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Photo Courtesy: Peter H. Bick

A Look at the NIL Landscape in Swimming, by Nick Shelly, *Swimming World*

The NCAA approved Name, Image, and Likeness compensation in 2021, opening the door for collegiate athletes to earn money through endorsements and sponsorships. When it comes to NIL, football and basketball dominate the headlines. Swimming, on the other hand, does not receive that same attention. Still, the sport is beginning to make waves in the NIL market as Olympians and NCAA champions continue to land partnerships.

The NCAA’s NIL Data Dashboard shows that top revenue sports still dominate the market share. As a non-revenue sport, swimming clearly lags in both deal counts and dollars per athlete. That said, swimmers are not entirely left out. Many are securing smaller, yet meaningful partnerships, often with swimwear brands or local businesses, while a few standouts earn larger contracts thanks to their accomplishments.

A Wide Gap

Football accounts for 41.6 percent of reported NIL deals in 2025, keeping the sport king in revenue. Swimming, by comparison, is listed under “other,” which makes up 9.7 percent. Swimmers are only a fraction of that 9.7 percent, highlighting just how limited their share of the NIL landscape really is.

In the NCAA NIL Dashboard, the 2025 revenue share includes men’s and women’s collegiate swimming combined. The average total earnings for a swimmer are \$514, while the median athlete earnings are just \$50. For comparison, football’s average athlete earnings are \$38,476, with a median of \$1,734. The numbers illustrate just how large the gap is between the revenue sports and swimming.

Limited Exposure, Limited Deals

Swimming has a smaller share of NIL money because of the sport’s limited exposure. College swimming rarely draws major media coverage other than the Olympics, World Championships and NCAA Championships. That leaves swimmers without the visibility or platforms that act as the catalyst for deals in football.

In the swimming world, NIL agreements often cover daily needs rather than life-

(please turn to page 4)





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If you are not humble,
it's hard to be coached.
If you can't be coached,
it's hard to get better.

-Jay Wright

@belisierchery

FROM THE EDITOR, *continued from front cover*

changing income, such as grocery money or travel expenses. A majority of NIL deals in swimming come from swim-specific brands or local businesses. They provide meaningful support for swimmers, but it is not the type of income that will change an athlete's financial future.

Looking Ahead

When talking about swimming and NIL, it is important to look to the future. NIL will not affect the sport in the same way it has with football. Olympic years and NCAA championships are essential for boosting attention to swimmers, giving the stars in this sport their chance in the spotlight. Those moments can lead to larger contracts, but for most swimmers, NIL will remain a source of practical help rather than serve as a life-changer. Until swimming becomes a constant in major media, the financial gap between it and high revenue sports will continue to grow.

Gretchen Walsh's Success

One swimmer who set the standard for what a top NIL earner can be is Gretchen Walsh. Her success in NIL was fueled by her dominance in the pool. While at the University of Virginia, she won multiple NCAA titles and set records in several events, including the 50-yard freestyle, 100-yard freestyle and 100-yard butterfly. She also carried that success onto the international stage, where she was the 2024 Olympic silver medalist in the 100 butterfly and the 2025 world champion in the 50 butterfly and 100 fly.

Her partnerships set an example of how a collegiate swimmer can grow a personal brand. Walsh has deals with Arena and Celsius, and she even launched her own co-branded swimwear line through Sporti. These are the prime opportunities available to collegiate swimmers. It is evident that success in the water goes hand in hand with success in NIL deals.

Examples in the Pool Today

Claire Curzan is a name to know in the NIL space. After transferring from Stanford to the University of Virginia in 2023, she maintained her status as an elite performer in the sport. She signed a deal with Crocs in 2023 and added a partnership with

New Era in April 2025. There is a common denominator between Curzan and Walsh: success in the sport and a reliance on social media income. Their NIL earnings come less from straight cash contracts and more from promoting products through their online platforms.

To highlight the importance of social media for these deals, Isabella Smith serves as a strong example. Smith is a diver at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis with a powerful social media reach. With more than 230,000 followers on TikTok, she has opened the door to opportunities to earn money in a non-revenue collegiate sport like swimming and diving. Because of her social media presence, she has a profile on Opendorse where she lists rates for social media posts, shoutouts and even autographs. Opendorse works as a marketplace, helping athletes promote themselves and making sure any agreements meet NCAA guidelines. To give an idea, Smith's prices start at \$627 for a social media post, \$142 for a shoutout, and \$45 for an autograph. Those numbers may seem small compared with revenue-sports athletes, but they still give athletes valuable opportunities to earn money.

Swimming's Lane Forward

The reality of NIL in swimming is that the money remains small in comparison to major sports. Most swimmers only see modest earnings to help with daily expenses. The equalizer to this is social media. Social media is providing swimmers the chance to build their personal brands and secure deals that go beyond the pool. As these platforms continue to grow, so does the revenue a swimmer can earn. The key is developing a presence online and using major events like the Olympics and NCAA championships to spotlight the stars of the sport. Social media can be the avenue that turns small NIL checks into bigger opportunities for swimmers in the future. The race for NIL opportunities starts in the water, but ends with a swimmer's personal brand.

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NISCA JOURNAL Staff and Writers

Editor: Dana Abbott

Contributors: Charlie Hoolihan, Kevin Pierce, Andrew Sheaff, Tomer Rozenberg, James Clear, Josh Becker, Arvel McElroy, Jim Starrett

Medical Consultant: Karl Hamouche, M.D.

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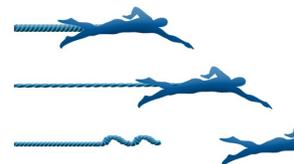


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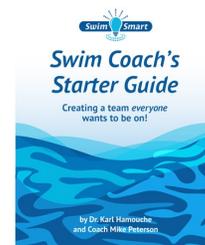
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I had a kid decide not to come out for the team this year, and I am taking it very personally. I needed to get it out of my system, and it came out in the form of writing.

Representing Your High School: Pride, Legacy, and Community

Representing your high school as an athlete carries a special sense of purpose, but doing so as a swimmer offers a uniquely powerful experience. High school swimming goes far beyond just chasing fast times or winning championships. It's about embracing commitment, forging lifelong relationships, and leaving a legacy that extends well beyond the lane lines. For swimmers, every practice, relay, and meet becomes part of something greater than individual goals. As someone who now coaches at my alma mater, I see this tradition from both sides—and it reminds me how meaningful it truly is to represent your school in the water.

Swimming teaches discipline early. The sport requires early mornings, long practices, and mental toughness. But when swimmers train and compete for their high school, all that effort becomes part of a shared mission. You are not just racing for your best time—you are racing for your teammates, the program, and the larger school community backing you. When I was in high school, some of my best memories came from being on the team. I remember the excitement of big dual meets, the intensity of Sectionals, the camaraderie of relay teams, and even the laughter during dryland warmups. Those experiences shaped me in ways I didn't fully realize until years later.

Now that I coach where I once competed, I see those same moments happening for today's athletes. I see swimmers building strong bonds as they push through tough sets together. I see them learning how to support each other after a disappointment or celebrate together after a breakthrough race. I see how proudly they carry themselves when representing their school at meets. Coaching at my alma mater gives me the chance to watch the next generation create their own memories—ones they'll look back on with the same pride I feel.

But the importance of representing your high school goes beyond the pool and into the community. High school sports often serve as a connecting point for families, alumni, and younger students. Swim meets bring together parents, siblings, classmates, and supporters who all share in the excitement and pride of watching athletes compete. Alumni follow the team, congratulate the swimmers, and stay connected long after their own high school days are over. When swimmers represent their school, they also represent that community—a community that invests in them, believes in them, and celebrates their achievements.

The responsibility of that representation shapes swimmers into leaders. Being part of a high school team teaches accountability, sportsmanship, and humility. It shows athletes how to carry themselves with respect, support teammates, and respond to setbacks with resilience. In swimming, where tenths of a second matter and races can be decided by the smallest margins, these lessons become even more important. High school swimmers quickly realize that their actions—at practice, in school, and at meets—reflect on the entire program. This sense of responsibility helps build character that lasts long after they leave the pool.

Ultimately, representing your high school as a swimmer is a privilege and an honor. It links athletes to a legacy, strengthens the bond between school and community, and creates memories that last forever. For me, coaching at my alma mater has only deepened my understanding of how meaningful and impactful the experience truly is. Some of my greatest high school moments came from being part of the team, and now I have the chance to help today's swimmers create their own. Representing your high school in the pool isn't just important—it becomes part of who you are even long after the season ends.

As we progress through the season, I encourage you to take a moment with your athletes. Remind them that they are part of something bigger—that every race, relay, and act of sportsmanship enhances the legacy of your program and the pride of your community. Celebrate what it means to represent your school, and help your swimmers realize the impact they make each time they step onto the pool deck.

Kyle

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<p>All America Coordinator MARK ONSTOTT 41 Nickelby Down Brentwood, TN 37027 847-644-7029 (Cell) e-mail: aacoord@niscaonline.org</p>	<p>All America Swimming-Boys TIM SIROIS 673 Hill Street Highland Park, IL 60035 224-765-2234 (W) 847-877-2669 (Cell) e-mail: boysswaa@niscaonline.org</p>	<p>All America Swimming-Girls MARK JEDOW 21425 Encino Lookout San Antonio, TX 78259 210-481-6955 (H) 210-356-0000 (W) 210-259-3986 (Cell) e-mail: girlsswaa@niscaonline.org</p>	<p>Academic All America/Scholar Team MARNEY SHIRLEY 401 8th Street SW Jamestown, ND 58401-4642 701-952-6642 (H) 701-269-4324 (C) e-mail: aamerican@niscaonline.org</p>
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<p>Power Point Coordinator MICHAEL MCHUGH NISCA Power Point 4689 Scots Way Dexter, MI 48130 Phone: 734-255-5108 e-mail: powerpoint@niscaonline.org</p>	<p>Journal Editor DANA ABBOTT 906 Aster Drive Katy TX 77493 281-347-0689 (H) 713-412-1610 (C) e-mail: journal@niscaonline.org</p>	<p>Online Store Administrator GREGG ANDERSON 1633 Amwell Rd Somerset NJ, 08873 732-673-2225 (H) e-mail: store@niscaonline.org</p>	<p>Webmaster EVE JULIAN Ottawa Hills High School 341 Alger St SE Grand Rapids, MI 49507 616-475-0807 (H) 616-970-1661 (C) 616-247-0086 (Fax) e-mail: webmaster@niscaonline.org</p>
<p>Coaches Education KEVIN PIERCE Ridley High School 901 Morton Ave. Folsom PA 19033 484-802-0160 (C) e-mail: education@niscaonline.org</p>	<p>Hour of Power TONY PLUMMER Northside ISD 8400 N Loop Rd 1604 W San Antonio TX 78249 210-397-8988 (O) e-mail: tedfund@niscaonline.org</p>	<p>Constitution DANA ABBOTT 906 Aster Drive Katy TX 77493 281-347-0689 (H) 713-412-1610 (C) e-mail: journal@niscaonline.org</p>	<p>National Conference Coordinator TOM WOJSLAWOWICZ 3015 Shiloh Lane Charleston, SC 29414 843-637-4663 email: bayaqua1@gmail.com</p>



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Peter Hugo, NISCA Past-President (1951-2025)

Courtesy Arvel McElroy



Peter Hugo, NISCA President from 2021-2023, passed away September 25, 2025 after a two-year battle with cancer. Pete worked for 35 years for the Great Neck, New York school district as a physical education and drivers education teacher before becoming the district director of athletics. During his time as a PE teacher, he was the swimming coach for Great Neck North High School. He guided the Great Neck North team to three consecutive Nassau County boys' swimming and diving championships from 1993-1995. His son, Chris, was a member of the team during that time.

When he retired from teaching and coaching, Pete continued to be an influential member of the New York swimming and diving community. Pat Pizzarelli, executive director for Section VIII, called him "Mr. New York State Swimming". Pat said he was an ambassador for boys' swimming. He went on to say, "He *is* Mr. New York State Swimming." In 2010 Peter assumed the responsibility of the New York State swimming coordinator. Joe Altieri, the assistant director of the New York State Public High Schools Athletic Association, credits Pete with raising the state tournament to the next level. Joe states that "Peter knew what it took for the sport to grow and to help student-athletes get the best possible experience."

As a member of NISCA, Pete served the organization in many different positions. In addition to being President, he served as the All America Chair, the Awards Committee Chair, and the Rules Committee Chair. I remember visiting Pete in his office at Great Neck North where he showed me his process for compiling the Boys and Girls All America lists and how he printed the certificates for those awards. Back then, he did it all: compiling the lists and printing and mailing all of the certificates.

Serving as NISCA President, Pete established cooperation with many of the swimming organizations of the country, including the Our Kids Initiative, ASCA, and USA Swimming. In that sense, he was an ambassador for NISCA just as he was for the state of New York. His work with those organizations resulted in him receiving the 2008 International Swimming Hall of Fame's Paragon Award for competitive swimming. NISCA recognized Pete in 2000 with the Outstanding Service Award, in 2004 with the Collegiate-Scholastic Award, and he will be honored with the Life Member Award in 2026.

Peter is preceded in death by his wife, Patricia, who passed away three weeks before him. He is survived by his sons, Christopher and Daniel, Daniel's wife, Kaitlin, and his two grandchildren, Daniel and Campbell. Other survivors include a sister and two brothers.

Many of us who knew Peter well will remember him for his New York accent, his sense of humor, and his drive to get things done. Personally, I'll remember Pete for offering to share a room with me in my early days of being involved in NISCA when I knew very few in the organization. We developed a strong relationship over the years and Pete honored me by agreeing to be a groomsman in my wedding. Like many other previous members of this organization that we have lost, Pete and his influence will be greatly missed.



Joe Groscost, NISCA Past President (1943-2025)

Courtesy Jim Starrett

For the past fifty-seven years, I have had the privilege of knowing a man whose presence could steady a room, whose calm and inviting voice of "Get in the water" would have coed age group thru high school aquatic athletes buy pain in pursuit of improving fractions of a second over 4 plus decades, and whose quiet strength left fingerprints on the many lives he touched.

Time has a way of swooshing past us, but some people anchor us - not by holding us back, but by showing us what it means and takes to move forward with grace, trust, honesty, and courage. **Coach G**, as he was affectionately referred to, was one of those rare few. He lived with values and character; not by speech alone, but through action. He'd offer his help before being asked, supreme loyalty to his profession and friends, along with his sincerity behind every handshake and promise he made. He taught that character is not something you can claim; it's something you prove, quietly and repeatedly when no one is watching.

There was a deep responsibility he felt towards his family. His wife, Barb, was his soulmate and rock. His son, Hans, and daughter, Hannah, were often the center of wonderful stories along with being blessed with having 5 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren.

When life tested him, he answered not with bitterness, but with resolve. To know him for so many years was to be reminded -- day after day -- that real goodness doesn't fade. It deepens.

Now, even in his absence, his example will remain: a bright light we can carry forward, a standard we measure ourselves against. It's a story we will hopefully retell so that future generations may learn what a true friend, father, husband, and man looks like. And so, to honor a life lived with such rare integrity, I close with the words of Rudyard Kipling -- his poem about the kind of loyalty and character that Joe so embodied:

*One man in a thousand, Solomon says,
Will stick more close than a brother.
And it's worth while seeking him half your days
If you find him before the other.
Nine hundred and ninety-nine depend
On what the world sees in you,
But the Thousandth man will stand your friend
With the whole round world agin you.*

*'Tis neither promise nor prayer nor show
Will settle the finding for 'ee.
Nine hundred and ninety-nine of 'em go
By your looks, or your acts, or your glory.
But if he finds you and you find him.
The rest of the world don't matter;
For the Thousandth Man will sink or swim
With you in any water.*



The Season of Life You're In vs. The One You Think You Should Be In

By Tomer Rozenberg, Author of *"New Day, My Way, Your Life"*
Discovering life lessons in everyday moments

I spent most of last year feeling like I wasn't doing enough. Everyone around me seemed to be launching new projects, starting businesses, building impressive things.

Meanwhile, I was just... maintaining. Showing up to my job, doing good work, but not creating anything new or dramatic. I felt stagnant, like I was wasting time while everyone else was seizing opportunities.

Then I realized something: I was in a building season. I was developing deep expertise in my role, establishing relationships that would matter for years, laying groundwork for things that hadn't emerged yet. The foundation work wasn't visible or impressive, but it was essential for what I wanted to do later.

We're often living in one season while feeling guilty about not being in a different one.

But I was judging myself by people who were in a different season—a launching season, where their foundation work was already done and they were ready to build on it. I was comparing my behind-the-scenes preparation to their public execution, my season of groundwork to their season of harvest.

That's when I understood: The mismatch between the season you're in and the season you think you should be in creates unnecessary suffering.

The Different Seasons

Life doesn't progress linearly. It moves through different seasons, each with its own requirements and rhythms. And just like you can't harvest in spring or plant in winter, you can't live in one season while trying to operate according to the rules of another.

There's the building season—when you're establishing foundations, developing capabilities, creating structures that will support future work. This season requires focus, patience, tolerance for not seeing immediate results. It's often invisible to others because nothing dramatic is happening externally. But the internal development is significant.

There's the launching season—when the preparation is done and you're actually executing, creating, putting things into the world. This season requires energy, risk-taking, visibility. It's exciting but also exposing. This is when others see what you're doing, which means it's also when you feel most judged.

There's the maintenance season—when you're sustaining what you've built, keeping systems running, doing the ongoing work that doesn't create anything new but preserves what exists. This season requires consistency, attention to detail, willingness to do unglamorous work. It can feel boring compared to building or launching, but it's essential.

There's the rest season—when you're recovering from intensity, processing what you've been through, allowing yourself time without productivity or progress. This season requires permission to not be doing, comfort with apparent inactivity, trust that rest is generative even when it doesn't feel like it.

There's the transition season—when you're moving between one phase of life and another, when old structures are ending but new ones haven't fully formed yet. This season requires tolerance for uncertainty, willingness to release what was, patience for what's emerging. It often feels disorienting because you're between identities, between purposes, between versions of yourself.

The Guilt of Being in the Wrong Season

The suffering comes when you're in one season but think you should be in another. When you're in a rest season but feel guilty because others are in hustle season. When you're in building season but feel behind because others are in launching season.

I watch people in necessary rest seasons beat themselves up for not being productive. They've just been through something intense—a major project, a life transition, a period of high stress. They need time to recover. But they see others who are in active seasons and feel like they're lazy, like they're wasting time, like they should be doing more.

But you can't skip rest season. You can try—you can push through, maintain intensity, refuse to slow down. But eventually, your body or mind or life will force the rest season on you, and it will be harder and longer than if you'd just accepted it when it arrived naturally.

I've also watched people try to launch before they've done the building work. They see others having visible success and think they should be there too. But those people did years of invisible preparation first. Trying to launch without building is like trying

to harvest without planting—you might get lucky, but more likely you'll just experience frustration and failure.

The guilt comes from comparing your season to someone else's season. You're judging your building work against their launching results. Your rest against their activity. Your transition uncertainty against their established stability. But seasons aren't comparable. They have different requirements, different rhythms, different outputs.

Why We Judge Ourselves by Other People's Seasons

Social media has made this season confusion worse. You're seeing everyone's highlight moments from whatever season they're in, without context for where they are in their larger trajectory.

Someone posts about launching their business. You don't see the three years of building season they went through first—the learning, the preparation, the failed attempts. You just see the launch, and you compare it to where you are, possibly in month two of your building season.

Someone posts about a productive day, an achievement, a milestone. You don't know if they're in a season where that's sustainable or if they're pushing through a rest season and will burn out. You just see the output and feel like you should be producing similar output, regardless of what season you're in.

This creates this weird comparison where you're judging your internal experience of your season against other people's external highlights from their seasons. You feel the difficulty of building but see only the results of others' launching. You feel the necessary slowness of rest but see only others' activity.

I've caught myself doing this constantly. Feeling behind because someone my age is further along in their career, without considering that they might be in a different season. Feeling unproductive because someone is launching impressive projects, without recognizing that I'm in a building season that requires different work.

The Requirements of Each Season

Each season has its own requirements, and trying to meet the requirements of a different season is what creates the suffering.

Building season requires patience with invisible work. You're developing capabilities, establishing relationships, creating foundations. None of this is immediately impressive or visible. If you judge building season by launching season metrics—visible output, public recognition, tangible results—you'll feel like you're failing. But building season isn't about those things. It's about doing work whose value won't be visible until later.

Launching season requires tolerance for exposure and risk. You're putting things into the world, making yourself visible,

potentially failing publicly. If you try to stay safe and hidden like you might in building season, you can't actually launch. The season requires different courage—not the courage to keep working when nothing is happening, but the courage to put things out when something might happen.

Rest season requires permission to not be productive. You're recovering, processing, allowing time for things to settle and integrate. If you judge rest season by active season metrics—productivity, progress, achievement—you'll feel like you're wasting time. But rest season isn't wasted time. It's necessary time that enables future active seasons.

Maintenance season requires acceptance of unglamorous work. You're keeping things running, sustaining what exists, doing consistent work that doesn't create anything new. If you judge maintenance season by building or launching metrics, you'll feel stagnant. But maintenance is essential. Without it, everything you've built falls apart.

Transition season requires comfort with uncertainty. You're between things, not fully released from what was but not yet established in what's coming. If you expect the clarity and stability of an established season, you'll feel lost. But transition season is supposed to feel uncertain. That's not a failure—it's the nature of being between seasons.

Recognizing Which Season You're Actually In

The first step is recognizing which season you're actually in, not which season you think you should be in or which season you wish you were in.

Look at what your life is actually requiring of you right now. Not what you think it should require, not what other people's lives require, but what yours actually requires. Are you in a period where you need to be building foundations? Launching things? Maintaining systems? Recovering from intensity? Transitioning between phases?

Pay attention to what feels sustainable versus what feels forced. Building season work should feel patient, foundational, sometimes slow but not depleting. If work that looks like building feels desperate or exhausting, you might actually be in a rest season and pushing against it. Launching work should feel energizing even when scary. If it feels depleting from the start, you might not be ready to launch yet.

Notice what happens when you try to operate according to different seasons' rules. If you're in rest season but trying to be productive, you'll feel constantly exhausted and still never feel like you're doing enough. If you're in building season but trying to launch, you'll feel frustrated by lack of results. The resistance tells you something about the mismatch between your season

and your expectations.

I realized I was in building season when I noticed that the work felt right even though it wasn't visible. I was learning things that mattered, developing relationships that would be valuable later, establishing credibility in areas that would pay off eventually. It didn't look impressive from the outside, but internally it felt like the right work for where I was.

The Permission Your Season Needs

Each season needs its own permission. And often the permission it needs is permission to not be in a different season.

Building season needs permission to not have visible results yet. To do work that looks like nothing is happening from the outside. To invest time in things whose value won't be clear for months or years. To not be impressive or noteworthy while you're developing what will later make you capable.

Launching season needs permission to be visible and potentially fail. To put things into the world before they're perfect. To take risks that might not work out. To claim space and attention even when you feel uncertain about whether you deserve it.

Rest season needs permission to not be productive. To have days or weeks where you're not building toward anything, not producing anything, not making progress on any goals. To just exist and recover without justifying the recovery with future productivity.

Maintenance season needs permission to not be growing or creating. To do the unglamorous work of keeping things running. To have periods where you're sustaining rather than building, maintaining rather than launching. To accept that not every season is about progress.

Transition season needs permission to not have it figured out. To be uncertain about what comes next. To release what was without fully knowing what will be. To exist in the in-between without forcing premature clarity.

I've found that giving myself permission to actually be in the season I'm in reduces the suffering dramatically. When I was trying to be in launching season while actually in building season, I felt constantly behind and inadequate. When I accepted I was in building season and gave myself permission to do building work, the same work felt right and productive, even though nothing external had changed.

What Each Season Is Building Toward

Here's what helps me accept whichever season I'm in: each season is building toward the others. They're not separate or competing—they're cyclical and generative.

Building season creates the foundation for launching season. You can't launch without having built first. The invisible work of building is what makes launching possible. Trying to launch without building is like trying to harvest without planting.

Launching season creates the thing that maintenance season sustains. You can't maintain what you haven't launched. The visible creation of launching is what gives you something worth maintaining. Trying to maintain without having launched is maintaining nothing.

Maintenance season creates the stability that allows for rest season. You can rest when things are maintained well enough to not require constant attention. The consistent work of maintenance is what makes rest possible. Trying to rest when nothing is maintained means your rest will be interrupted by crisis.

Rest season creates the energy for building season. You can't build well when you're depleted. The recovery of rest is what gives you capacity for the patience and sustained effort that building requires. Trying to build without rest means your building will be unsustainable.

Transition season creates the space for new building to begin. You can't build something truly new while still fully committed to what was. The release that happens in transition is what makes space for different building. Trying to skip transition means carrying old patterns into new seasons.

The Courage to Inhabit Your Season

There's a particular courage required to fully inhabit your actual season instead of performing a season you think you should be in.

The courage to rest when others are hustling. To not apologize for needing recovery time. To trust that rest is productive even when it doesn't feel productive. To resist the pressure to be always building or always launching.

The courage to build when others are launching. To do invisible work while others are getting visible recognition. To invest in foundations when you could be getting attention for incomplete structures. To trust that the building will matter later even though it doesn't impress anyone now.

The courage to maintain when others are creating new things. To do the unglamorous work of keeping things running. To accept that not every season is about innovation or growth. To value sustaining what exists as much as creating what doesn't.

The courage to transition when you want certainty. To release what was without fully knowing what's next. To exist in uncertainty without forcing premature clarity. To trust that what's emerging will reveal itself in time.

I'm learning this courage slowly. Learning to stop comparing my building season to someone else's launching season. Learning to accept rest when I need it instead of pushing through. Learning to value maintenance work even when it's not exciting. Learning to trust transition even when it's uncomfortable.

Permission to Be Where You Are

Here's what I want you to know: **The season you're in is the season you need to be in. Trying to force a different season creates suffering without actually changing which season you're in.**

If you're in building season, build. Don't feel guilty that you're not launching yet. Don't compare your invisible work to others' visible results. Trust that the building matters even when nobody sees it.

If you're in launching season, launch. Don't play it safe or hide. Don't wait until everything is perfect. Put things into the world and accept the exposure that comes with launching.

If you're in rest season, rest. Don't force productivity. Don't feel guilty about recovery. Trust that rest is creating capacity for future seasons, even when it doesn't feel like you're creating anything.

If you're in maintenance season, maintain. Don't feel stagnant. Don't judge yourself for not building new things. Value the essential work of sustaining what exists.

New Day, My Way, Your Life is more than just a book—it's an invitation to rediscover the joy in everyday moments. Born from my own personal experiences and observations, this book explores how **small changes in perspective can lead to profound shifts in our lives.**

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You can order from Amazon here:

If you're in transition season, transition. Don't force clarity prematurely. Don't try to skip the uncertainty. Trust that what's emerging will reveal itself when it's ready.

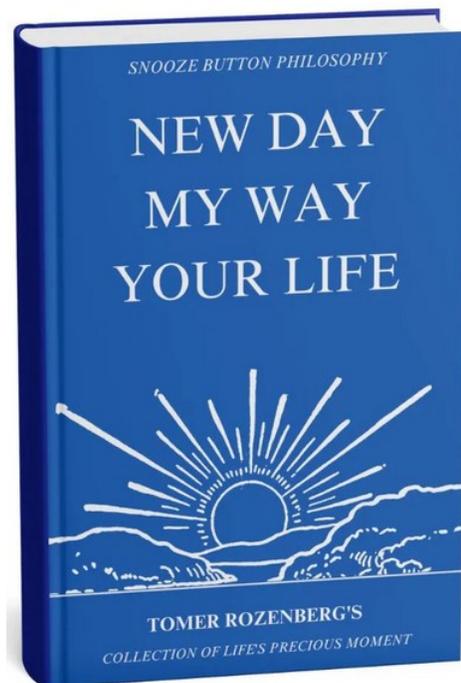
You can't harvest in spring or plant in winter. You can't force seasons to arrive before their time or last beyond their natural duration. You can only recognize which season you're in and do the work that season requires.

The suffering isn't from being in any particular season. The suffering is from being in one season while trying to live according to the rules of another.

So stop judging your season by someone else's season. Stop feeling guilty for being where you are instead of where you think you should be. Recognize the season you're actually in, give yourself permission to inhabit it fully, and do the work that season requires.

The seasons will change. They always do. But while you're in this one, be in it. Fully. Without apology. Without comparison. Without trying to force a different season before its time.

Your season is your season. *And that's exactly where you need to be.*





Your Team Doesn't Need More Rules

By Kevin Pierce, NISCA Education Chair

When I first started coaching, I believed that the secret to running a successful program lived in the details of control. If I could write enough rules, if I could anticipate every possible problem and shut it down before it started, then I thought I could build the kind of team that would be disciplined, efficient, and thriving.

Before one of my first seasons, I sat down with a notebook and began scribbling out a list of expectations. Be on time. Sit up straight. Do not talk back. Dress properly. Respect every teammate. No excuses. No missed practices without a doctor's note. No phones on deck. No jewelry. No food in the locker room. The list went on and on. By the time I finished, the rules were longer than the roster.

And you know what? It did not work.

At first, I could not figure out why. I was convinced I had been thorough. I thought I had covered every angle. But despite the list of rules, the team was inconsistent. The discipline crumbled the moment I was not hovering. Leaders hesitated to lead. Conversations about standards turned into eye rolls and whispers. I was confusing rules with culture. I thought compliance would lead to commitment. It does not.

Compliance produces short term obedience at best. Commitment sustains you when nobody is watching. And commitment does not grow out of a binder full of rules. Commitment is born in relationships, trust, and shared purpose.

I have coached teams with long lists of rules that looked like pharmacy receipts, and I have coached teams that lived by just one: Do what is best for the team. Without hesitation, I can tell you the teams with fewer rules and stronger connections outperformed the rest every single time. The difference was not structure. The difference was trust.

Rules Create Compliance Not Commitment

Rules by themselves are not evil. We need boundaries. We need guidelines. Without them, classrooms become chaos, families spin out of control, and teams lose direction. But rules only take you so far.

Think about the classroom for a moment. You can have a school where students sit quietly because they are afraid of detention. Or you can have a classroom where students sit quietly because they respect the teacher and want to learn. The first is compliance. The second is commitment.

The same principle plays out in athletics. You can force a swimmer to show up on time by threatening punishment. Or you can

build a culture where showing up early is a badge of pride because nobody wants to let the team down. The first is rule enforcement. The second is ownership.

And the difference between the two is massive. Compliance fades under pressure. Commitment deepens when tested. Compliance disappears the moment authority leaves the room. Commitment remains when nobody is watching.

This is why more rules often backfire. The longer the list, the more kids start looking for loopholes. The more rules you create, the more energy you spend policing instead of coaching. And the truth is, no rule book can keep up with the creativity of teenagers determined to push boundaries.

What Teams Actually Need

So if rules are not the answer, what is? Over years of coaching, teaching, and parenting, I have learned that teams do not thrive on more restrictions. They thrive on three deeper foundations: Clear Values. Rules change depending on the season or the circumstance. Values do not. When athletes understand why something matters, they carry it with them into the pool, the classroom, and life. For example, respect for teammates is not about a rule written on paper. It is about the value of treating others with dignity, win or lose.

Shared Ownership. When rules come only from the top, kids follow them reluctantly. When standards are built together, kids defend them fiercely. I have watched teams transform simply because I asked athletes to write down what they wanted to be known for. Suddenly, it was not the coach's culture. It was their culture.

Real Connection. The stronger the relationships, the fewer rules you need. When kids feel seen and valued, they do not want to disappoint one another. A rule about punctuality is no match for the bond of a teammate who texts, "I need you at practice today."

A Story About Letting Go

I remember one particular season where I learned this lesson the hard way. I had just finished one of my long lists of rules and handed it out to the team at our preseason meeting. I thought I had done the right thing. I thought I was setting the tone. But halfway through the year, things were unraveling. Small cliques formed. Seniors were going through the motions. Younger kids were checking out.

Out of frustration, I called a meeting. I expected to lecture. Instead, I decided to listen. I asked them one question: "What do you want this team to stand for?"

At first, silence. Then slowly, hands went up. They talked about wanting a team that supported each other. They talked about wanting effort to matter more than talent. They wanted practices that pushed them but also bonded them. And as they spoke, I realized something painful but freeing: none of them mentioned my rules. Not one.

From that day on, we started building something different. Instead of reviewing rules every week, we started reviewing values. Instead of me handing out punishments, captains started holding conversations. Instead of me guarding the culture, we all owned it together.

By the end of the season, it was the most connected team I had ever coached. And it had nothing to do with my original binder of rules.

The Classroom Connection

This principle does not stop at the pool. As a teacher, I see it every day. Some teachers begin the year by slamming down a rule sheet. No phones. No late work. No talking. No food. And within weeks, they are exhausted from chasing compliance.

The classrooms that thrive are different. They are the ones where students know why expectations exist. They are the ones where kids feel like they belong, so they respect the space. They are the ones where the teacher models consistency, so the rules do not need to be shouted.

I once had a student who tested every boundary. He pushed back on everything, and no list of rules could contain him. What changed him was not more restrictions. What changed him was connection. Once he knew I cared, once he trusted I was on his side, he began to regulate himself. That is the power of relationship over rule.

Parenting Parallels

The same pattern shows up at home. Parents can create endless lists of rules for screen time, curfews, chores, and language. And those rules may work in the short term. But the deeper goal of parenting is not compliance. It is character.

When kids understand the values of respect, responsibility, and honesty, they will eventually apply those values without constant supervision. If parenting is only about enforcing rules, the moment a child has freedom, they will push back or hide. If parenting is about building values and connection, the moment a child has freedom, they will apply what they have internalized.

Rules are external. Values are internal. Rules are temporary. Relationships are lasting.

What Leaders Can Do Instead

So what does this mean for you if you are a coach, a teacher, a parent, or a leader of any kind?

It means stop adding rules and start adding conversations. Instead of piling on restrictions, create moments for reflection. Instead of policing every detail, empower kids to own the standards. Instead of posting a list on the wall, let them write the words they want to live by.

Ask questions. What do we want to be known for? How do we want to treat each other? What kind of culture will make us proud when the season ends? The answers to those questions will always carry more weight than any rule you can draft.

And when violations happen, and they will, treat them as opportunities to reinforce values rather than just enforce punishment. A broken rule can be patched with discipline. A broken value requires conversation, accountability, and repair. That is the harder work, but it is the work that lasts.

The Simple Truth

At the end of the day, your team does not need more rules. Your classroom does not need more restrictions. Your family does not need a bigger list taped to the refrigerator. They need connection. They need clarity. They need ownership.

Because rules do not inspire. Rules do not build loyalty. Rules do not create belief.

Relationships do.

So the next time you are tempted to add another line to the list, pause. Instead, add a conversation. Ask a question. Share a story. Build a bond. Because in the end, culture is not enforced. Culture is lived.

And when the season is over, when the classroom is quiet, when the kids have grown and moved on, they will not remember the list of rules you wrote. They will remember the way you made them feel, the values you instilled, and the trust you built.

That is what lasts.

Follow Coach Kevin Pierce on **The Leadership Launchpad** as he shares insights on leadership, coaching, and personal development. There you will find strategies, stories, and resources to help build stronger leaders in sports and in life.

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Building Bulletproof Skills, Part 2 (edited for clarity and length)

Andrew Sheaff - www.coachandrewsheaff.com

In Part I in the last NISCA Journal, we introduced the idea of bulletproof skills. Winning races comes down to executing skills when physical and psychological pressure is at its highest. Fatigue is making it more and more difficult to swim well, and the pain of fatigue is distracting swimmers from doing what they need to do.

The best way to develop the physical ability to resist fatigue and the psychological focus to ignore it is exposure to situations where swimmers must perform under pressure.

In Part I, we looked at some strategies that create this learning environment, using various forms of fatigue. In Part II, we'll look at how to use various forms of resisted swimming to 'strengthen' skills, as well as look at example sets that illustrate the strategies discussed.

Resistance

By training skills with equipment that overloads force production, we can create more resilient skills. As distinct from the fatiguing strategies described above, the purpose here is to develop the 'strength' to hold skills together.

The concept is to create a buffer or reserve between the force production that is possible and the force production that is required to sustain the necessary skills. The greater the buffer and the greater the reserve, the longer and more effectively swimmers will be able to sustain their skills.

In fatiguing situations, we use fatigue to build resiliency against the loss of function when swimmers get tired. When using resistance to build strength, we're aiming to train so that fatigue doesn't occur in the first place. We're building a buffer that works against resistance.

In general, the focus here should be on AVOIDING fatigue, creating a high volume of quality repetitions performed against resistance. The purpose here is to develop strength. That's going to happen most effectively when there is a lot of quality worked performed over time.

While the strategy of simply swimming against resistance in the form of a parachute or power tower will be effective in providing many of these benefits, we can further target our efforts to create resiliency in specific areas. There are multiple strategies that can be used to create the effect.

One of the key aspects of implementation is appropriate loading. We want to challenge the desired skills without overwhelming the desired skills. The amount of resistance used should make it difficult to swim well, yet allow for swimmers to swim well with regularity. Every rep doesn't need to be perfect, nor should it be perfect. However, swimmers need to experience success.

Overload the Limbs

We can overload specific areas of the body to create more stress in a given area. If we're looking to develop the ability to maintain or sustain a kicking action, you can use DragSox on the feet or use fins while swimming against resistance such as a parachute. This will specifically challenge the capabilities of the legs.

If we're looking to overload some aspect of the pulling pattern, we can swim against resistance while using paddles of some type, or by performing these efforts with a pull buoy and band. This requires swimmers to maintain effective force production.

If we want to challenge the ability to maintain stroking rhythm through the arm recoveries, we can place small weights on the hands, wrists, or elbows to increase the challenge.

In every case, swimmers are developing strength in the actual skills they need to use, while also learning to execute their skills in slightly different contexts. For both reasons, these strategies will increase the ability to maintain skilled movement.

Overload Body Position

As with overloading the limbs, we can apply directed pressure to the torso to improve the ability to maintain body position while swimming fast. Most resistance strategies will cause the hips to sink. Some of this effect is due to the resistance actually pulling the hips down. This is particularly true of weight belts, but also true of parachutes, power towers, and DragSox.

A second effect is simply due to resistance training slowing swimmers down. When swimmers move slower through the water, they need to ride lower, increasing the inclination of the body. The resistance also makes maintaining rhythm more difficult, which has similar consequences.

By practicing in these situations, and developing the strength to overcome these challenges, swimmers will be more prepared to manage their body position throughout racing situations. They'll have the strength and control to create change, and they'll have the experience of regularly practicing these skills to make it happen when it matters.

Overload Skills

While this strategy overlaps to some extent with the strategies above, it differs in its intent and approach. When overloading the limbs or body position, we're creating effects at specific locations as a primary focus. How these effects impact the desired skills is secondary. It is what it is.

In contrast, overloading skills starts with the skill in question, and then specific designing the implementation of resistance to create a specific effect. As an example, if a swimmer tends to lose their butterfly rhythm and body position at the end of their

racers by 'going vertical', we can use a weight belt or a parachute to exaggerate this flaw.

The swimmer must then work to overcompensate for this loss of body position. When performed with controlled parameters, appropriate loading, and given enough time, the swimmer can learn to develop the strength to hold their positions when the resistance is removed. This same thought process can be applied to any skill. It is simply a matter of identifying what skill is important, and how can it be loaded with resistance to make it more robust.

Combinations and Variety

We learn in situations of novelty. Once we have the answer, we need to change the questions. As swimmers begin the process of bulletproofing their skills, they will begin to find answers to the training questions that we pose them. To continue to provide novel learning environments, we'll need to be creative in coming up with new challenges.

While we only explored two general categories of training stimuli, the creation of fatigue and the use of resistance, there are many subcategories that can be explored. More importantly, we can combine those strategies in an almost infinite number of ways. This allows us to provide an unending number of learning environments that can be used to help swimmers learn how to execute their skills under pressure.

There is a lot of value in being very directed in creating specific contexts that preferentially challenge the skills that swimmers are working to make more robust. Creating environments that place a lot of pressure at a desired point can help to create change fast.

For instance, if a swimmer really struggles to sustain their kicking action at the end of a 100 freestyle, performing challenging sets with DragSox where there is a lot of pressure on that skill, both kicking and swimming, can be very effective in creating change. When these sets are performed at a high intensity, this creates a very relevant stimulus for change.

However, there is a lot of value in learning to execute the desired skills in many different contexts, even those that are not 'race-specific'. Using our 100-freestyle example, while sustaining an effective leg action during aerobically-oriented sets might not be as 'specific', the ability to do so in under aerobic challenge is going to reinforce the ability to sustain the leg action NO MATTER WHAT.

In these situations, the focus is not necessarily on achieving certain performances, although this can and should be incorporated. The focus is on sustaining the kicking action in all contexts. Not only does this create a behavioral habit, it helps create the physiological ability to do so, as well as the psychological focus to execute under pressure.

The same concept applies to all skills. When skills are consistently challenged and hardened in MANY contexts, they become bulletproof in ANY context.

Designing Sets

When designing training sets, we have two primary options. We can use a direct approach or a complex approach. The direct

approach is simply putting swimmers in a challenging context and letting them figure it out, regardless of whether that context is race-specific or not. We're allowing that environment to facilitate learning. In the complex approach, we're combining the designed environment with race specific efforts. Here, we're creating a challenge and then requiring execution in very race-relevant situations LINK.

Let's take a look at both options in more detail.

Direct Approach

With these sets, we're simply using the tools of fatigue and resistance, or any combination of the two, to facilitate learning. There is less concern for achieving race speeds. The focus is simply on creating challenging situations that require swimmers to execute their skills, and then repeating those situations.

The sets below are simple to illustrate the primary concept. They can and should be altered with varying challenges to provide better learning environments.

10x100@20 seconds rest; 25 fast scull/25 breaststroke + light dolphin kick/25 fast scull/25 breaststroke

Here, we're creating a lot of work with the forearms and then requiring swimmers to swim breaststroke with that fatigue. As the rest periods are pretty short, and it's a lot of forearm work, the fatigue will begin to accumulate. This set can be made more challenging by requiring swimmers to stick to an individually determined stroke count for each breaststroke segment.

We're creating local fatigue in the forearms, and challenging swimmers to maintain their skills in that environment. There are many ways to progress this set, including adding resistance, further reducing stroke counts, or placing speed requirements on any segment of the set.

10x200@20 seconds rest; single paddle pull with band and buoy; alternating paddle by 200; One less stroke per 50 within each 200 Aerobic descend in pairs (1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10)

The focus here is maintaining control of distance per stroke regardless of which hand the paddle is on. Further, the band and buoy prevent any contribution of the legs, so swimmers must maintain propulsive efficiency in spite of mounting fatigue in the upper body. As the set is extended and there is little rest, that fatigue will accumulate. Further swimmers are expected to swim faster as the set goes on, while retaining the same stroke count.

To navigate this set successfully, swimmers must execute their skills and swim efficiently. They must do so with effective upper body mechanics. The requirement for skilled movement is higher at the end of the set than at the beginning, in spite of accumulating fatigue. Swimmers must learn how to swim well when tired, and they will receive objective feedback as to whether they are doing so or not.

3 rounds through 8x25@45 Butterfly; breathing every other stroke; performed with a resistive parachute; Fast 100 EZ between rounds

The goal here is to work on the breathing action in a resistive context. The swimmer is expected to maintain the same stroking rhythm and body position whether breathing or not. That is the objective. Their body position shouldn't change when they breathe and their stroke rate should remain constant.

The challenge is performing these skills against the added resistance of the parachute. As the distances are short and the rest periods are relatively open, swimmers should be able to maintain a high level of performance. Over time, a set such as this will 'strengthen' that skill, making it more robust to challenges, whether due to speed or fatigue.

3 rounds through

6x25@1:15 Backstroke; swim with DragSox; Fast 100 EZ between rounds

This set is similar in set up and intention to the butterfly set above. It differs in how resistance is used to create a learning environment. With this set, the focus is on maintaining a really strong leg action, and developing the strength to do so. The DragSox preferentially stress the legs, making it more difficult to create and sustain the kick.

Over time, the required strength to maintain that skill will be developed. As the legs can tend to fatigue more quickly and more significantly than the upper body, it is often prudent to provide more rest to allow the focus to be on developing strength versus creating fatigue. This tactic is reflected in the slightly lower volume and extended rest periods.

8x50@1:30 Backstroke with DragSox; fastest possible average

This set is using the same tool as the set above, yet doing so with a very different purpose. Whereas the previous set was using DragSox to develop strength, this set is using DragSox to accelerate and deepen muscular fatigue. When repetition distances extend, fatigue tends to accelerate much more than without resistance.

In this set, there will be multiple opportunities, and extended periods of time, where swimmers are experiencing significant muscular fatigue yet must still sustain their skills, in this case a strong kicking action. As the kicking action is foundational for an effective rhythm, it's critical that swimmers are able to sustain it in spite of tremendous fatigue of the muscles. This set places them in that context and allows them to figure out how to do so, while also developing the required physiological resources.

3 rounds through (*UWDK: Underwater dolphin kick)

2x25@40 15m fast UWDK plus 2 breakout cycles

2x25@35 15m fast UWDK plus 2 breakout cycles

2x25@30 15m fast UWDK plus 2 breakout cycles

2x25@25 15m fast UWDK plus 2 breakout cycles

2x25@20 15m fast UWDK plus 2 breakout cycles

100 EZ

Here we're challenging the ability to sustain dolphin kicks and breakouts at high volume with decreasing rest. As the same kickout component remains, and there is no access to oxygen, the ability to manage respiratory challenge is going to be stressed. Further, as there is progressively less rest between

high efforts, the heart rate is going to be higher prior to the hypoxic challenge, making it more difficult to control the breathing.

There are many different ways to combine reduced breathing and high heart rates to challenge breath-holding ability, and the ability to execute skills under these conditions. For safety reasons, it makes a lot of sense to ensure that these efforts are short in duration and conservative in nature. Swimmer can be challenged by in safe ways by keeping the efforts brief. Focus on getting the heart rate elevated and then creating a slight hypoxic challenge allows for shorter stressors.

Complex Approach

With this strategy, we're combining any of above approaches (resistance, fatigue, etc.) with race efforts. So, we're putting the skills under pressure with fatigue or resistance, and then asking for race efforts. The major difference between the direct and complex approach is the inclusion of race-specific work.

With the direct approach, swimmers must execute their skills in a compromised, yet less specific context. With the complex approach, they must do both. Swimmers ultimately need to be able to execute their skills at race speeds under race fatigue. As such, it makes sense that we create that practice environment as often as possible, in as many varied ways as possible.

3 rounds through

4x25@40 Fast kick on a board with a parachute

50@1 100m Back end speed with racing stroke counts

50@3 EZ recovery

In this situation, we're preferentially fatiguing the legs, and doing so in a way that challenges force production. When moving into the 50-m swim, swimmers must execute this racing effort with compromised legs that are unable to create as much force as normal. This is a situation they'll face in a race.

Regardless of this disadvantage, they must execute whatever skill is of importance. It may be simply sustaining the legs, it may be executing a certain breathing pattern, establishing a desired rhythm, or breathing in a typical manner. It's whatever skills that you and the swimmer determine are limiting performance. Execute them under a specific type of pressure.

Let's contrast the above set with a similar set, yet one that places the stress in a slightly different area.

3 rounds through

3x50@1 Fast kick on a board

50@1 100m Back end speed with racing stroke counts

50@3 EZ recovery

In this set, the legs are still going to be fatigued and this fatigue must be managed by the swimmer. However, whereas the previous example focused more on a higher force challenge, this situation is creating more metabolic fatigue that the swimmer must manage. It is SIMILAR, yet it is still DIFFERENT.

Learning to execute the desired skills in both of these situations will make these skills more resilient to stress.

3 rounds through
4x25@40 Fast swim with DragSox
50@1 100m Back end speed with racing stroke counts
50@3 EZ recovery

Now we're working on skills during the resistance work, while also preferentially fatiguing. This differs from the prior set where you are creating fatigue and THEN working on the skill. This set has a similar impact, yet puts more emphasis on skill practice over fatigue. The legs are being hit while still working on the desired swimming skill. As with the previous example, the swimmer will then go into the regular fast swimming to put it all together.

These same concepts can be applied to any strategy. The initial portion of the set can use any type of fatigue stimulus, any type of resistance stimulus, or any combination of the two, using unlimited variety. All volumes and intensities are fair game as well provided they serve the purpose you intend. Further, any subsequent race efforts can be used appropriately, provided the focus is on executing the desired skills. It is all about decided how you want to apply stress, and then doing so in a manner that accomplishes whatever goal you have set forth.

Conclusion

If swimmers want to win close races, they must be able to execute their skills at a high level. Better swimmers are better able to maintain a high standard of execution. Their skills are bullet-proof to the effects of fatigue and pain. While there are some that have a natural inclination towards doing so, it is ultimately a skilled that can be learned by any swimmer.

Bulletproofing skills is ultimately the result of exposure to learning environments that demand a high standard of skilled execution, while under significant pressure. These learning environments can rely on large amounts of fatigue, or significant physical resistance to skillful execution. In both cases, successful execution and the ATTEMPTED successful execution of these skills will help swimmers learn how to perform under pressure.

When designed well, these sets will facilitate the necessary physical adaptations while concurrently helping swimmers learn how to do what they need to do, when they need to do it. That is the definition of preparation.

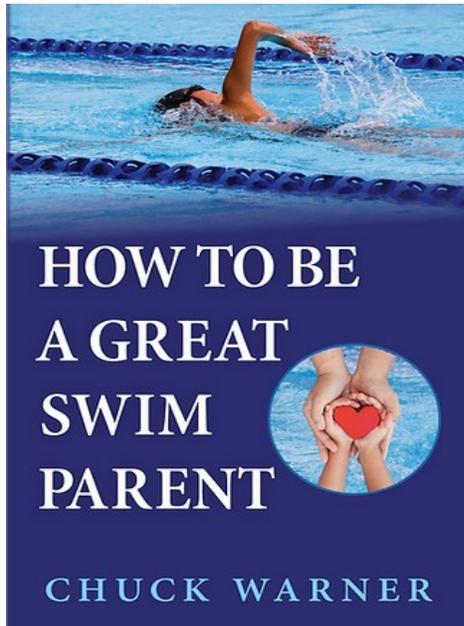
A GUIDE WITH PRACTICAL WAYS TO ENHANCE SWIMMING SKILL DEVELOPMENT.

Provides a practical framework for coaches to understand constraints, enhance skill development, and improve athlete satisfaction by manipulating the environment and movement variability in swimming.

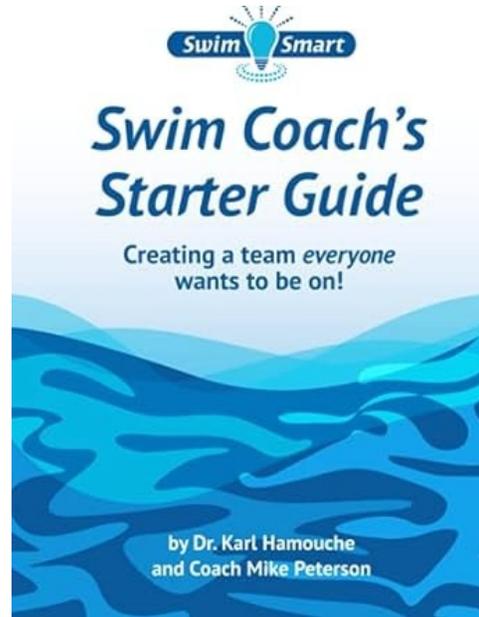
For coaches, athletes, sport scientists, and parents interested in athlete development and programming.



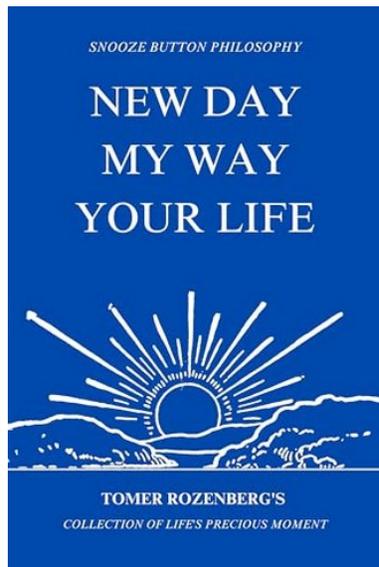
BOOKS WE RECOMMEND



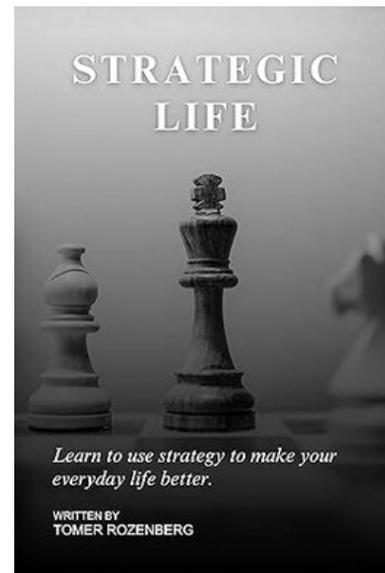
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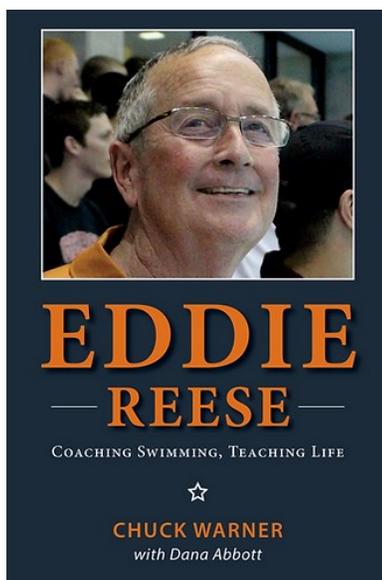
- In this refreshing take on life management, you'll discover:
- How making your bed can set the tone for a productive day
 - Strategies to defeat the dreaded alarm clock and start your mornings with purpose
 - The art of turning your commute into a personal growth opportunity
 - Ways to navigate the afternoon slump and maintain energy throughout the day
 - The surprising benefits of well-crafted complaints
 - How to find balance in a world of endless choices



This insightful book offers a step-by-step guide to help you develop the essential skills, habits, and mindset needed to live a strategic life. From setting clear goals and mastering time management to cultivating meaningful relationships and embracing change, this comprehensive resource covers every aspect of personal growth and development.

Both books by Tomer Rozenberg are available on Amazon.com

BOOKS WE RECOMMEND



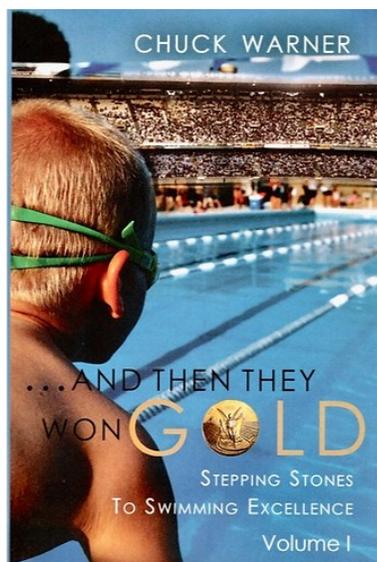
Eddie Reese is one of the most successful and effective coaches in sports history. His method of building his swimmers' character first has resulted in unprecedented success at The University of Texas including:

- 15 DI Men's Team Titles - a record
- 25 D1 Men's Team Top 2 Finishes - a record
- 39 Olympic Gold Medals.

The book contains:

- 130 "Eddie-isms" that provide in his own words some of his wit and wisdom.
- Over 50 stories from past swimmers and coaching colleagues.

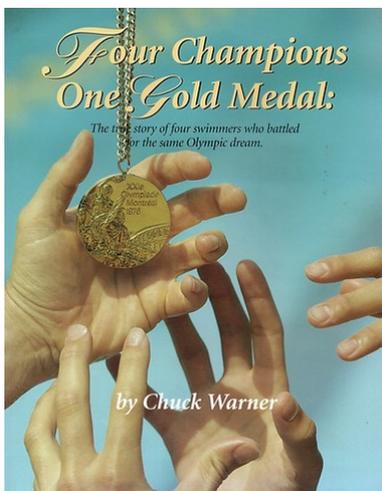
Technique tips.



Learn how eight of the greatest male swimmers in recent swimming history progressed from summer league swimming to collectively win 28 Olympic Gold Medals.

Included are technique tips from the swimmers themselves and practice samples from each stage of their development. The legendary swimmers included are:

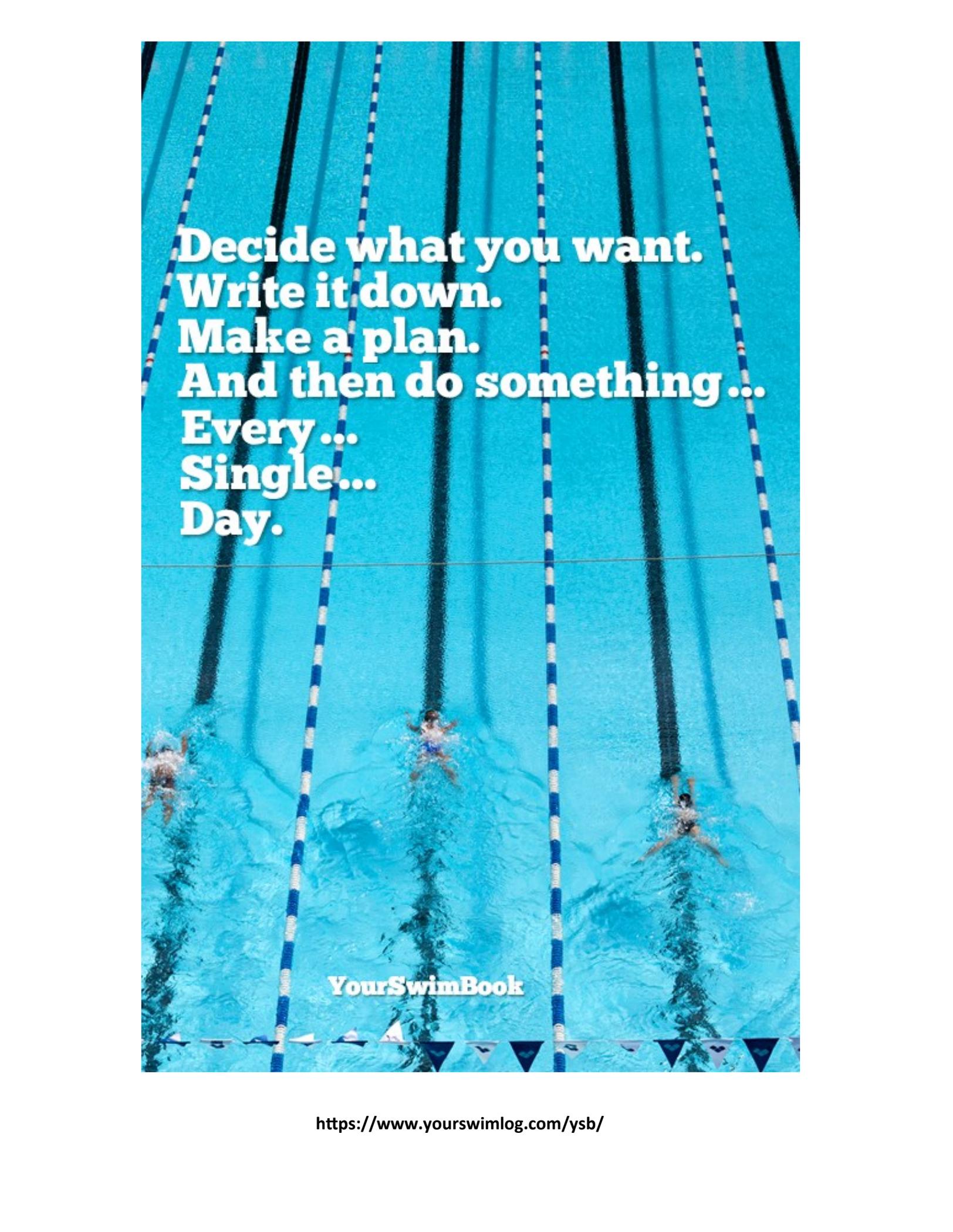
- Matt Biondi - Olympics 84, 88, 92
- Dave Berkoff - Olympics 88, 92
- Mike Barrowman - Olympics 88, 92
- Josh Davis - Olympics 96, 2000
- Lenny Krayzelburg - Olympics 2000, 2004
- Ian Crocker - Olympics 2000, 04, 08
- Grant Hackett - Olympics 2000, 04, 08
- Aaron Peirsol - Olympics 2000, 04, 08



Four Champions, One Gold Medal, is a monumental achievement! Descriptive, prescriptive and inspirational, it recounts--step-by-step--the road taken by four world-class athletes in quest of Olympic gold: Americans Tim Shaw, Brian Goodell and Bobby Hackett, and Australian Steve Holland.

All four were extraordinary athletes--incredibly hard-working, and totally focused on their common goal of winning the 1500 meters at the 1976 Olympic Games. All four were champions in every sense of the word. Yet only three made it to the blocks at the start of the 1500 in Montreal.

And, of course, only one emerged as Olympic champion.



**Decide what you want.
Write it down.
Make a plan.
And then do something...
Every...
Single...
Day.**

YourSwimBook

<https://www.yourswimlog.com/ysb/>

On Minimalism

By Joshua Becker (<https://www.becomingminimalist.com/>)

Recently, I've noticed a few comments on my social media posts and even this blog from people who have mentioned they feel "pushback" from the people closest to them about their decision to live a minimalist life. For example, here are a few that I've seen:

My family doesn't understand why I love minimalism.

When I say 'no' to social events, my friends take it personally.

My husband doesn't want me to declutter anything.

Every time my dad comes to visit, he asks when we're going to buy a bigger house.

I never, of course, know the full story, and there are usually two sides. But it still makes me sad whenever I read comments like these because I know minimalism is already countercultural.

In other words, the world constantly pressures us to consume more, accumulate more, spend more, be busier, make more money, and define success on the terms they dictate. To think that someone is feeling the same pressure from the people they are closest to must make it even more difficult.

When both society and our loved ones are echoing the same message, it can be isolating and even cause us to doubt our own convictions.

I don't know how much influence one writer on the Internet that you've probably never met can provide, but if the description above describes you (or you just feel constant pressure from the world), I want to offer you a kind reminder today. It is okay...

It is okay to buy a smaller home. A smaller mortgage means less financial stress and more freedom. A smaller space means less cleaning and maintaining and repairing—and more time for the people in it.

It is okay to own a capsule wardrobe and repeat clothes. Your value is not found in the cost of your outfit or how closely you follow the newest colors and trends. Wearing clothes you love, that fit well and make you feel comfortable, is a life-giving practice that eliminates decisions, clears mental clutter every morning, and allows you to focus on more important things with your life.

It is okay to skip the newest, hyped series on television. Your time is your most finite resource. Choosing to spend it on rest, conversation, creation, or a personal hobby instead of keeping

up with every constantly-revolving trending television show is a better decision than wasting it on pop culture.

It is okay to get paid less working a job you love. A fulfilling career that aligns with your values and allows you to be present for your family is a wealth that a higher salary cannot replace.

It is okay to not have every child involved in every possible activity. A less frantic and structured schedule for your children often means more space for them to discover their own creativity and interests. It also might mean physical, emotional, social, and academic perks.

It is okay to cancel an appointment. Protecting margin and your schedule is not a sign of weakness or selfishness. It's a sign of maturity, self-awareness, commitment to well-being, and is often a healthy understanding of the value of solitude in your life.

It is okay to not want to climb the corporate ladder at the expense of your family. Ambition is not defined solely by title and salary. There are other places to find motivation.

It is okay to be generous and selfless. In a world that often tells you to "look out for number one," choosing to live a selfless life that is generous with both money and time is the most efficient pathway to well-being and fulfillment.

It is okay to not be on social media. Your life is happening here and now, in the physical world with the people in front of you. It's okay to put down your phone. You don't need to be on social media to make a difference in the world.

If I may continue, it's also okay to drive an older car, pack a lunch instead of eating out, prefer a quiet walk with a friend over an expensive night out, drink water, go to bed early, and/or set appropriate boundaries to protect yourself when necessary.

This list is not a call to reject personal growth or check out of life entirely. Just the opposite. It is a call to a simple, focused life.

It is about being intentional with your one, precious life. It is about pursuing a way of living that allows you to become the best version of yourself—not defined by net worth or the world's definition of success.

You don't have to live like everyone else. In fact, you'll probably be happier if you don't.

STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING

Conduit (Core) Training for swimming

By Charlie Hoolihan, ASCA Strength and Conditioning Coordinator

The term **conduit** training is intended to redirect widespread oversimplifications of core training into programming with a context for individual function and performance.

A conduit is a location where energy is transferred from its originating source to a utilization destination. An electrical conduit box receives energy from the power station and delivers it to an outlet that powers a lamp.

The conduit in the body is the region surrounding the hips where energy originates from a limb or limbs' anchor, muscles contract, and movement energy is transferred to utilization muscles a distance away from the originating source.

In swimming, the hand or hands anchor on the water and create energy, which travels to the feet through the 20-plus muscles attached to the hip.

The hand anchor differs from most sports, which are foot-anchored. More importantly, swimming's anchor point is liquid rather than solid.

The hand anchor, variable movement patterns in all four strokes, and the liquid anchor point require conduit training considerations not applicable to other sports and activities.

Swimming conduit programming priorities should include exercises which

- Teach maintaining a stable hip position during variable movements
- Include hand-initiated full-body movement
- Include the use of limbs during movement

The following exercises illustrate these principles. Key teaching points for using these exercises are provided below each illustration but some common elements apply to these and most all conduit exercises.

- A stable platform should be provided with the conduit muscles surrounding the hips.
- Movement should not move the platform out of a stable position
- Exercises should be performed at a slow to moderate speed to reach full range of motion in each end and start points
- Use duration instead of repetitions for each set. Thirty to ninety seconds of work with a thirty second rest period
- Athletes should be encouraged to break during a set if key position points are not met due to fatigue

Dead bug Pull +hip/knee flexion (start position)



Finish position



- Loop a small 6-12" band with light resistance around the ball of each foot. Hold a moderate resistance kettlebell with two hands overhead and close to the floor. Lift the legs and the kettlebell into a streamline position about six inches from the floor. Make sure the spine is gently pressing against the floor surface.
- Pull one knee and the kettlebell towards the midline of the body, then straighten back into a streamline. Pull the other knee and the kettlebell towards the midline and return to streamline. Perform the exercise slowly for better muscle stimulation.
- This exercise can also be performed with dumbbells in each hand to alternate upper limb movement. Opposite leg and arm should be in extended positions. Then switched to flexion.

Stability ball hand plank + leg lift



This is an advanced exercise for athletes who have strong conduit control in the plank position and have mastered it on the floor first before adding a stability ball. They should be able to hold a straight line from head to support leg. Assume a hand plank position on the stability ball with chest directly over the hands. Once stabilized, alternate leg lifts.

Press-up roll (start)



(finish)



Place thighs on a foam roll about midway between knees and hips. Place hands on an elevated surface about 6-12 inches above the floor. Create tension through the body with a gentle press before pushing down into the surface. Push down and pull slightly on the surface to lift chest and upper spine up while rolling body on the roller from mid-thigh to knee. Lower gently towards floor.

Band pull over (start position)



(finish)



Charlie Hoolihan is the Swimming Strength and Conditioning Specialist Certification Coordinator for the American Swim Coaches Association and has been strength training swimmers since 1990. He's also a presenter and writer for numerous national fitness organizations and publications.

You can set up a complimentary team-specific dryland training analysis of your resources and programming by contacting him at charliehoolihan@gmail.com

- Place a band on an anchor point about 2 feet off the ground and place an exercise bench lengthwise underneath it. Also, provide a bolster for the athlete to sit on to position the bottom of the shoulder blades on the edge of the bench.
- The athlete then grips the band in an overhead position and lifts their hips off the bolster while stretching their hands overhead towards the anchor point. There should be some resistance from the band in this position.
- The athlete flexes the upper spine and chest toward the knees during a pull-up.



Mastering Time Management:

Book - The Art of Laziness

1. Plan your day.
2. Write everything you want to achieve in a day.
3. Write your goals on a physical paper.
4. Follow the 80/20 Rule. 20% of your work will bring you 80% of your results.
5. Stop Multitasking. Switching tasks significantly reduces your productivity.
6. Focus on one task at a time.
7. Remove all distractions from your environment.
8. When tired, take a nap.
9. Learn to say no. You will never have enough time if you say yes to everything.
10. Delegate all the non-important tasks.
11. Don't wait for the perfect time. Do It Now.
12. Anything that can be done in under five minutes should be done now.
13. Do the task that you hate first.
14. Set deadlines; the task will never be finished without deadlines.
15. Stop focusing on things that don't help you achieve your goals.
16. Don't be a perfectionist when it's not required.
17. Schedule a time when you're going to check your email.
18. Avoid all unnecessary meetings.
19. Avoid negative people at all costs.
20. Do what you love.

3-2-1: How results accumulate, the secret to motivation, and living with a calm persistence

By James Clear (jamesclear.com)

3 IDEAS FROM ME

I.

“Results tend to accumulate to the person who enjoys the lifestyle that precedes the result.”

II.

“Earning more money increases freedom. Spending less than you earn reduces stress.”

III.

“Motivation often increases after you begin. The lesson is not to wish you had more motivation, but to make starting as easy as possible.”

2 QUOTES FROM OTHERS

I.

Novelist and poet **Charlotte Bronte** reminds us to worry less about what's gone or what's coming, and focus more on what inspires us:

“I avoid looking forward or backward, and try to keep looking upward.”

Source: Letter to her friend Ellen Nussey (January 15, 1849)

II.

Polymath and writer Johann **Wolfgang von Goethe** reminds us to live and work with a calm persistence:

“Without haste, yet without rest.”

Note: Goethe's original example was a star orbiting the sun: steady and unhurried, but always in motion.

Source: Gedichte. Ausgabe letzter Hand (1827)

1 QUESTION FOR YOU

Close your eyes and scan your body. Notice where you are holding tension or stiffness. Breathe deeply and slow down. What is your body asking to do and what does it need right now?

COMMENTARY: Coffee Time

The Conversations You're Avoiding Are the Ones You Need Most

By Tomer Rozenberg, Author of *"New Day, My Way, Your Life"*

Discovering life lessons in everyday moments



There's someone I need to have a conversation with. I've needed to have it for six months. I know exactly what I need to say. I've rehearsed it in my head dozens of times—in the shower, on walks, lying awake at night. I've crafted the perfect opening, anticipated their responses, prepared my follow-ups. And I still haven't had the conversation. Instead, I've been carrying it around like a weight. Every interaction with this person is colored by the conversation we're not having. Every message exchange is awkward because we're both pretending everything's fine when we both know it's not. The relationship has become this strange performance where we're both acting like there isn't this huge unspoken thing sitting between us.

That thing everyone knows but nobody says is quietly poisoning everything.

Tomer Rozenberg

The avoidance itself has become the problem. Not the original issue that needs addressing—the fact that I'm avoiding addressing it. The conversation I'm not having is now more damaging than whatever the conversation would be about.

And I know I'm not alone in this. We're all walking around with conversations we know we need to have but keep putting off, and that avoidance is quietly poisoning everything around it.

The Conversations We're Not Having

Think about the conversations you're avoiding right now. You probably know exactly what I'm talking about. There's at least one, maybe several.

The feedback you need to give someone about their work or behavior. The boundary you need to set with a friend or family member. The truth you need to speak about how you're actual-

ly feeling. The thing everyone on your team knows but nobody's saying out loud. The conversation you need to have about your relationship not working the way it used to.

These aren't hypothetical future conversations you might need to have someday. These are specific, concrete conversations you know you need to have, probably with specific people you could name right now. You've thought about them. You've rehearsed them. You've imagined how they might go. You just haven't actually had them.

And in the absence of the real conversation, you're having endless versions of it in your head. You're managing your anxiety about it, strategizing around it, spending mental energy on not having it. The conversation you're avoiding is taking up more space than the conversation itself would take.

I've noticed this pattern in myself repeatedly. There's a conversation I'm avoiding, and suddenly I'm thinking about it constantly. It colors every interaction with that person. It shows up in other areas of my life. It affects my sleep, my focus, my peace of mind. The thing I'm trying to avoid by not having the conversation—discomfort, conflict, awkwardness—I'm experiencing anyway, just spread out over weeks or months instead of concentrated in one difficult conversation.

How Avoidance Spreads

Here's what I've learned: one avoided conversation doesn't stay contained. It spreads like a stain, contaminating everything it touches.

When you're avoiding a conversation with someone, every interaction with them becomes awkward. You can't be fully present because you're managing the thing you're not saying. You can't be authentic because authenticity would require addressing what you're avoiding. So instead, you're performing normalcy, pretending everything's fine, having surface-level interactions while the real issue sits unspoken between you.

This makes every interaction exhausting. Because you're not just having the conversation you're having—you're also actively not having the conversation you need to have. You're monitoring yourself to make sure the real issue doesn't accidentally come up. You're keeping things safely superficial. You're spending energy on the performance of everything being okay.

I've also noticed that avoided conversations start affecting other relationships. When I'm avoiding a difficult conversation with one person, I find myself irritable with others. The unresolved tension leaks out sideways. I'm shorter with people, less patient, more reactive. The emotional weight of what I'm carrying around affects how I show up everywhere, not just with the person I need to talk to.

The avoidance also affects how you feel about yourself. There's this low-grade guilt or anxiety that comes from knowing you're not dealing with something you should be dealing with. You're aware that you're being a bit cowardly, a bit avoidant, a bit dis-

honest by omission. And that awareness erodes your self-respect in small ways. You're not being the person you want to be, and you know it.

Why We Avoid

The reasons we avoid difficult conversations are usually straightforward: we're afraid of how they'll go.

We're afraid the other person will get angry or defensive. We're afraid we'll hurt their feelings. We're afraid the conversation will make things worse instead of better. We're afraid we'll handle it badly. We're afraid of the awkwardness, the discomfort, the potential conflict.

We're also afraid of what comes after. Because having the conversation means things will change. The relationship might end. The situation might escalate. You might have to follow through on consequences you've threatened. The comfortable status quo, even if it's not actually that comfortable, will be disrupted.

So we tell ourselves we're waiting for the right time. We need to think through our approach more carefully. We should wait until we're calmer, until they're in a better place, until the circumstances are more favorable. We convince ourselves that avoiding the conversation for now is actually the responsible choice.

But here's what I've noticed: the right time never comes. There's always a reason to wait. The circumstances are never perfectly favorable. You're never going to feel completely ready to have a difficult conversation. The waiting is just avoidance with better PR.

I've also realized that sometimes we avoid conversations because we don't want to face what having them would mean. If I give someone feedback about their behavior and they don't change, I'll have to decide what to do about that. If I tell someone how I really feel about our relationship and they don't respond well, I'll have to face that the relationship isn't what I want it to be. The avoidance protects us from having to deal with uncomfortable realities.

The Fantasy Conversation

One of the strange things about avoiding conversations is that we end up having them anyway—just not with the actual person. We have them in our heads, over and over, in infinite variations. In these mental rehearsals, we're usually either devastating in our honesty or perfectly diplomatic in our approach. We say exactly the right thing. We handle their reactions with grace. We navigate the difficulty with impressive skill. The conversation goes well, or at least goes the way we want it to.

But these fantasy conversations are worse than useless. They don't prepare you for the real conversation—they actually make it harder. Because you've had this conversation so many times in your head that when you finally have it for real, you're surprised when the other person doesn't follow your mental script. They say things you didn't anticipate. They react in ways you didn't

rehearse. The real conversation is messier, less controlled, more unpredictable than all your mental versions.

I've also noticed that the mental rehearsals tend to make the actual conversation feel even higher stakes. Because you've been thinking about it so much, building it up so much, imagining all the ways it could go—the real conversation becomes this weighted, significant thing rather than just a conversation you need to have.

The mental rehearsals also eat up enormous amounts of mental energy. Energy that could be going toward actually having the conversation, or toward literally anything else in your life. Instead, you're trapped in this loop of imagining conversations that never happen, solving problems that don't get solved, rehearsing scenarios that never play out.

The Actual Cost

Let me be specific about what avoiding these conversations costs.

First, it costs you the relationship itself. When there's an unspoken issue between you and someone else, you can't have a real relationship with them. You can have a performance of a relationship, where you both pretend everything's fine. But you can't have actual closeness, actual trust, actual authenticity. The avoided conversation becomes a wall between you.

I've watched relationships slowly die because neither person was willing to have the difficult conversation. They just drifted apart, the unspoken thing creating more and more distance, until eventually there was nothing left to save. And both people knew the whole time what was happening. They could see the relationship dying. They just weren't willing to have the conversation that might have saved it.

Second, it costs you the resolution of the actual problem. Whatever issue you're avoiding addressing—it doesn't go away just because you're not talking about it. It stays there, unresolved, usually getting worse over time. The behavior that needs addressing continues. The boundary that needs setting remains violated. The problem that needs solving stays unsolved.

Third, it costs you peace of mind. You can't fully relax when you're carrying around an avoided conversation. It's there in the background of your consciousness, creating low-grade anxiety, coloring your mood, affecting your presence in other areas of your life.

And fourth, it costs you your integrity. Every day you don't have the conversation you know you need to have is a day you're not being the person you want to be. You're being someone who avoids hard things, who prioritizes comfort over honesty, who lets relationships deteriorate rather than fighting for them. That's not who you want to be, and the disconnect between who you are and who you want to be creates its own kind of suffering.

The Relief of Finally Having It

Here's what I've discovered: the anticipation is almost always worse than the actual conversation.

All those months of avoiding, all that mental rehearsal, all that anxiety—and then you finally have the conversation and it's... manageable. It's uncomfortable, yes. It might be awkward or painful or difficult. But it's finite. It's a specific period of discomfort rather than the endless diffuse discomfort of avoidance.

I had a conversation recently that I'd been avoiding for three months. It was about twenty minutes of genuine discomfort. Twenty minutes. And then it was done. The issue was addressed. The air was cleared. The relationship could move forward. Those twenty minutes of discomfort ended the three months of constant low-grade anxiety I'd been carrying around.

The math is absurd. Three months of avoiding versus twenty minutes of uncomfortable conversation. Three months of mental rehearsal and anxiety and managing the avoidance versus one difficult but finite interaction. The avoidance cost me so much more than the conversation itself.

I've also noticed that the conversations usually go better than I expect. Not always well—sometimes they're genuinely difficult and the other person doesn't respond well. But even when they're hard, they're rarely as catastrophic as I'd imagined. The relationship doesn't explode. The person doesn't hate me. The discomfort is real but survivable.

And there's something deeply relieving about finally saying the true thing. Even if it's difficult. Even if it doesn't resolve everything perfectly. Just the act of being honest, of addressing the real issue, of being the kind of person who has difficult conversations when they need to be had—that feels better than the ongoing performance of avoidance.

What You're Really Avoiding

I've been thinking about this, and I don't think we're actually avoiding the conversation itself. We're avoiding what comes after.

Because the conversation is just words. Twenty minutes, half an hour, maybe an hour of discomfort. That's not really what we're afraid of.

What we're afraid of is that the relationship might end. That the person might not change. That we might have to follow through on consequences. That things might get worse. That we might discover something we don't want to know. That the comfortable illusion we've been maintaining might be shattered.

The conversation is the door, and we're afraid of what's on the other side of it. So we don't open the door. We just stand in the hallway, knowing we need to go through but too afraid of what we might find to actually do it.

But here's the thing: whatever's on the other side of that door is already real. Your fear that the relationship might end? If that's true, the relationship is already ending—you just haven't admitted it yet. Your worry that the person won't change? If that's true, they're already not changing—you just haven't faced it yet. The thing you're afraid the conversation will reveal is already there. The conversation doesn't create the reality; it just makes it visible.

And visible reality, even when it's difficult, is actually easier to deal with than invisible reality. Because at least when you can see it, you can make decisions about it. You can grieve if there's something to grieve. You can change course if you need to change course. You can deal with what actually is rather than managing your anxiety about what might be.

How to Finally Have It

I'm not going to pretend I've mastered this. I'm still avoiding conversations I need to have. But I've learned some things about how to actually move from avoidance to action.

First, accept that you're never going to feel ready. The right time isn't coming. The circumstances won't get more favorable. You're never going to wake up one morning feeling completely prepared and eager to have a difficult conversation. You just have to decide to do it while still feeling unready.

Second, keep it simple. All your mental rehearsals and perfect scripts are probably making it harder. You don't need the perfect opening line or the ideal approach. You just need to name the thing that needs naming: "I need to talk to you about something that's been bothering me." That's enough to start.

Third, accept that it might go badly. The other person might get defensive. They might not receive it well. The conversation might be more difficult than you hope. That's okay. A difficult conversation that happens is still better than an avoided conversation that never happens.

Fourth, remember that you're not doing this to control the outcome. You're doing it because it needs to be said. Whether the other person responds well, whether the situation improves, whether the relationship survives—those aren't entirely within

your control. What's within your control is whether you're the kind of person who says true things when they need to be said.

And finally, do it sooner rather than later. The longer you wait, the more the avoidance contaminates everything. The more mental energy you waste. The more damage the unspoken thing does. The conversation doesn't get easier with time—it just gets more weighted.

Permission to Risk It

Here's what I want you to know: **You have permission to risk the discomfort of honesty.**

You don't have to protect everyone from difficult conversations. You don't have to wait for perfect circumstances. You don't have to have it all figured out before you speak. You can just say the true thing that needs saying, even if it's awkward, even if it's hard, even if it might not go well.

The relationship you're protecting by avoiding the conversation? It's already damaged by the avoidance. The person you're trying not to hurt? They probably already sense something's wrong. The comfortable status quo you're trying to maintain? It's not actually that comfortable—it's just familiar.

The conversation you're avoiding is costing you more than having it would cost. The thing you need to say is taking up more space unspoken than it would take spoken. The avoidance is harder than the honesty.

So have the conversation. Say the thing. Address the issue. Name what needs naming. Not because you're guaranteed a good outcome, but because carrying around avoided conversations is slowly poisoning everything, and you deserve better than that.

The conversations we're avoiding are usually the ones we need most. Not because they'll necessarily solve everything, but because having them is an act of honesty, courage, and care—for yourself, for the other person, and for the relationship. And that's worth twenty minutes of discomfort.



THE DAILY COACH

“Be the reason someone believes in goodness again. Not because you are perfect, but because you choose to be kind when you have every reason not to. You smile through your storms; you listen even when your own heart is breaking; you show up with softness in a world that often isn’t soft. And maybe that’s what real strength looks like—being gentle when life gives you every reason to be hard.”

— Anonymous



Everyone Is Borrowed

We treat the people around us like they’re permanent, like there will always be more time, more calls, more dinners, more “let’s catch up soon.”

But no one in our life is ours to keep—everyone is borrowed.

We never know when the borrowing ends.

One day becomes the last day, and we almost never realize it when it happens.

While you still have the chance, love your people a little louder.



Life always moves in waves.

- *Some crash into you with a force that nearly drowns you. Others lift you higher than you ever thought you could rise.*
- *The small ones come and go quietly, barely noticed. The massive ones reshape your entire direction.*
- *But the secret isn’t in fighting the wave, it’s in learning how to ride it.*
- *Pain, joy, success, loss, they all arrive in sets. And just when you think you’re finished a new swell is already forming in the distance.*

You can’t control when the waves come, you can only choose whether to sink, or to stand and surf.

That choice determines everything.

A list of people to thank this year —

- *The friends who healed hearts they didn’t break. Chosen family.*
- *The person who listened to you talk about the same situation over and over until it was out of your system, until you healed.*
- *The person who encouraged you. The person who pushed you. The person who loved you from a distance.*
- *The person who you could call at any hour. The person you grew closer to.*
- *The person you had to step away from. The person who inspired you to begin the next era of your life. The person who reminded you who you are.*
- *Yourself.*



When No One Is Watching

Listen, nobody celebrates your discipline until they need to borrow your results.

So stop looking for applause. Just keep showing up.

Because one day, the same people who overlooked your grind will be asking you how you did it.

Stay consistent when it’s quiet. The results will make the noise.

Source: Devante Warner, Motivational Creator



Holidays can bring up so much for many of us — the joy, yes, but also the noise, the old ache, the familiar patterns, the remembering, the pressure to hold everything together.

A small reminder as we step into this season: you’re doing your best. And it’s okay if your best looks different this year.

Being kind to yourself might look like saying no to protect your energy. Holding your boundaries. Choosing rest when your body asks for it. Doing less. Protecting what feels fragile.

Remember to offer yourself the same softness you offer everyone else.

Looking Back to Look Ahead

2025 has taught us...

- Not everything is meant to come with you. Some people were chapters, not lifetimes.
- Some seasons were meant to end, even if you weren't ready to say goodbye.
- Some doors closed because you outgrew the room you kept trying to fit in.
- Letting go didn't break you — it freed you. It made space. Space for peace that doesn't feel heavy. For love that doesn't make you shrink. For a life that feels like yours again.

What's meant for you won't require you to beg, prove, chase, or hold on tighter. It will choose you back. It will stay. It will feel like coming home to yourself.

Source: @divinedemaleempire

The Sacred Space Between

The space between no longer and not yet is what defines the pivot periods of our lives.

- This is the time when we have nothing left to hold onto but also nowhere clearly to land.
- This is when most people revert back to their oldest and most familiar coping mechanisms, confusing what's known for what's right.
- If we find the courage to hold our hearts open throughout this process, what we find is that we create an opportunity for miracles to find us, to take root in us, to change us through and through.

If we find the resilience to make peace with the unknown, to not require every answer to keep moving forward, to believe that everything will work out one way or another—we begin to live more completely in the moment, releasing the illusions that had been clouding us all along.

Source: Brianna Wiest, *The Pivot Year* via Jevon Thoresen

Question

When did I feel most like myself this year — most aligned, most alive — and how can I intentionally shape my life to cultivate more of those moments?

Leadership Starts With We

- *Great leaders execute the strategy — and recognize it's about WE, not ME.*
- *They focus on serving the needs of others, not elevating themselves.*
- *If you help enough people get what they want, you'll always get what you want.*

⇒ *Love the people in your life loudly and clearly. Don't assume they know — say it, show it, repeat it.*

⇒ *Forgive. Not because others always deserve it, but because carrying heaviness strains the heart more than old age ever will.*

⇒ *You are allowed to outgrow people and environments. Some chapters end to protect you, not punish you.*

⇒ *Pride is expensive. Humility costs nothing and buys you wisdom, relationships, and inner peace.*

⇒ *Comparison steals the joy you already earned. Walk your path, not someone else's highlight reel.*

⇒ *Most regrets come from things you never tried, not things you tried and stumbled through. Bravery ages better than caution.*

⇒ *You can start again at any age. Reinvention isn't just for youth — elders do it too, quietly and courageously.*

⇒ *Life becomes lighter when you let yourself be curious. Ask questions, explore, and keep learning — staying curious keeps your spirit young.*

The Daily Coach

A daily hands-on approach to becoming a better leader. With the help of some unique wisdom as well as an action plan to tackle your day, **The Daily Coach** aims to be an inspiration in your email inbox each morning. Plus, it's **FREE**. Sign up for **The Daily Coach**:
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BRAIN FOOD



Ideas, Thoughts, Insights, and Links To Get You Thinking
(<http://fs.blog>)

Your reputation isn't what you shout, it's what people whisper.

Someone always has an advantage. If you don't know who, it isn't you.

It's never about the outcome. It's always about the day.



Michael Jordan on listening:

"I'm not so dominant that I can't listen to creative ideas from other people. Successful people listen. Those who don't listen, don't survive long."



Philosopher Matshona Dhliwayo on being wise:

"One who looks around him is intelligent; one who looks within him is wise."



David Foster Wallace on thinking:

"Learning how to think really means learning how to exercise some control over how and what you think. It means being conscious and aware enough to choose what you pay attention to and to choose how you construct meaning from experience."



The best are always learning.

Read like crazy.

Think alone.

Keep a journal.

Write stuff down the moment you see it.

Review regularly.

Memorize the big ideas to fluency.

Attack your best ideas.

And never get high on your own supply.

You don't have to be gifted. You do have to be deliberate.

When you fall in love with the process rather than the outcome, you don't have to wait to be happy.

The best opportunities go to people whose reputation got them picked before anyone else knew the opportunity even existed.

When you're impatient with results, every day feels expensive. When you're impatient with effort, every day feels like progress.



Citadel founder Ken Griffin on opportunities:

"Often it's the person who goes the extra mile who comes to the right conclusion. That's grit, it's perseverance, it's determination. It's making the effort. One of the things we emphasize is what do you need to do, what extra steps do you need to take to get to the right conclusion faster than those you compete with. And if you do hustle, you will find those opportunities."



Novelist Charles Kingsley on happiness:

"We act as though comfort and luxury were the chief requirements of life, when all that we need to make us happy is something to be enthusiastic about."



When you're only halfway interested in something, you'll lose to someone obsessed. It won't even be close.

It's worth asking why.

Small advantages compound over time like interest in a bank account, so being 10% more committed doesn't give you 10% better results; it gives you 10x better results.

Think of it like studying: the genuinely curious person will remember and connect ideas in ways that the person just trying to pass will never.

Being all in doesn't just beat partially in; it crushes it.

Reliability is magnetic because humans are hardwired to avoid risk, so once you prove yourself trustworthy and reliable, you become the default choice for opportunities without ever asking for them.



When you stop treating your current opportunity as a stepping stone to something else and start treating it as the only one that matters, opportunity finds you.



Does the world happen to you, or do you happen to the world?

Most people wait for permission to solve problems. The subtle message they send is "I don't care enough to solve this on my own. Tell me what to do." The world happens to them.

High agency people are different. They care. And because they care, they solve problems without being told. They happen to the world.

High agency people act like owners. Owners see a problem and fix it. They don't wait. They don't need permission. They don't think this is someone else's job. They don't think this is hard. They don't think "I can't do this, I've never done it before." They don't think this is someone else's job.

Act like an owner before you are one. That's how you become one.



We're wired for novelty, but life rewards repetition.

Good ideas are rare. When you find something that works, you've found gold. But instead of mining it, we go looking for more gold.

We'd rather have ten ideas that might work than one that does.



A lot of success in life is just putting yourself in a position for good things to happen to you.

- + Be reliable
- + Avoid drama
- + Help other people win
- + Take care of your body
- + Take care of your mind
- + Live below your means
- + Treat your job as if it matters
- + Take care of your relationships

Simple, but not easy.

Comedian George Carlin with an important truth:

"Everyone driving slower than you is an idiot, and everyone driving faster than you is a maniac!"



Engineer Carl Braun on reputation:

"Let's keep in mind that there is not one of us whose reputation would not be grievously dimmed by a thorough cataloguing of our faults and errors."



Author Haruki Murakami on the plateau of talent:

"They can't take it any further. And why not? Because they won't put in the effort. Because they haven't had the discipline pounded into them. They've been spoiled. They have just enough talent so they've been able to play things well without any effort and they've had people telling them how great they are from the time they're little, so hard work looks stupid to them. They'll take some piece another kid has to work on for three weeks and polish it off in half the time, so the teacher figures they've put enough into it and lets them go to the next thing. And they do that in half the time and go on to the next piece. They never find out what it means to be hammered by the teacher; they lose out on a certain element required for character building. It's a tragedy."



Not everyone runs on your clock. Your urgent isn't their urgent.

While you're optimizing every minute toward specific goals, others might be optimizing for presence, relationships, or balance.

The key is protecting your time without demonizing theirs.

Borrowed wisdom breaks under pressure because you haven't earned it.

You're trusting someone else's compression without knowing what created it.

Earned wisdom, on the other hand, holds up because it's rooted in your actual experience. You know when it works, why it works, when to ignore it and when to bend it because you created the compression.

Some really good articles on Self-Improvement:

<https://fs.blog/category/self-improvement/>



Coaching Is Harder Than Ever

By Kevin Pierce, NISCA Education Chair

There are days when coaching feels heavier than anyone on the outside will ever truly understand. The world has changed. The demands have changed. The expectations have multiplied. Yet the number of hours in a day, the energy inside our bodies, and the emotional capacity we carry have stayed exactly the same.

Coaching today is hard. Really hard. Hard in ways that catch up to you on the drive home when the adrenaline wears off and the noise fades and you finally realize how much you are carrying.

People see the practices, the games, the wins, the team pictures, the smiles. They don't see the worry. They don't see the weight. They don't see how deeply coaches care, and how much it costs us sometimes.

The Challenges That No One Warns You About

Every coach I know is exhausted. Not because they do not love the kids they work with, but because the job has quietly stretched into something bigger than teaching skills and running practices.

Today's coach is expected to be a leader, motivator, mentor, counselor, conflict manager, academic advisor, culture builder, communicator, nutrition expert, social media monitor, and emotional support system for dozens of teenagers at once. That is before the game even starts.

And then there are the quiet moments no one ever hears about. The conversations that happen after the deck has cleared. The moments when a kid waits until everyone else leaves before saying Coach can I talk to you

I remember one night sitting in my car long after practice ended. A kid had opened up about something heavy, something they had been carrying alone for far too long. I sat there afterward gripping the steering wheel, wondering if I said enough, or the right things, or if I even helped at all. By the time I finally drove home the house was dark and my own kids were already asleep.

Coaches pour themselves out every single day, and very few people ever stop to ask how the coach is doing.

Family Time Is the First Thing That Gets Sacrificed

This is the part that hurts the most.

Coaching pulls you away from your own family more than anyone ever warns you. Nights. Weekends. Holidays. Dinners. Bed-time routines. Being present in the small moments that matter.

You miss things. You stretch yourself thin. You tell yourself it will all balance out later but you know deep down that time is never coming back.

There was a moment this past fall that stayed with me. Bradley

had a soccer game I could not attend because of coaching responsibilities. I told myself it was fine. Life is busy. It happens. But later that night Cammy sent me a picture of him after the game, smiling and proud. And the truth hit me hard. I had spent the entire evening checking on other people's kids while my own was out there making a memory I was not part of.

No one prepares you for that kind of guilt.

And then there is Charlotte, who comes into the room after practice eager to talk, eager to connect, eager for Dad's attention. And some nights I am so mentally drained from worrying about twenty other teenagers that I have to fight to stay fully present. She deserves the best of me, not what is left of me.

The Pay Does Not Come Close to Matching the Investment

This is the uncomfortable truth.

Most coaches earn far less than people think. When you divide the pay by the hours worked, it becomes almost laughable. Coaches keep showing up anyway.

There are easier ways to make money. There are simpler paths with fewer headaches. No one coaches because of the paycheck. They coach in spite of it.

And still we stay.

The Unexpected Reward That Makes It All Worth It

Here is the part that no one tells you when you first start coaching.

The real payoff does not come during the season. It comes years later.

It comes when you are walking through the Acme and you hear Coach Pierce is that you and one of your former swimmers is suddenly standing in front of you taller, older, more confident than you remember. They tell you where they are now. They tell you what they learned. And sometimes they tell you something you never realized you taught them.

It comes in the handwritten note a kid sends you after graduation saying thank you for believing in me when I did not believe in myself.

It comes in a message that pops up out of nowhere. Coach I know I was a pain sometimes but you were the reason I stuck with it. You helped me get through some of my hardest days.

It comes when someone who struggled through practice after practice now tells you they use the lessons from those workouts to get through college or a breakup or the loss of a job.

There was a swimmer who came back years after he graduated. He told me that something I said to him in the middle of a

rough season completely shifted how he viewed himself. I barely remembered the conversation. It was one moment on one day of a long season that probably felt ordinary to me at the time. But to him it made a difference. That is the impact coaches often never see until long after the season ends.

Those moments remind you that the work mattered.
That your presence mattered.
That the time you sacrificed mattered.

And every coach has these moments. The texts you save. The thank you messages that hit you in the chest. The conversations that make you realize you were making a difference even when you felt like you were barely holding everything together.

These are the quiet rewards that get you through the days that leave you drained.

So Why Keep Going

With all of this weight, all of this sacrifice, all of these challenges that few outside the profession ever see, it is fair to ask the question again.

Why keep doing it

Why keep pouring yourself into something that takes so much out of you

The answer is simple. Because this is who I am.

Because there is no feeling like watching a kid discover their own strength.

Because there is no moment like seeing an athlete work for something and finally get it. Because coaching allows me to shape lives, even in small ways that echo long after the season ends.

I think about the kid who struggled but stayed. I think about the athletes who have come back years later to tell me I made a difference. Those moments stay with you. They anchor you. They remind you that all the long nights and the worry and the sacrifice were worth something.

Coaching has woven itself into every part of me. It has shaped the way I lead, the way I parent, the way I show up in the world. Every season I learn as much from my athletes as they learn from me. Even on the hardest days, even when I question everything, I know I am exactly where I am meant to be.

Coaching is not just something I do. It is a part of who I am. And despite the sacrifice, despite the challenges, despite the weight that never fully disappears, I would choose it again every single time.



Follow Coach Kevin Pierce on **The Leadership Launchpad** as he shares insights on leadership, coaching, and personal development. There you will find strategies, stories, and resources to help build stronger leaders in sports and in life.

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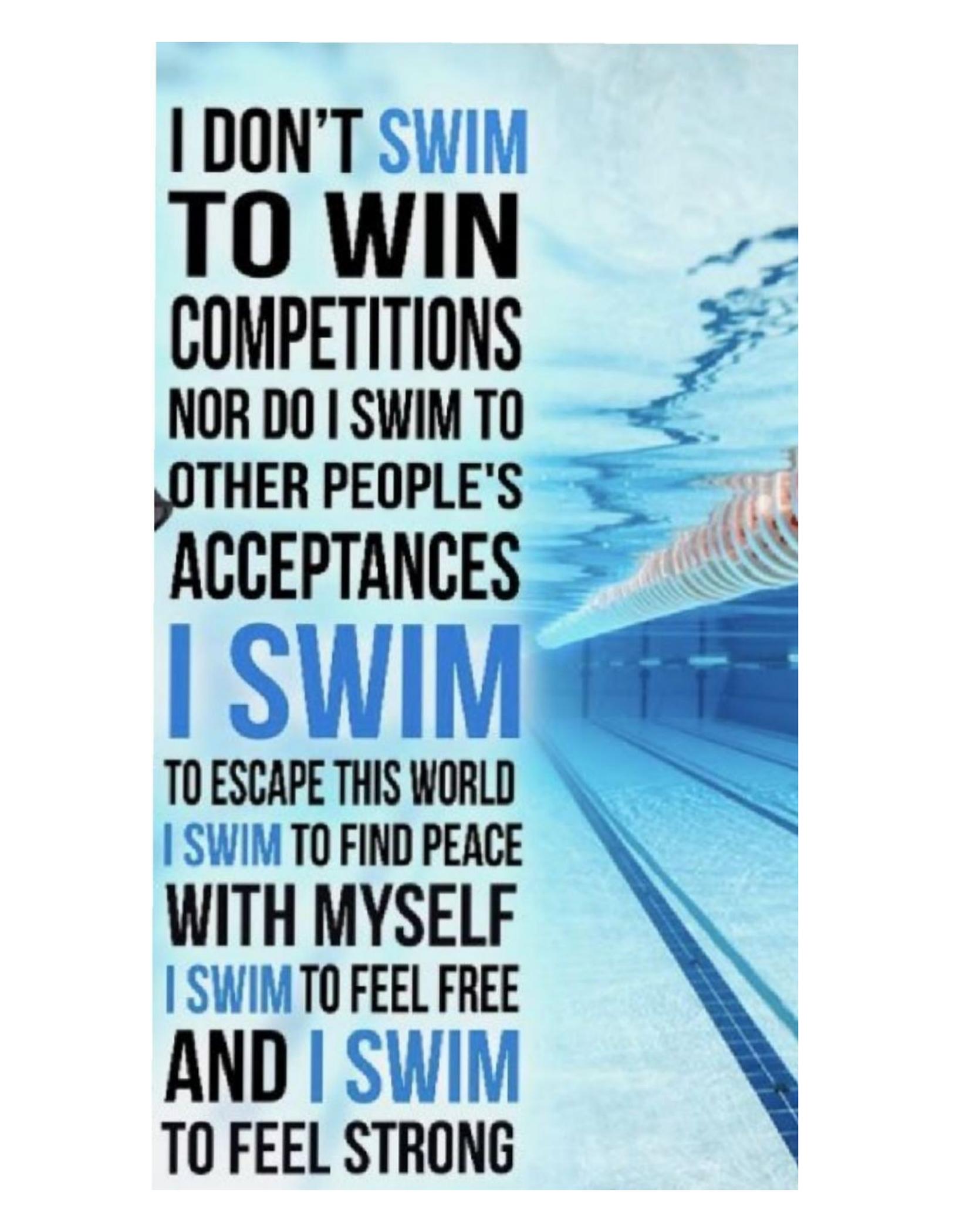
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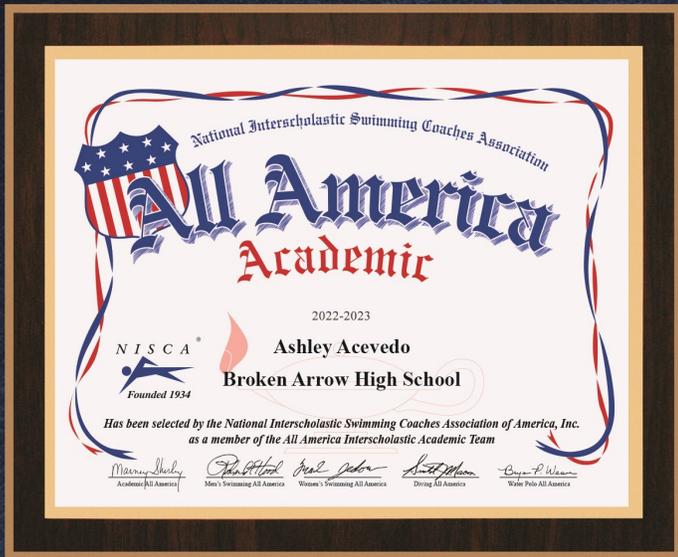


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TO WIN
COMPETITIONS
NOR DO I SWIM TO
OTHER PEOPLE'S
ACCEPTANCES
I SWIM
TO ESCAPE THIS WORLD
I SWIM TO FIND PEACE
WITH MYSELF
I SWIM TO FEEL FREE
AND I SWIM
TO FEEL STRONG**

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TO HAVE A GREAT DAY

TO SMILE MORE

WORRY LESS

TO BE THE VERY
BEST VERSION OF

YOU

TO DO MORE OF WHAT
MAKES YOU HAPPY

EVERY DAY

TO BE POSITIVE

AND REGRET NOTHING

TO BE HUMBLE AND WORK HARD

EVERY DAY MAY NOT BE GOOD BUT

FIND SOMETHING

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LAUGH

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Ponte Vedra High School swimmer Juli Cavalcanti competes during the Class 3A State Championship swim meet at FAST in Ocala, FL on Saturday, November 15, 2025. [Chris Watkins/Gainesville Sun]

[Chris Watkins/Gainesville Sun](#)

Sophomore Juli Cavalcanti was girl's team high point scorer with individual swims in the 200IM and 100 Backstroke.

She swam personal best times in the 200 IM, winning in 2:02.03, and a 4th-place finish in the 100 Backstroke, with a 57.84