

News for Swim Parents

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"You're Missing the Point!"

"It's about making it hard, not about making it easier."

By John Leonard

Our friends the Australians have an expression...to be "gobsmacked". Heaven only knows the derivation, but the picture I have in my mind is getting literally "smacked in the face with a fish". Sort of a stunning and "attention riveting event."

One night during Christmas Vacation training, one of the nice young men on our team, (I'll call him Benito) did something that led to my exclamation at the top of this article. He's a good young man, and he was simply responding to the prevailing ethic of our society, which is to constantly seek to make things "easier".

In the process, he lost track of a critical lesson and a great opportunity. It resulted in my rather loudly and strongly making my point above.

We'd finished about 6 K of water work in 90 minutes and were proceeding to our 30 minutes of dryland work on a cool Florida evening, with a decent chill in the air. My first instruction was about some med ball throws. Following that, it was "3 sets Med ball situps, ½ twist, 100 with 30 seconds rest."

So far, all is well. Benito moves into the situp phase well enough and does his first set. Around that time, another athlete has to leave....tossing her med ball into the bin....Benito, who is about 30 situps into his second hundred, hops up, and grabs the just discarded ball, which, I immediately note is 4 pounds LIGHTER.

"BENITO, WHAT ARE YOU DOING? THIS IS A SET OF 100!"

"Coach, I wanted this other ball...." (as explanation for stopping in mid-set, which he knows is a team no-no)

"WHY? THIS IS A SET OF 100!"

"Coach, this ball has handles and its lighter."

Now revert to the top of the page for my next comments.

I then stopped the whole group and gathered them around me...."guys, why are we here?" (various answers) "we'd better all be here with the intent to get better." (various nods, affirmations, and some blank stares....) ***"to get better, we Need to Do Whatever Is HARDER, Not what is easier, yes?"***

Lights go on in most eyes, most heads nod. Notably, not ALL heads nod.

I went on to explain that sport, done correctly is counter-culture. The prevailing culture around us values and esteems "making things easier". It's EVERYWHERE in our world. And it is EXACTLY what keeps us from being our best. As aspiring athletes, and coaches, we need to SEEK OUT that which is harder, more uncomfortable, more demanding. Not look for the lighter ball with handles.

Benito got it. As soon as I said "back to work", he found the biggest, nastiest med-ball he could find WITHOUT handles, and restarted his second set of 100. The majority of the rest of the athletes did likewise. When you point it out to them...."they know".

But I found myself wondering, if a COACH didn't point it out to them, would they ever get it on their own? I think that's why we describe it as "counter-culture."

Each of my athletes has heard and "understood" the expression "get comfortable with being uncomfortable" if you want to get better. They can all intellectually explain it. But on a cool Florida night when they were tired, most could not see the application "on their own."

A wonderful lesson for me as well as for my athletes.