



The World Swimming Coaches Association

Tuesday, November 22, 2022



**CHARACTER AS THE DRIVER
OF CULTURE AND SUCCESS**

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“Character is the only secure foundation of the state.” *(and the team)* Lyndon Johnson

The Ultimate “Art” Behind the Science

If science is physiology/training, and art is technique and set construction, the ultimate art is culture creation.



Developing Leaders



In sports and in society

Empowering Cultures

the rising tide



“To say that your fate is not tied to my fate is like saying your end of the boat is sinking.” Hugh Downs

Changing Lives (and life trajectory)

"Come to the edge." "We can't. We're afraid."
"Come to the edge." "We can't. We will fall!"
"Come to the edge." And they came.
And he pushed them ...



And they flew.

Guillaume Apollinaire

The hidden power behind the process

Maximizing Performance



and career longevity

Creating an Aggressive Dual Mandate

Extraordinary culture (character) and Extraordinary Performance (character-driven)



We have two banners on site (for everyone to see) – Olympic Trial qualifiers and collegiate team captain.)

They will converge

Background

Growing up - exploring/near obsession

Life commitment to coach

Saw sports as life's greatest learning ground

Life mission to work with youth in a moral/ethical backdrop

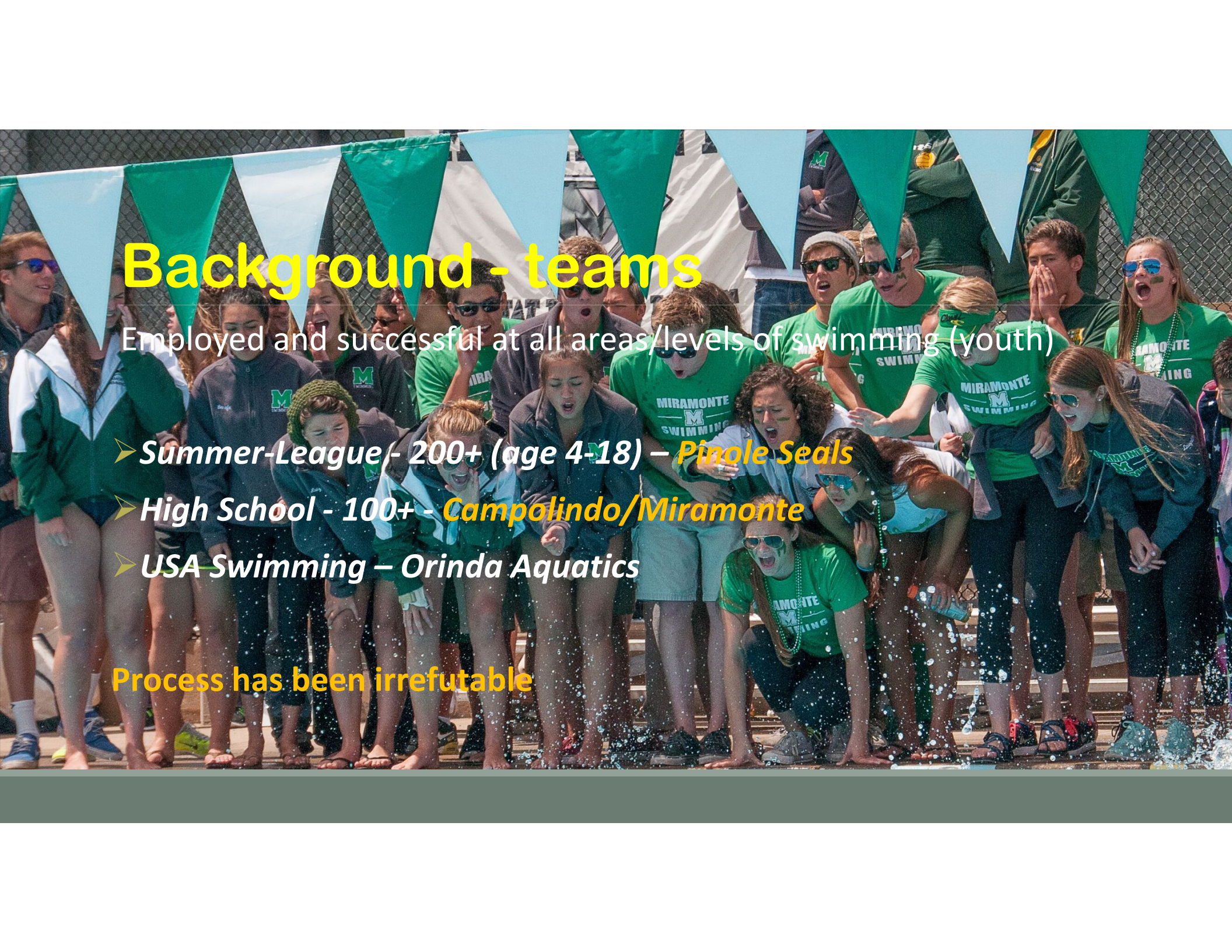
To change the moral and ethical trajectory of athletes (and teams)

Pursuit of the art of teambuilding/culture-building

Ran "Character Camp" for 10-14 year-olds in Lamorinda

The strong desire to be competitive (the best)



A large group of young people, mostly teenagers, are gathered outdoors at what appears to be a swimming competition. They are wearing green and blue athletic gear, including t-shirts and swim caps. Many are wearing sunglasses and have green face paint on their cheeks. They are all cheering and splashing water, creating a dynamic and energetic scene. In the background, there are blue and white triangular bunting flags hanging from a chain-link fence.

Background - teams

Employed and successful at all areas/levels of swimming (youth)

- Summer-League/- 200+ (age 4-18) – *Pinole Seals*
- High School - 100+ - *Campolindo/Miramonte*
- USA Swimming – *Orinda Aquatics*

Process has been irrefutable

Character Contribution

A six hour “Life Skills” presentation for ASCA in San Diego

A 385-page guidebook for ASCA (donated) on character development

Several articles (ASCA, Swimming World - March) on character development, culture, leadership, club development

Lectures at numerous World Clinics and internationally, as well as Leadership Conferences

ASCA Lecture on “The Art of Team Travel”

Orinda Aquatics is widely regarded as a model for character in swimming/youth sports

Don/Ron advise and support clubs and coaches on culture/structure

USA Swimming included OA in the character curriculum

Don/Ron received Positive Coaching Alliance – Double Goal Award

Orinda Aquatics Culture (150 swimmers)

One hundred teenagers
(Senior Group)

Extraordinary
environment – virtually
no discipline problems –
great relationships

No bad language,
respect, integrity, ego
issues

Incredible work ethic
and embraced approach
to effort and discipline

Virtually no parent
problems

Travel with 80+
teenagers – no
chaperones, bed checks,
no issues (see ASCA
World Clinic)

GPA for the entire group
is ~4.0; 9 Scholastic All
Americans was 4th in the
Western Zone

50+ collegiate team
captains

Athletes will run
workout on own (at a
high level)

Self-run dryland and
workout (without a
coach) – AG & Senior

Virtually no
burnout/attrition

All (ages) know “dual
mandate”

Orinda Aquatics Success



Won Junior Nationals (West) with 75 swimmers

Won Sectionals, Western Zone Senior Championships, Far Westerns, second at Summer Juniors

27 Olympic Trial qualifiers (12 in 2008)

200+ national-level swimmers

Multiple Silver Medal club in USA Swimming Club Excellence program

Average 10-15 Junior National swimmers each year

Has been top (or two) scoring teams under 200 swimmers in USA Swimming Virtual Club Championships

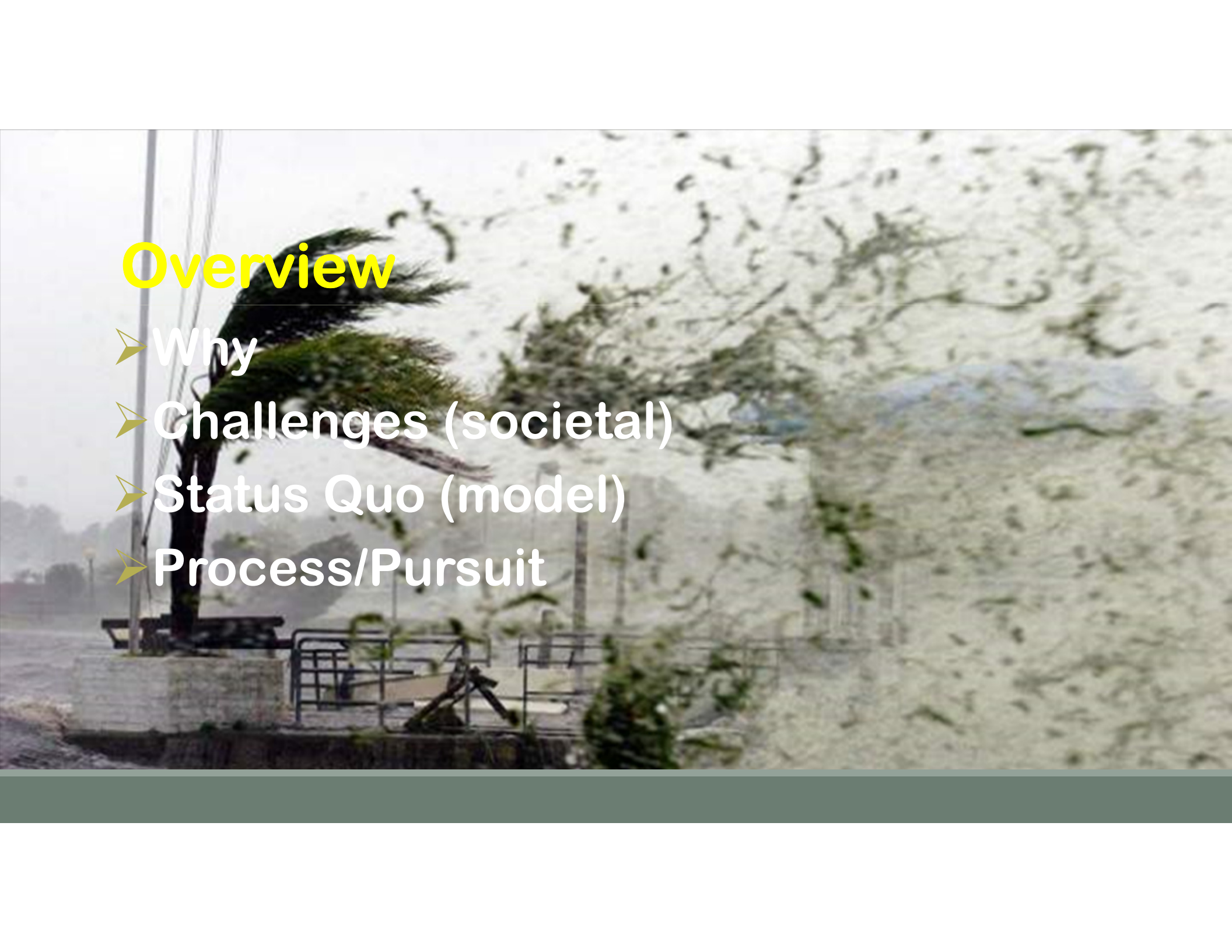
80% of graduates go on to compete in college (all want to)

Current or committed college swimmers at: Texas, Cal (2), Harvard (2), Princeton, UCLA, Brown, MIT, Vanderbilt – average 40 collegiate athletes each year

Success...

is constant because culture is constant —
With absolute expectation of behavior and purpose



A photograph of a tropical storm or hurricane. A large, dark green tree is being blown over by strong winds, its branches and leaves flying in the air. The background shows a hazy, overcast sky and some distant structures. The overall scene conveys the power and danger of such weather events.

Overview

- Why
- Challenges (societal)
- Status Quo (model)
- Process/Pursuit

Reality



The vast majority of teams and athletes underperform (and under experience OR under grow personally) to their potential.

Key



Character/Values **can** be the hub or lynch pin to....

- **work ethic, integrity, humility, compassion, etc.**
- **all of things that make better athletes, teammates, and cultures**

The Known and the Unknown



There is no shortage of information (millions of websites) on technique, drills, training/set design, etc.

The invisible tailwind of a character-driven culture is much more elusive.

Character and Performance will Ebb and Flow

With personalities

Social dynamics

Talent

Staff

Board

They must be organizational mandates

Manufactured...



Examples of Conflicted Interest

Fast swimmer – bad teammate

(most) Talented athlete – lazy and negative

Great kid/high character – poor focus/effort

Board member's child – behavior issues



Note: a good swimmer, good student, good person, **DOES NOT** make a good teammate

Mitigating “Burnout”

From Swimming Science -

Why Do Young Swimmers Burnout?

Posted: 27 May 2013 12:30 AM PDT

Swimming thrives on a “survivalist” culture. But many swimmers voluntarily drop out years before they’re cut from a higher level. I don’t have any statistics comparing swim dropout rates to other sports, but there’s no doubt that early dropouts can be problematic for all levels.

Unfortunately, many promising young swimmers leave the sport on negative terms and have been soured by their experience. But it would be delusional to think the swimming institution is not at least partially responsible for driving away young talent.

A common refrain in swimming is swimmers never wanting to see a pool again. **It’s not an easy problem to solve. And if you have the answer, I’m sure USA Swimming would pay handsomely for it.** This simplest approach is to admit we can all do a little better, which starts with an honest look at why many swimmers leave the sport long before reaching their potential.

The easiest way to reduce or eliminate burnout is through a positive culture and team environment. Yes, consistent improvement will keep kids in the sport, but it does not always keep them happy, and improvement is not linear. **Young athletes need to connect with something bigger and something meaningful, and have strong relationships based on respect.**

Olympic “Toxic Environment”

Their Olympics was beset by “culturally toxic incidents” including misuse of prescription drugs, alcohol, deceit, and bullying that highlighted a failure of culture and leadership, a report said. A culture existed within the team which “did not appear to assist or support high-level performance for most people.”

The review recommended creating an ethical framework of what the (Olympic) team stands for, updating internal codes of conduct and implementing **better processes for managing issues around standards and expectations.**

Some were pursuing their own goals rather than those of the squad, and that some swimmers behaved more like schoolboys than Olympians at a pre-games camp. (no team concept)

“Poor behavior and disrespect within the team were not regulated or resisted strongly by other team members, and it was **left unchecked** or without consequence by staff and coaches on a number of occasions,” the Review said. (no leadership)

This is not an “Olympic” issue. It is a club issue, an age-group issue, a high school issue, and a societal issue.

What Dissipates?

- Burnout (mentioned)
- Swimmer conflicts (egos)
- Coach-swimmer conflict
- Behavior issues
- Apathy, effort, attendance issues
- Attitude issues
- Focus issues
- Travel issues
- Parent issues



Allowing the coach to... coach

A Change in Culture, A Change in Life

(from a 17-year-old national-level swimmer who changed teams and cultures)

“I think about where I would be had I not changed teams, and honestly its scary. I was becoming a person I did not want to be. I have learned what is truly important in life, and I am not sure when or if I would have figured it out. I never realized what it was like to be around negative people because that type of person was always me. Additionally, I dreaded swimming and now I love it again and it has been a rebirth.”

The real benefit may very well be in the unseen...

- Self-esteem
- Self-awareness
- Accountability
- Connectedness
- Improved academics
- Saying no to a drug, alcohol, or sex introduction
- Choosing role models over social models
- A better/healthier family life
- A more productive college experience
- Being a better employee
- Dealing with a life crisis
- Becoming a true leader
- Making a difference in the lives of others



And in becoming a better swimmer and teammate.

With...

More drill focus/better technique
On time
Positive in the locker room
Train harder
Train with focus
Peer support
Positive workout environment
Better meet culture/team focus
More positive (and safe) travel
Better coach-swimmer relationship
Etc.



We want...

Leaders

Selfless teammates

Elite “athletes”

People who put the team first

People we trust implicitly

Swimmers who maximize their potential and their careers

Healthier, happy kids

And better people



Character Headwinds - *and eroding moral standards*

Against both character and performance



"98% of teenagers lie to their parents."

Why?

**Developing athletes
against a societal
backdrop that
challenges the very
core of our sport...**



Where in our culture do we celebrate character and humility? We would argue that society is anything but character based.

and the essence of human development



Train children in
THE RIGHT WAY,
and when old, they
WILL NOT STRAY.

Proverbs 22:6, NRSV

“Old” Masters (are out)

Dalai Lama – insight

Confucius – truth

Jesus – forgiveness

Gandhi – tolerance

Lao Tzu – leadership

Buddha – suffering

Mohammed – service

Mother Teresa - compassion

Aristotle – wisdom

Helen Keller - perseverance



New Masters (are in)

Apple

Facebook

Instagram

Tick Tock

Twitter

Reality TV

MTV

Kim Kardashian

Miley Cyrus

Abercrombie and Fitch (fashion)

Kanye West (although he did refer to himself as Jesus)





**“Prepare the
child
for the path,
not the path
for the child.”**

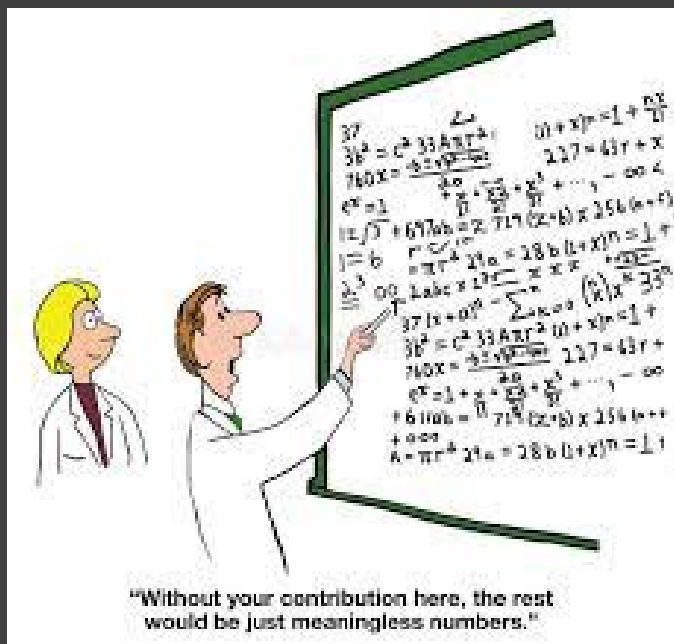
Unknown

The path for success, and for life.

How



It is not easy



It takes time
It requires daily vigilance
It is ever-changing/organic

Must be who you are

- Identify with values – connect to sports
- Be life-driven (consumed)
- Use sports for human potential
- **Make everything about growth, virtue, impact, etc. (change paradigm)**

Example – work ethic:

1. *Work hard because I told you to (external)*
2. *Work hard because you want to get better (serves you)*
3. *Work hard because others are (culture/environment)*
4. *Work hard because it is a virtue that should be an anchor in a productive life (innate)*



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Organizational Alignment

- Staff (Head Coach)
- Board
- Parents
- Team “leaders”



CLEARLY defined mission with a dual mandate

YOU Must be a Culture Creator

Stay ahead of the
culture by
creating the culture.

©hugh



Good ingredients = good soup

The Culture of Cultures - *we must:*

Understand your cultures (and subcultures)

Understand their affect, on environment and performance

Redefine them in terms of what is:

- **Right for humanity**
- **Right for athletics and teams**

Sell the benefits (get buy-in)

Implement them

Demand them

Change the paradigm

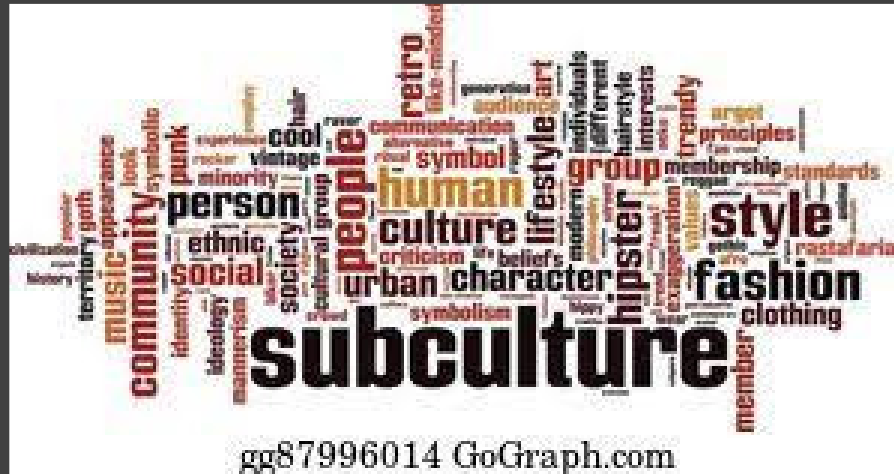
Give kids and athletes back to themselves

Change the world?



Examine sub-cultures of...

- ✓ Attendance
- ✓ Effort
- ✓ Technique -
- ✓ Race maturity
- ✓ Dry land
- ✓ Team support
- ✓ Helping
- ✓ Travel
- ✓ Academics
- ✓ College



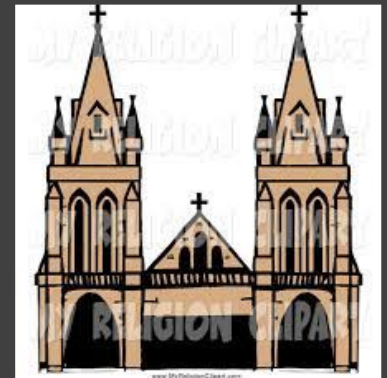
Create a Vision – for athletes, leaders, and team

with sub-visions

“A rock pile ceases to be a rock pile the moment a single man contemplated it, bearing within him, the image of a cathedral.” Antoine de Saint-Exupery

The vision should be success at the highest level, impeccable character, and an inspiring culture, as well as for each sub-culture

We did this with our team twenty+ years ago



And set aggressive (cultural) goals for:

- ✓ Attendance – 90, 80, 70%?
- ✓ Training – known for positive effort
- ✓ Individual performance - next
- ✓ Team performance – VCC, regional, national?
- ✓ Travel – positive, no issues, great leadership
- ✓ Academics – 4.0
- ✓ College – all want to
- ✓ Leadership/mentorship – all want to
- ✓ Etc., etc.



Seek to be the best at what you do.

Performance Specific/Culture-Driven

10% at a National Level

- Development plan
- Supporting culture (from the bottom up)

50% at Far Western/AAA time

- Development plan
- Supporting culture

75%+ retention

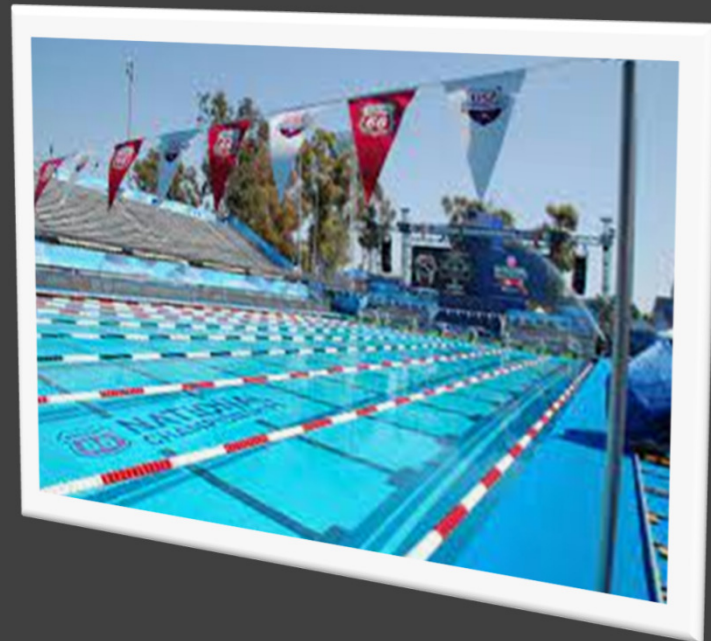
- Retention culture/**best option** – culture will retain

75% swim in college

- Supporting culture – support, assistance, sell

4.0 GPA

- Supporting culture – talk about, require, support
- “we are elite student-athletes”



The Standard Model

Integrity and sportsmanship mentioned in Mission Statement

Coaches may talk about it at a higher level

It is generally absent in the daily process

Kids gravitate to social or athletic flow, or status quo

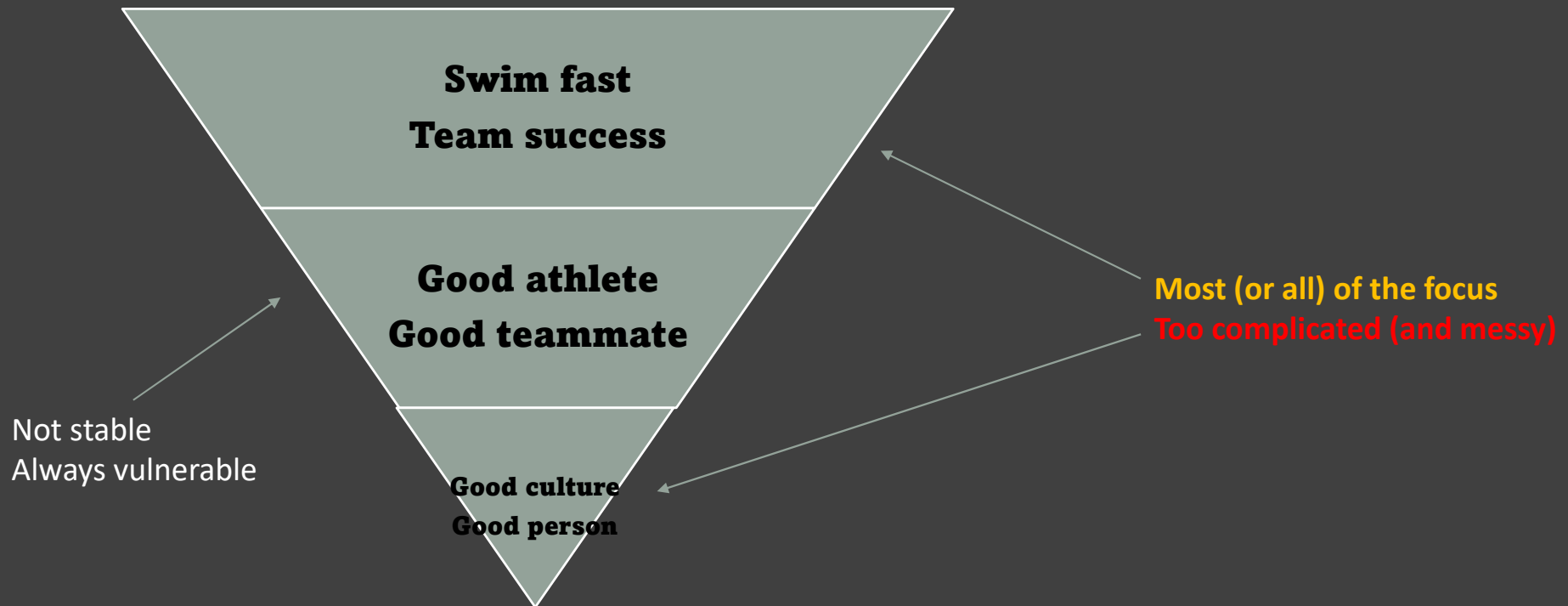
Coaches (and boards) end up putting out fires of poor behavior, giving up, or looking the other way

No “lines in the sand”, or coaches are complicit

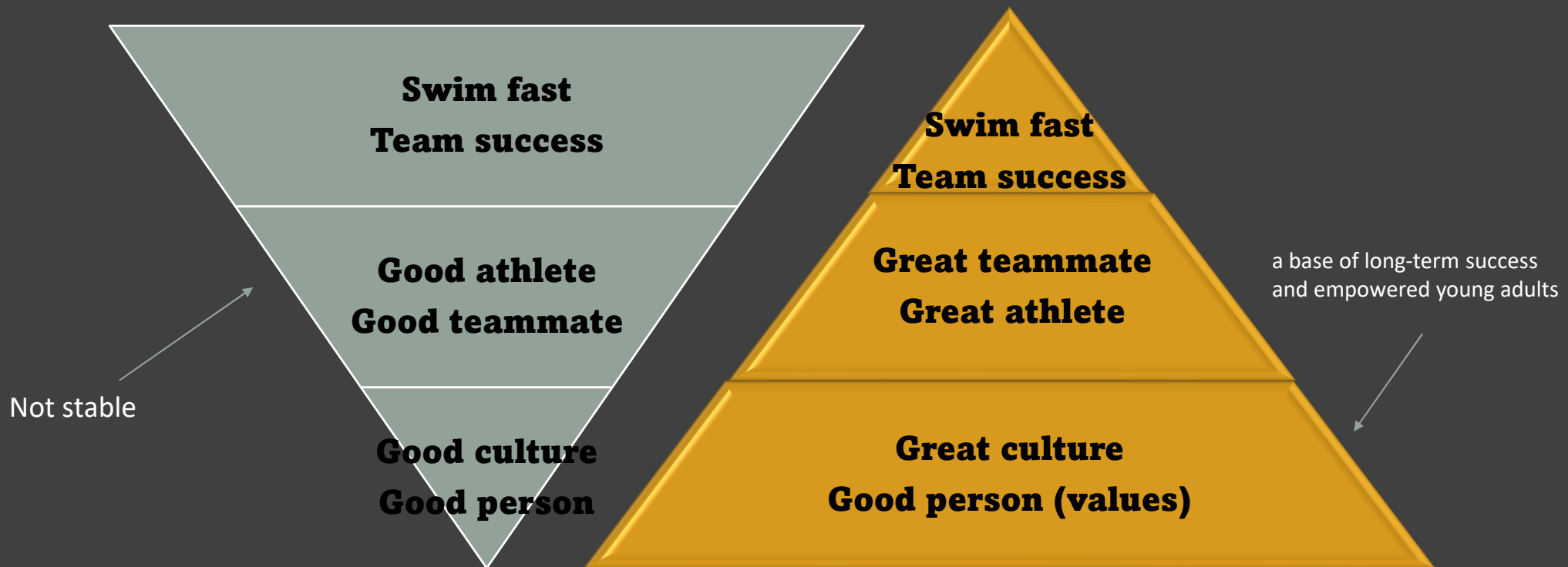
And, the ends justify the means, *IF you are successful (“the culture is bad, but we win”)*



Upside Down Model?



A Stable Cultural Base/Long-Term Foundation



Junior Group/Age Group Focus

Promotion of the bigger concept of “future leader” (learn it now) and avoiding teen traps and pitfalls (discussed)

Make clear that to be on the team, you MUST: be a good teammate (“helper”), be positive, and be a good kid

Sell and emphasize – character, national pursuit, collegiate swimmer/leader, etc. (the path)

Weekly Meetings – articles, letters, discussion, quotes on workouts

Give peer leadership jobs, assign mentors (Senior leaders)

Examples of inspiration, leadership, challenging the social status quo (in middle school)

Coach vigilance (watching in all areas)

Move up criteria – maturity, effort, humility, and help

There is an upward to pull to leadership, values, and service



“If you can’t be a good follower, you’ll never be a good leader.” repeated

Senior Group – “the road less traveled”

Sell/demand – “servant/leader”, role model as their role and responsibility

Weekly Meetings – articles, letters, discussion – value-driven vs. social-driven

Aggressive discussion about hard teen issues

Quotes on workouts

Examples of inspiration, leadership, challenging the teen social status quo

Coach vigilance (watching in all areas)

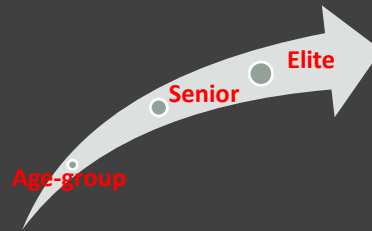
Move up criteria

Two banners in facility – Collegiate Team Captains and Olympic Trial Qualifiers

Highest team recognition is an inspirational award

Perpetual Leadership Model

Seniors **driven** to lead



Junior swimmers **eager** to learn (and lead)

Establish/Demand Core Values



Reposition/Sell the Pillars of Success (and character)

Work ethic/Resilience
– path of **MOST**
resistance (earlier)

Integrity/Trust –
the foundation of all
relationships

Attitude –
only positive/glass half
full (always)

Humility – ego is **need**
for attention/approval,
and toxic

Selfless – service as a
virtue (all great
masters showed this)

Compassion –
humanities great need
(and kids')

Team-oriented (greater
good) – the concept is
a **life concepts** (get
good at it)

The real work that gets you to the downhill side. Ties back to visualization.





Connect Individually (critical)

Care	Care deeply and personally
Support	Support current and long-term goals
Show	Show pathway to personal growth and leadership
Show	Show pathway to swimming potential (what is possible)

Challenges

It is all encompassing and consuming.



Kids – not buying in or being accountable (and honest)

Parents – defending kids to any extreme, or only caring about times

Boards – not supporting (the concept or the staff)

Staff – not aligned

**We, as coaches, can be the ones to
redefine youth culture and drive athletic potential.**



It begins with sports, and it ends with life.

Questions?



Thank you for attending.

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