distinguish the people we later call geniuses from their other talented peers. This one thing is called deliberate practice; or, as Robert Sternberg (2005) explains, the major factor in whether people achieve expertise

"is not some fixed prior ability, but purposeful engagement."

Are people's mindsets related to their level of ability in the area? No, at least not at first. People with all levels of ability can hold either mindset, but over time those with the growth mindset appear to gain the advantage and begin to outperform their peers with a fixed mindset.

Are mindsets fixed or can they be changed? Mindsets can be fairly stable, but they are beliefs, and beliefs can be changed.

How Do The Mindsets Work? The Mindset Rules

The two mindsets work by creating entire psychological worlds, and each world operates by different rules.

Rule #1.

In a fixed mindset the cardinal rule is: Look talented at all costs. Jealously guard that talent.

In a growth mindset the cardinal rule is: Learn, learn, learn! Take risks. We may even want to cite Ms. Frizzle, of PBS's *The Magic School Bus*, who frequently exhorts her students, "Take Chances, Make Mistakes, Get Messy."

In Dweck's work with adolescents and college students, those with a fixed mindset say, "The main thing I want when I do my school work is to show how good I am at it." When given a choice between a challenging task from which they can learn and a task that will make them look smart, most of them choose to look smart. Because they believe that their intelligence is fixed and that they have only a certain amount, they have to look good at all times in order to maintain their and others' view of who they are.

Those with a growth mindset, on the other hand, say "It's much more important for me to learn things in my classes than it is to get the best grades." They care about grades, just as athletes care

about winning, but they care first and foremost about learning. As a group, these are the students who end up earning higher grades, even when they may not have had greater aptitude originally.

- ⦿ What happens when you ask swimmers to race new events or to change their technique? Are they fearful of looking bad, or do they see it as an adventure or a new challenge?
- ⦿ Several years ago, my daughter plateaued in her chosen college events, 50 and 100 yd butterfly, and she was getting very frustrated. I suggested that she play with the 400 IM, and she grimaced. Then I, a confirmed masters freestyle sprinter, made the challenge: “If you race the 400 IM, so will I, and I’ll even add the 200 fly to up the ante.” She had the best season of her long swim career, and I celebrated my 65th birthday at the Illinois State Masters Meet with a whole new set of challenges and exciting horizons in swimming. My first goal was to race the 200 fly “with dignity.” Better times are next on my list. It’s never too late to accept a new challenge.

Dweck’s studies show that, precisely because of their focus on learning, growth mindset students end up with higher performance. They take charge of the learning process. For example, they study more deeply, manage their time better, and keep up their motivation. If they do poorly at first, they find out why and fix it.

Dweck has also found that mindsets play a key role in how students adjust when they are facing major transitions. Do they try to take advantage of all the resources and instruction available, or do they try to act as though they don’t care or already know it all? In a study of students entering an elite university, Carol found that students with a fixed mindset preferred to hide their deficiencies rather than take an opportunity to remedy

“Work with passion and dedication—effort is the key.”

them—even when the deficiency put their future success at risk. In swimming, the prospect of changing technique can be very threatening to a fixed-mindset athlete, since these changes frequently result in slower times for a while. Witness Michael Phelps’ giving straight-arm freestyle a try. Or Dara Torres learning a “new” freestyle when she returned to competitive swimming.

Look at age groupers who are great at the 50 yard races and then fade in their 100s and 200s. Some of these kids are reluctant to take on the challenge of learning to swim the longer races. They know that they probably won’t be consistent winners when they begin to compete at longer races and that they will, consequently, reveal to the world that they aren’t the swimmer who is constantly a winner. Others gladly take the challenge, partly because it’s fun and partly because it’s rewarding to see themselves getting better.

Rule #2.

In a fixed mindset, the second rule is: I don’t need to work so hard or practice too much because my talent will get me good results.

In a growth mindset, the rule is: Work with passion and dedication—effort is the key.

- ⦿ We have all heard stories of really fast high school swimmers who quit their

college programs because they did not want to notch-up their work load to remain competitive at the collegiate level. In high school, these swimmers tend to rely on talent, but when they reach college, everyone is talented and harder work is needed to remain competitive.

- ⦿ Woven into Rule #2 is the “Fear of Failure.” Those athletes with a lot of talent sometimes do not try for fear of failing. They do not put forth maximum effort, or they self-sabotage because they are afraid: if they give it their all and “fail,” their weaknesses will truly show. If they don’t give it their all, then they can always excuse themselves.
- ⦿ One of our nine year olds qualified with the second fastest time for the finals in a prelim/final meet. He refused to swim in the finals because “I can’t beat the guy who qualified first, so what’s the point.”
- ⦿ One high school coach discussed her experience with a top age group distance swimmer who entered this coach’s high school program: “Her technique needed a major overhaul, and she refused to make any sincere effort to change anything. One day when confronted with a challenge to alter her head

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position through the turns for the 500 free, she burst into tears, 'Everyone is always trying to change my turns, and they all want me to do something different. I'm tired of it; it always makes me slower!' She spent a lot of time at the trainer getting ice on her shoulders and left high school with little change in the times or technique she brought to high school four years earlier."

Those with a growth mindset know that they have to work hard, and they are willing to do it. They understand that effort is what ignites their ability and causes it to grow over time.

Carol gets letters from former child prodigies in many fields. They were led to expect that, because of their talent, success would automatically come their way. It didn't. In the world of Olympic sports, we do not do our young athletes a favor by allowing them to believe that great talent alone will transport them to the medal stand. From recent research we find that the really talented athletes spend at least 10,000 hours of guided practice, or, as Ericsson and his colleagues (1993) describe, 10 years of "deliberate practice" to reach their high levels of achievement.

Recently Carol conducted a small study of college soccer players. She found that the more a player believed that athletic ability was a result of effort and practice rather than just natural ability the better that player performed over the next season. What these players believed about their coaches' values was even more important. The athletes who believed that their coaches prized effort and practice over natural ability were even more likely to have a superior season.

What coaches can do:

- ⊙ Encourage athletes to do skills, drills, and sets that they are not comfortable doing. It may be especially important to make your best athletes practice skills they are not very good at or do not like doing, all in an effort to show the importance of learning both to these swimmers and to the other swimmers on the team who look up to these fast performers.

Rule #3.

In a fixed mindset the rule is: When faced with setbacks make excuses, blame others, blame your fragile shoulders/knees, blame your coach, or conceal your deficiencies.

In a growth mindset the rule is: Embrace your mistakes, confront your deficiencies, and seek help to understand and overcome them.

- ⊙ "Failure is feedback." Billie Jean King
www.dailycelebrations.com/failure.htm

Carol has found over and over that a fixed mindset does not give people a good way to recover from setbacks. After a failure, fixed-mindset students say things like "I'd spend less time on this subject from now on," or "I would try to cheat on the next test." They make excuses, they blame others, and they make themselves feel better by looking down on those who have done worse. They do everything but face the setback and learn from it.

- ⊙ Sometimes we see adolescent swimmers blaming their over-trained shoulder or knee joints as an excuse to "escape" from hard training. The real task for many of these kids is to re-tool their stroke technique and reconfigure their primary events to suit their maturing bodies. For many, this is an exciting prospect, and for others, it is a daunting task to

be avoided. In this situation we have two growth issues: physical and mindset.

- ⊙ Sometimes the fastest/most talented swimmer is not the hardest worker, and this swimmer becomes the other swimmers' role model. Frequently these "role model" swimmers get leadership roles (e.g., captain) because they are the fastest swimmers. When these fixed mind-set leaders become team leaders, they frequently come in conflict with the coaches' values and don't turn out to be adequate leaders.

What coaches can do:

- ⊙ In most racing situations, swimmers focus on times, and age group swimmers frequently focus on their times as compared to friends' and competitors' times. Rather than encouraging your swimmers to focus on times as the only criteria of racing success, why not give race assignments that encourage other areas of development...."let's focus on good turns....no breathing for four strokes into each turn, come out with 5 undulations, and no breathing for the first four strokes;" "let's focus on good rotation and long reach with an early catch." At the end of the race, then, coaches and swimmers have things to discuss that invite further action....process oriented actions...instead of ultimate "succeed or fail" goals (times).
- ⊙ Most high school coaches have a relatively short season with a high number of meets. In our 14 week fall high school girls' season, our team usually has around 13 meets, ranging from duals to multi-team invites. Swimming in meets is how we practice to swim in meets. If swimmers are to learn to become better racers, coaches have to consider

“allowing” their athletes to take risks with new techniques and race strategies. In these situations, the reward isn’t necessarily a faster time. These situations are learning possibilities. For example, coaches might suggest:

- “How about taking your 100 free out at the same speed as your 50 free and see if you can maintain that speed for your second 50? You may die, but you may not. You’ll never know unless you take the chance. If you do die, we’ll see where it happens, and we’ll modify your training to work on that part of your race.”
- “Now is the time to practice that new breathing technique we’ve been working on. You may have to do more thinking about technique during your race than you are used to, but let’s give it a try and see what happens.”

In a TV interview after prelims, the commentator asked Michael Phelps, “What are you going to do in the finals, just swim faster?” Michael responded, no, that was not his strategy. He still had technical adjustments to make in his coming race.

How Are Mindsets Communicated?

Mindsets can be taught by the way we praise. In many studies, Carol has found a very surprising result. Praising children’s or adolescents’ intelligence or talent puts them into a fixed mindset with all of its defensiveness and vulnerability. Instead of instilling confidence, it tells them that we can read their intelligence or talent from their performance and that this IS what we value them for. After praising their intelligence or talent, Carol found that students wanted a safe, easy task, not a challenging one from which they could learn. They didn’t want to risk their “gifted” label. Then, after a series of difficult problems, they lost their confidence and

enjoyment, their performance plummeted, and almost 40% of them later lied about their scores.

What should we praise?

Carol found that praising students’ effort or strategies (the process they engaged in, the way they did something) put students into a growth mindset in which they sought and enjoyed challenges and remained highly motivated, even after prolonged difficulty. Thus, coaches might do well to focus their athletes on the process of learning and improvement and to remove the emphasis usually placed on natural talent. A focus on learning and improvement tells athletes not only what they did to bring about their success, but also what they can do to recover from setbacks. A focus on talent does not.

Giving praise that is meant to boost self-esteem, at the expense of honesty, can also have negative results in terms of fostering growth mindset and success outcomes. A growth mindset coach will talk about effort and commitment. When a swimmer didn’t place as highly in an important meet as she had expected, Coach explained, “You weren’t the best, today. Your swimming shows that you’re working hard, but you need better technique and better conditioning to swim faster. Those are things that you can work on.”

What coaches can do to create a process focus:

- Swimming fast is the result of putting multiple components together. Coaches are very nicely situated to highlight the process of putting together strategies that help the swimmer achieve new goals. Coaches can, for instance, outline the components of a race and then involve their swimmers in putting together new strategies to integrate these components into their races. In this way, we help take our athletes from old habits that keep them static (but comfortable), to new pathways toward

improvement. And, in this process, coaches model a growth mindset. How, for instance, will a new head position and altered breathing patterns smooth out stroke mechanics? Many coaches ask swimmers to keep journals that analyze their meets and practices and then include plans for how to get better.

- On a “growth-oriented” meet day, coaches may have pre-race consultations that focus on helping swimmers to think about things that they CAN do. Since race times are a function of properly “doing” things that are under swimmers’ control -- proper body alignment, cadence, turns, etc -- swimmers can work toward executing sub-goals with the ultimate goal of faster times -- paying attention to head position, good rotation, early catch, etc. After the race, the coach can then talk about how well swimmers swam their races in terms of executing these components, and then talk about strategies for building on those changes.
- When time permits, right after races coaches may want to ask their swimmers for their race analysis before giving coach-feedback. Coach: “Talk to me about your race. What did you like about what you did? What didn’t happen the way you think it should have? What do you propose we do to capitalize on what you did well, and what should we do to improve what you didn’t do well?” If a swimmer answers, “I felt good,” the coach may want to probe, “What about your swimming felt good? Let’s capture that feeling and translate it into continued swims.” Or, Swimmer: “I missed my turn.” Coach: “What parts of your turn weren’t on the mark? What should you practice in order to make your race turns better?”
- Doing push-ups for having taken breaths out of turns is a punishment, not a growth-

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oriented coaching strategy. Having the athlete practice turns without breathing is a more appropriate and effective growth-oriented strategy.

- ⊙ One of the more difficult facets of racing is confronting and moving through pain, which is a natural part of high level swimming. (Note: Here, we are talking about pain that results from exertion/fatigue, not injury related pain.) Helping swimmers learn to confront and move through pain promotes tremendous growth. We frequently see kids simply stopping when it hurts. They think that when it hurts they have reached their limits of performance. Helping them learn to confront and work with pain is a totally challenging growth experience. In a particularly exhausting high school challenge set, one of our captains was obviously in pain. After the set she described to one of the freshman sprinters about how confronting this pain was a necessary challenge. The freshman wrinkled her face and completely rejected this concept. For the next four years, her quietly executed bathroom breaks tended to occur when the sprint workouts entered the pain phase. She maintained her status as one of our faster sprinters, but she really didn't get much faster and reach toward her full potential as a swimmer.
- ⊙ In this kind of confrontation with an unsavory aspect of training, coaches may consider talking with their swimmers about the kinds of workouts where confronting pain and working through it is, in fact, a major object of that workout. From Mark Schubert: The pain you feel in practice is similar to the pain you will feel in a race. In each race, a point comes where you either defeat the pain, or you give in

to it. Practice is your time to practice defeating that pain.

- ⊙ Labeling swimmers as wimps when they shy away from pain merely reinforces the fixed mindset view that some swimmers can work through pain and some cannot. In the growth mindset, our mission is to figure out ways to help athletes meet this challenge.
- ⊙ Coach: "You can only grow and get faster in several ways...better technique, better conditioning, better attitude. Today we are working on confronting pain. You may not like it, but you have to work through it in order to get faster."
- ⊙ This season I used some great hints that Frank Busch gave at the 2009 Central States Swim Clinic. I think that these hints can serve as a model for coaches to help fixed mindset swimmers transition to a growth-oriented perspective. I coach girls' high school swimming for a team that typically has 16 members, few of whom are year 'round club swimmers. One of the 13 year-old swimmers began the season as a self-proclaimed breaststroker whose technique needed major tweaking. As well, she had little faith in her 100 yard, 1:07 freestyle. I proposed some major technique changes in both strokes, and, after trying out these changes she was very discouraged. These changes didn't feel right, and she was swimming slower. I took a phrase from Bush, "If you don't believe in these changes, hop onto my beliefs that they'll work for you over time." Eight weeks later, and with big smiles, she took 3 seconds off her 100 yard breast, and 6 seconds off her 100 yard free. I'm certain that her hopping onto my mind-set played a major role in helping her believe in the process that helped her make the changes she needed.

- ⊙ I also took a leap in response to Dave Salo's talk at that same Clinic. Basically, Salo outlined a training strategy that flew in the face of all of the conventional models I have been taught. Instead of constructing workouts based on a highly structured energy-system model, Salo proposed a strategy that introduced lots of non-swimming-but-in-the-water activities that put fun and novelty into the equation. He still worked the energy systems, but without exclusively using the standard swim-rest-swim-rest format. I rationalized that, since I coach at the University of Illinois Laboratory High School where trying out new educational methods is part of our charge, what the heck. We experienced at least as many PRs this year as in past years, as well as 76% PRs at our championship meet. Perhaps best of all, the girls have big smiles at our 5:30 AM practices.

I think that Coach DeMont (2001) who wrote the following paragraph could easily conceptualize this situation in a Mindset framework: "Many swimmers hang on to their old ways as if those habits were their lifeblood. The idea of trying to integrate something new into their stroke scares them. This kind of swimmer would rather remain a national qualifier than risk going through the process of change that could possibly land him or her in a place in the finals. A change in technique requires repetition of the new task until it becomes habit. As a coach, I sometimes have to ask, 'Do you want to move to the next level or remain the same?' In my eyes, four hours a day or more is too much time to spend to protect "qualifier" status. Go on, take a risk! "

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- ⊙ Coaches can identify their fixed mindset athletes by asking them to agree or disagree with statements like this:
 - “You have a certain level of athletic ability, and you cannot really do much to change that;”
 - “Your core athletic ability cannot really be changed;”
 - “You can learn new things, but you can’t really change your basic athletic ability.”
 - They can also ask their athletes to complete this equation:
Athletic ability is ____% natural talent and ____% effort/practice. This exercise may be tough for many swimmers; they see other kids who seem to always be faster and who seem to swim effortlessly. “Obviously, these other kids swim fast because they have talent.”
- ⊙ I think the language that our swimmers use gives strong hints as to where they stand: Do we see differences between swimmers who say “I can’t” (a very fixed position) and those who say “I’m having trouble with this.....” (a very growth-oriented position). People have a much easier time moving forward from “I’m having trouble...” since this kind of thinking invites a solution to pursue. “I can’t....” indicates an attitude of helplessness and indicates the perspective that effort is not a solution.

With these kinds of hints coaches can work on fostering growth mindsets in their athletes who place an undue emphasis on fixed ability.

Swimmers’ Relating to Coaches:

In relating to his/her coach, we may see fixed mindset swimmers:

- ⊙ Wanting to be put on a pedestal;
- ⊙ Expecting to be the favorite because his/her times are the fastest;
- ⊙ Wanting to be made to feel perfect and/or special;
- ⊙ Having a very public tantrum after a disappointing race and expecting the coach’s sympathy.

A growth mindset swimmer might want a different relationship with the coach:

- ⊙ Wanting weaknesses to be seen and wanting the coach to help the swimmer to work on these problems;
- ⊙ Wanting to be challenged to become better;
- ⊙ Wanting coach to offer encouragement to learn new things.

What About Coaches’ Mindsets?

Fixed mindset coaches may convey to their teams that natural talent is valued above all. When a coach has a fixed mindset, athletes will be eager to impress the coach with their talent and will vie to be the superstar in the coaches’ eyes. One unintentional possible scenario of this coach mindset is the creation of unhealthy rivalries between swimmers who are vying to be the superstar.

On the other hand, growth mindset coaches are more likely to foster teamwork and team spirit. If athletes know that their coach values passion, learning, and improvement, players can work on these things with each other and with their coaches to produce improvement. In this scenario, healthy rivalries may develop where swimmers encourage each other to mutual success.

- ⊙ At swim camp one of the kids told this story: Her workout group of 13 year olds came to practice in a very unruly, goofy mood and wouldn’t

pay attention to the coach as he tried to start the practice. From complete frustration with their inattentiveness, he quietly walked to the chalk board and wrote, “5000 meters butterfly.” In my thinking, 5000 fly is out of bounds for age groupers, let alone seasoned swimmers, and, in fact, did 5000 fly address the issue? In *Mindset* Carol discusses the legendary basketball coach, John Wooden: “He did not tolerate coasting. If the players were coasting during practice, he turned out the lights and left: ‘Gentlemen, practice is over.’ They had lost their opportunity to become better that day.” (p. 207) What would have happened if this swim coach had done the same thing?

- ⊙ I was working on streamlining off the wall with a group of energetic 8-12 year-olds. I asked them to push off on their sides, hold that posture as far as it would take them, and then stand up for my feedback. Most of them surfaced, bounced around, and headed back to the wall without paying attention to the feedback that I was giving. I figured that I would work with those who paid attention and let the others bounce. But one bouncer came back to the wall and said, “I need you to tell me what I did wrong. How can I get any better unless I know what I need to work on?” Light bulb moment. I’m the adult, and it’s my job to figure how to work with these kids, especially an incipient growth-mindset kid. So, we changed the routine. Push off, streamline, return to the wall, and get your feedback face to face with me. The feedback wasn’t as immediate as I had planned, but it stopped me from yelling to get their attention. Let them bounce if their energy levels and joy of the water dictate bouncing. It worked.

In *Game On*, Tom Farley (2008) discusses youth sports coaches: “There are more than seven million youth and high school coaches in the U.S., and very few have received any form of training, even if it’s just a three-day course on skills and drills. And even fewer have been taught how to coach for character. So most of them wing it, using disciplinary techniques that experts say aren’t developmentally appropriate for elementary and middle-school kids: extra exercise (64 percent), verbal scolding (42 percent), public embarrassment (18 percent), suspension (8 percent), and striking or hitting (2 percent) according to survey results presented to the American College of Sports Medicine in 2006” (p. 195).

None of these disciplinary techniques encourage growth through meeting challenges. Although I’m not sure if any research supports my intuition, I’d venture that coaching styles that rely on punitive actions don’t engender the kind of joy and inquisitiveness for exploring newness that growth mindset athletes thrive on.

I would also venture that fixed mindset coaches may be intolerant of feedback from others since these coaches may see feedback as impugning their own ability. These coaches tend to see themselves as the ultimate swimming authority in the lives of the kids they coach. The fixed stance they take, “my way or the highway,” negates their ability to grow as coaches and to process new information that may help them improve the quality of work that they can accomplish with their charges.

How can coaches work with parents?

Where kids get their mindsets is not a clear issue. They probably develop their belief systems from many places: peers, teachers, coaches, parents. Let’s be totally clear: parents are not the enemy. From their perspective, they are acting on their kids’ behalves, and most parents only want what is

best for their children. But many parents bring their personal issues into their kids’ lives. Many parents may come from a fixed-mindset perspective themselves and can’t help but apply a fixed mindset to their kids’ swimming endeavors.

From the coach’s point of view fixed mindset parents are frequently the bane of the age-group world, the high school world, and, surprisingly, the college world, as well. Since parents are a strong given, and, in fact, the real foundation of youth sports, we must learn to incorporate them into their kids’ athletic endeavors in ways that are consistent with their kids’ healthy development. In other words, we may need to help our athletes’ parents switch to a growth mindset as well. Our job is to make our position clear and to negotiate a mutual support system between coaches and parents for the benefit of our athletes.

- ⊙ Last summer, our four-day technique camp ended with Sports-a-Rama: water basketball, inner tube races, funny dives, and the like. One of our 11 year-olds was quickly ejected from his tube in the inner tube fight and emerged from the pool in inconsolable tears that lasted for quite a while. This lad is a very successful age-group swimmer. He usually wins races, and he has good technique. But, winning is a family value. A few days later, the same boy and some of his teammates were working on turns with a coach who is really great with their age group. Mom was watching. The kids were laughing and having fun as they also drilled their turns. In one instance, the coach said, “Now, let’s try this turn again keeping in mind what we’ve just learned.” And mom yells to son, “And do it perfectly!!!!” No wonder the kid cries when he doesn’t win an inner tube fight. His winning (“perfection”) defines his self image, and anything less is failure.

- ⊙ On the first day of a two day, multi-event meet, one of our fast 9 year-olds finished his first race and announced that he didn’t feel very fast that day. He decided that he would scratch the rest of his races. Apparently, putting out the effort to swim well when he felt that he couldn’t swim his fastest wasn’t part of his mindset. He comes from a family where swimming fast and winning defines all of their age-group swimmers.
- ⊙ At several age-group meets, one of our 16 year-olds ended many of her races in tears saying, “My parents are going to hate me.” Why? “Because I didn’t have a cut time/best time.” In a conversation with Mom, she explained to me that she demanded of each of her kids that they pick an endeavor, music or sports, and excel in this choice. With swimming, best times and cut times were convenient markers of excellence for Mom. Mom really didn’t know much about swimming, but she did know how to operate a stop watch and read spread sheets.

So, what could these parents have done in a growth-oriented direction?

Consider this model as a starting place: In the fixed mindset, everything is about the outcome. If you’re not the best, it’s all been wasted. The growth mindset allows people to value what they have done, regardless of the outcome. Using this paradigm, parents should refrain from praising only outcomes and focus on the components of their kid’s performances that led to these outcomes. Sure, you want to praise a personal best time, but you shouldn’t be defining your child by this time. “You looked like you were working really hard. All of the time that you put into practice seems to be paying off.” NOT, “You are a really fast swimmer, and it really looked that way today.”

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In a fixed mindset, parents and coaches label: E.g., “You are a fast/talented swimmer.” If being a “fast swimmer,” is good, then a slow race means that you are bad and that you failed. In a growth mindset, a sub-par performance can be transformed into a learning experience. “What were the parts that didn’t work today, and what can we work on in practice this week?”

- ⊙ When coaches and parents hear, “I can’t” or “I failed,” we need to help our athletes change their language, and consequently, their mindset. Rather than, “I can’t,” we should encourage “I’m having trouble with XYZ, can you help me with it?” Or, we may hear, “I’m bad at this,” (fixed) versus “I did or didn’t do...” (growth). Coaches and parents need to recognize these differences so they can have their kids learn to reframe their analyses immediately. So, if athletes say “I sucked,” the coach can say “What are the parts of your race that sucked? I know you’re disappointed. Let’s see what we need to work on for the next race.”

A fixed mindset approach is destructive and contributes to feelings of being judged: “win, win, win -- prove yourself -- everything depends on it.”

A growth mindset approach is constructive and encourages “observe, learn, improve, become a better athlete” with the parents’/coaches’ roles as being that of helpers who foster a growth process that guides athletes toward getting better.

For coaches and parents:

- ⊙ Don’t over-praise intelligence and/or talent, and don’t only praise results.
- ⊙ Do praise the effort and what athletes accomplish through practice, persistence, and good strategies.
- ⊙ Talk with your athletes about their work in a way that

admires and appreciates their efforts and choices. “In practice you really worked hard on your transitions, and your race showed it.”

- ⊙ Focus on what your swimmers/children can control. Athletes never have complete control over winning. They certainly can control what they do, but they can’t control what their opponents will do.
- ⊙ We should not assume that swimmers have the ability to do the kind of self-analysis necessary to identify their mindsets, and their everyday personality may block this kind of objectivity. Mindsets must be established with the help of coaches, parents, or others who are highly influential in the lives of young people, athletes, or others. Without help, we should not expect our kids to do it themselves. Coaches who believe in mindset development must dedicate time away from training to work on it.

One thing I always like to see is that the kids I coach are having fun. If they are enjoying what they are doing, they are usually learning and having a good experience. I also like to engender their ownership of their actions. I want them to be swimming and working hard because they see an internalized value in doing so, not because I (coach) or others (peers/parents) want them to be doing this.

Conclusion

Mindsets are beliefs. Beliefs can be changed.

- ⊙ Praising ability usually results in decreased performance levels;
- ⊙ Praising effort usually results in increased performance.

At the level of the swimmer, a growth mindset allows each

individual

- ⊙ to embrace learning;
- ⊙ to welcome challenges, mistakes, and feedback;
- ⊙ to understand the role of effort in creating talent;
- ⊙ to accept that growth is change and change involves risk.

At the organizational level, a growth mindset is fostered

- ⊙ when coaching staffs present athletic skills as acquirable;
- ⊙ when passion, effort, improvement, and teamwork, not simply natural talent or results, are valued.

Growth mindset coaches

- ⊙ are mentors and not just talent judges;
- ⊙ inspire and promote development no matter what the natural talent may be;
- ⊙ nurture a new generation full of athletes who love their sport and bring it to the highest level.

Growth mindset parents

- ⊙ encourage their kids to take risks that engender growth;
- ⊙ love their kids independently of their performance outcomes;
- ⊙ support their kids through periods of frustration and disappointment.

Futurist and creator of the Geodesic Dome, Buckminster Fuller, articulates an educator’s view of growth mindset:

“If I ran a school, I’d give the average grade to the ones who gave me all the right answers, for being good parrots. I’d give the top grades to those who made a lot of mistakes and told me about them, and then told me what they learned from them.” <http://www.dailygood.org/pdf/dg.php?qid=3054> ⑧



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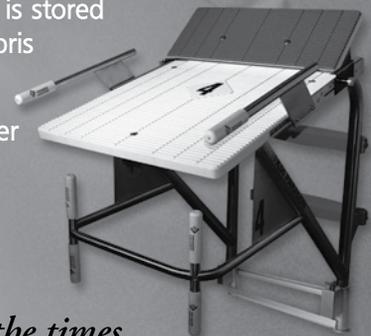
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