

7 Things All Swimmers Should Start Doing

and

20 Habits of Elite Swimmers

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As George Bernard Shaw said, “Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.”

No doubt.

How often have you found yourself caught in a loop of doing the same things, having the same behaviors, displaying the same attitudes, and yet still expecting different results? If you are like me, a few times. Change is foreign, difficult, and requires us to remove ourselves from our comfort zone and the outlooks and mind sets we have developed over the years.

Here are 7 things swimmers can start doing in order to inflict some change this season:

1. Face the tough stuff head on.

We all have those sets that intimidate the draw strings out of our swimsuits. We squirm and are swamped with dread each time coach throws it up on the board. Whether it is a test set, a long rep for time, or all out efforts that will give you an indication of how much (or how little) progress we have made. The only way to attack those big, scary sets is inch-by-inch, meter-by-meter. Avoid thinking about the set as a whole and focus on the rep in front of you, and you’ll find yourself more willing to give those tough sets an honest thrashing.

2. Spend time with the right people.

Life is far too short to spend it with people who complain, who berate, who naysay and live to shoot down the aspirations of others. The path to success – whatever your version of success in the pool is – is not easy, and it is made infinitely harder when you surround yourself with people who have no interest in seeing you flourish as an athlete and as a person.

3. Be honest about where you are at and where you want to go.

Take a few moments and be honest about where you are at as a swimmer, and what you would like to do with your abilities and talents. Once you have a solid understanding of who you are, what your strengths and opportunities for improvement are, you will be better equipped to choose a path which will showcase your own particular brand of awesomeness.

4. Be willing to forge your own path.

It’s easy to look at our idols, or even the elite swimmers that we train with on a daily basis, and want to copy their path to success. While there will be some similarities in what you need to do in comparison to

what they are doing – hard work, consistency, and so on – be willing to find your own way, to forge your own path towards your individualized form of success.

5. Value your mistakes as much as your successes.

We grow from friction, from bouncing back from failures and setbacks. Victory, while undoubtedly sweeter, doesn't always provide the same lessons that we get from coming up a little bit short. Instead of brushing aside those moments where things don't go your way, pick them apart for lessons in where you can do things better in order to drive forwards with purpose.

6. Start seeing yourself as more capable.

We tend to place limits on what we think we are capable of, more often rather arbitrarily. Because we haven't done something before means we cannot do it now. Because a particular interval was challenging means we can't do an even faster one. Suspend your doubt and limitations long enough to try, and more often than not you will find that you surprise yourself.

7. Trust yourself to be okay.

Big goals scare the chlorine out of most swimmer's hair. It's not even necessarily the goals themselves that are intimidating, it's the thought of giving it their absolute goal and then coming up short. It's the failing part that is scary. But how many times in the course of your swimming and life have you failed, and yet you still came out of it? You survived then, and you'll be okay in the future too, so have faith in your own resiliency.

20 Habits of Elite Swimmers

While there isn't an exact formula for success that can be applied to everyone, there are some typical traits and habits of those who have achieved success in swimming that are universal.

Make 2013/2014 your best year of swimming yet by embracing some of the following habits of elite swimmers:

1. They Don't Allow Others to Dictate What They Are Capable Of. There really isn't much more discouraging than someone you respect, admire or love telling you that your goal or dream is out of your reach, not within your abilities, or outside of the scope of your talent. Some people take this to heart, while others use it as jet fuel to light their motivation.

2. Be About It. Everyone wants to be successful; everyone talks about how they want to achieve so-and-so a time, or qualify for XYZ team. Talking about it is the easy part. But successful swimmers don't stop at wanting or talking about it; they put words into action. You can say that you want to be a championship caliber athlete all you want, but are your actions reflecting this intent?

3. Being Elite Isn't a Part Time Gig. You can't be good and expect to be great. Likewise, you can't be great once in a while, or part time. Elite swimmers show up every day, not when they feel like it, or when circumstances suit them.

4. The Journey is What Makes You Elite. Setting goals, and chasing them is about so much more than the final result, time or placing. The journey is what creates the elite swimmer, the final results are merely a symptom of what a swimmer has become by putting in work every day.

5. Elite Swimmers Have Unshakable Personal Integrity. How often do you commit to something and find that within a few days or weeks your resolve loosens, until the promise you made to yourself is broken and gone? Having personal integrity means that you not only keep your word and promises with others, but most importantly that you keep your word with yourself.

6. Embrace the Grind. Sure, it would be great if life came without friction. If things went according to plan and according to our wishes all of the time. In reality we both know this is not how things go down. Setbacks, detours and roadblocks will happen, and the choice is whether they are going to be exercises in character development or the reasons for quitting.

7. Unafraid to Plan. Success isn't an accident; it's the result of planning combined with focused action. Elite swimmers know to get to where they want to go they need to have a road map.

8. Look for Solutions, Not Excuses. While many swimmers will talk about achey muscles, excessive homework, or how they don't feel up their best, your friendly neighborhood elite swimmer will find a way to be successful in spite of these same types of challenges.

9. Surround Themselves with Like Minded Athletes. How we perform is a result of the environment and the people we decide to surround ourselves with. Hanging out with naysayers and toxic people will rub off on us. Similarly, hanging out with athletes who are down to take things to the next level will only embolden and empower you.

10. Proactive. Elite swimmers take action before need necessitates it. They don't want for things to happen to them; they go out and make it happen for themselves. They don't hope for success to stumble upon them via luck or good fortune; they actively chase it.

11. Willing to Go the Extra Mile. This can mean that they will come in early, stay after practice for additional ab work/stretching, or step up and do a faster interval even when not prodded to do so. The adage "first one in, last one out" is highly applicable to elite athletes.

12. Set Higher Standards for Themselves. "Good enough" is *not* good enough. Don't confuse this with perfection; elite swimmers understand the difference between striving for excellence versus chasing perfection (doesn't exist!).

13. Possess a Willingness to Accept Constructive Criticism. Feedback from coaches isn't taken personally or negatively. Elite swimmers listen to and assess criticism as objectively as possible.

14. Accept Ownership. Playing the blame game, or sugar-coating a bad swim with lame excuses is a disservice to yourself. Sure it may be an easy band-aid for your ego, but by explaining your performances away with excuses only means that you lose out on a valuable lesson and provides conditions for it to happen again down the road.

15. Take Pride in Hard Work. Hard work sounds, well, hard. And in a day and age where we expect instant results and instant satisfaction, it can be easy to cast aside hard work as something we don't need to do anymore. Elite swimmers take pride in the fact that they work hard, that they are willing to do what others won't.

16. Support Teammates. Whether it is cheering on teammates, helping out the youngsters, or being a friendly ear when someone is having a rough day, elite swimmers have a strong sense of compassion for their teammates and for the sport in general.

17. Make the Best of What They Have. Heaps of Olympians have come up through the ranks having trained in dark, dungy 25 yard pools. They know that all they need is a lane and a bathing suit and they are good to go. Conditions and your environment will never be perfectly ideal; the key is to maximize the resources you do have.

18. They Don't Complain. They recognize that complaining doesn't bring them closer to their goals. Getting bitter and dwelling on complaints and perceived unfairness only develops a negative and ineffective state of mind.

19. They Know They Deserve Success – Just Like Anyone Else. Most gaze star-struck at top-level swimmers and think of all the reasons that they will never be at that level. Elite swimmers look up and think of all the reasons why they will and deserve to be at that level.

20. Refuse to Wait. Sure, you could fully dedicate yourself to your swimming when you feel up to it. Or when you get that new suit. Or when your team gets a new pool. But at that point there will be a new excuse to delay action. Elite swimmers refuse to wait another moment to chase their goals and dreams. They recognize that starting tomorrow is a day too late.