

Once upon a time, in a swimming pool in the far north,

by John Leonard, ASCA Executive Director

near the arctic circle in upstate New York, I learned a lesson. There was a lane we called "the national team." Some of these 8 or 9 bodies had national cuts and others just aspired to have the national cuts, and were close. They all thought they were special. They came early, they stayed later, they were "the National Team."

They weren't the only ones I had in the pool during this time, and I moved from group to group, so periodically, I'd pass them by and say something like "Nice Job. You guys are working hard, keep it up, Good Work." They improved when they went to swim meets and swam faster and faster.

One day as I walked past, I heard Lynn Scully say to Amy Richards, "hey, cut me some slack here, slow down, I can't go that hard right now." (for purposes of full disclosure, Lynn is a male, Amy a female)
 Amy looked at him in a quizzical way, and went hard again. I ignored it and walked away.

The next day, I walked past, said "good job, Good work, makin' progress." Lynn and two other male swimmers didn't look me in the eye. Later in that practice, I heard Pete say, "Amy, I'm dyin' here, give me a break hey?" and heard Lynn chime in, "Yeah, no need to go this hard." And a third male say "Crap Amy, you're makin' us all work too hard to keep up with you!."

Amy slapped her hands on the water with frustration, gave up, stepped aside and moved to the middle of the lane to let Pete lead.

Our nationals Sucked.

I learned from this that we can be two kinds of people....the kind that encourages everyone around us to work hard and achieve more,

or we can be the kind that says "we don't have to work that hard to achieve more." We each of us have both people within us. And everyone who has ever coached or ever swum or ever competed knows this is the truth.

If just one person backs off, it lets the next weakest person do likewise. Its a disease, and it spreads fast.

After that lesson, I always paid attention to the "lane talk" in workouts. And I'd talk to my teams about how to encourage each

other to be achievers and how no one person in the group can achieve more than the group aspires to achieve. The group has got to get it right, and none can have the attitude that says "we don't have to work that hard."

And if they didn't want to be their personal best selves, they didn't want to train with me. They could train somewhere else and float through with some other coach.

I would say for awhile that I was "amazed" at how much satisfaction the swimmers took from encouraging each other to do more than they thought was possible.

Now, I look back and know it was not amazing at all. It was normal. Because, you see, we can all chose to be the person who

says "lets do less" or the person who says "lets swim faster." And once the team decides to only accept the positive input, there is nothing amazing about it. Its normal.

Since 1974, that experience left an indelible mark on me. It marked me with the knowledge that just one person who thinks they can "do less" can ruin a team, or a group, or an office, because we all have the capacity to sink, or to rise to leadership. Think about that when your team is swimming up and down that lane.

**Life, and this sport,
does not reward those
who "float through"**

**..it rewards those
that enjoy the work
for its own sake.**