

# The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Athletes

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Looking ahead to this season, here are a few ideas for things you athletes may want to think about to become your best self during this year. They aren't in any particular order, because I think all of them are relevant. How many do you do? And what can you add to make yourself even better?

## 1) Show up

Some of the best athletes I've known were good simply because they made swimming a priority. If there was practice, they were there – it was that simple. Practice is practice for a reason – to practice the skills that will make you better. Whether that's training your body to maintain dolphin kicks off every wall in a race, learning to hold your breath for a whole 50, or building up the endurance to finish the mile. Some people can get away with not showing up for practice, and still manage to wow the competition. That's relying on talent. Don't be that person – train like you are the worst athlete (ie, work your butt off every day) and race like you are the best.

## 2) Communicate

Coaches are there for a reason – to help you become a better swimmer. However, sometimes the Grand Plan isn't suited specifically to your needs as an athlete. That's okay, but before you run off trying to taper yourself, create your own weight room plan or try out a new diet, talk to your coach. Chances are he will have some suggestions for you as to what to try. In my time as an athlete, I've become very close to my coaches. I've had help individualizing my training program and had the opportunity to enjoy life advice outside swimming. Coaches are a resource – use them

## 3) Ask Questions

And I don't mean in the middle of practice, trying to stall so there won't be time to finish that 3×400 pull set. Make notes of what's going on in the workout, and if something strikes you as curious, file it away for after workout. A coach doesn't have time during workout to explain *why* he's asking you to do different things, but if you talk outside practice, often times you'll be enlightened. And yes, sometimes the answer is, "Just because."

## 4) Think During Practice

I'd say this is a no-brainer, but that's exactly the opposite of what you should be doing! When you hit the water, turn your brain on. This is the part of our sport that is so great – you've got lots of time (and endless repetitions) to change bad habits and make them good, **if you're thinking about it**. When you're swimming that 3×400 pull set, pick something to focus on – whether it's your turns, where your hand catches the water, or how far you're turning to breathe. Try to notice what's "right" and what's "off." Ask your coach to watch your stroke and make suggestions before or after workout. Then it's up to you to take those suggestions and make sure you're doing them.

*For more information on what to think about during practice see the article "10 Things to Think About During Swim Practice".*

## **5) Support Your Team**

We are all in this together; you, me, the guy in the pond next door. However, you and I probably aren't training together, and the guy in the pond next door is next door. The athletes who can help you become better are the ones you share pool space with, day in and day out. Often, rivalries develop that can cause a rift in a team. Be bigger than that fault line. Congratulate your teammates when they do well, console them when they don't. Cheer at meets and in practice. Push yourself to beat the athlete next to you, but don't gloat when you do. There's always another rep, another race, and your common enemy is the clock, not each other.

## **6) Do Something Extra**

Athletes become good by doing everything they've been told to do – showing up for workout, swimming thoughtfully, keeping in touch with coaches. But what sets one athlete apart from others is that little something extra that she chooses to work out. For myself, I did one or two turns after practice, every day. But something extra can be almost anything: practicing starts every day, running, yoga, and pushups; even (or perhaps especially) focusing on putting healthier food into your body as fuel.

## **7) Sleep**

Personally, I think this is one of the most important things on this list. I was always solid on this one during college, and I think that gave me a leg up on the competition. I always, always, always got at least seven hours of sleep a night. Most collegiate – and even high school – athletes struggle to get four or five on a routine basis. Sleep bingeing on the weekends doesn't make up for lack of sleep during the week, and the lack of recovery time takes a toll on the body. Manage your time well, don't procrastinate and enjoy a good rest every night. Your body will thank you by being fast.