



Selling the Vision, Building the Team

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It is our privilege this morning to be able to introduce the next speaker. Over the last several years I have had the opportunity to watch from afar the program development of the Orinda Aquatic Club and the thing that has always impressed me the most about it is, it is a team first. It is a team that seems to embrace the concept of team better than most teams are able to do. I believe the team is in the range of a hundred swimmers and yet, every year they are putting kids at the National level – the great Kim Vandenberg hails from the Orinda program. A lot of that, the team concept and the team vision that is brought to their athletes is to the credit of our next speaker, Don Heidary. And so, with that, I will turn it over to Don.

Well, first of all, I would like to thank ASCA and John Leonard for the opportunity to be here and I would like to thank you for attending. I want to apologize; I have some overheads that the font may be a little bit small on some of the slides. They came from a handout that I put together.

Now, clearly this is not one of the most popular topics at the clinic, but it is something that I have actually been obsessed with and consumed with for many years and it is outside the scope of the traditional training and technique talks that you may have the opportunity to hear. What I want to talk about is clearly top down, big picture – it is not quantifiable, but I truly believe is the greatest force in swimming and in life.

On the overhead there is a quote that I came in contact with about 20 years ago and the quote was, "Leadership is all about painting the vision, giving people something worthwhile to follow." Twenty years ago I read that quote and I thought a lot about it. I was coaching at the time – about 300 kids – and I thought well, by definition I am a leader. So was I offering something worthwhile to follow or was I just doing what I thought was right? Was I painting a picture? From that day on I took a global approach to everything that I did and I still think about it today.

In many aspects it is like putting a puzzle together. The borders or framework are the vision of what we do. We work our way into philosophy, culture, policies, integrity, respect, work ethic and finally as we finish the puzzle we achieve great results. Too often we focus on the wrong thing. We try to win a meet with a team that has no identity. We try to fix a stroke for someone who does not work hard. We condemn a parent before we bring them into the process and we criticize a team for not caring when they do not know what to care about. There is often a disconnect between coaches and kids, coaches and parents, parents and kids, and coaches and administrators. They are all involved in the same activity, but yet not on the same page. I believe the disconnect is a lack of a shared vision and an articulated vision.

One story many years ago that stays with me is about somebody that I had coached, who graduated and went on to a major university. He was a water polo player. I called him in the fall and I asked him how things were going, and he said "Great." I asked him how the team was and he said, "We have a lot of talent." And I said, "So you have a shot at winning the National Championship," and his response was, "Probably not." I said, "Well, why not?" And he said, "The guys really are not into morning workout," and that really struck me. So, what happened? I have no doubt that the coach was exceptional and that he obsessed with winning the National Championship every night. But, there was a disconnect and in my opinion the disconnect was the vision was not articulated and not sold. So, John put this in the business track – so how does this relate to business? If you were running or owning a business and you had five minutes to sell your business plan and your objectives to your investors 38 (who would be parents) and your customers (who would be swimmers) on why they should commit their time and money to you – what would you say? How would you differentiate yourself and your program? Take a minute and think about it. How would you define yourself and your program if somebody had to make a choice?



So whether you are a swim team director, a head coach, a group coach, a lane coach, recruiting, or you work with one kid from novice to Olympian – you are a salesman and you are selling a product. And I believe it is the greatest product in the world – sports teams, human potential and human development. Not because it is swimming-related, but because it is life-related. As with my experience that with one quote, I hope that in what I say you find at least one thing that may change your team, your coaching career or your life. A man named David Lent did a study and a documentary on successful people. He found five common traits which I would guess everybody would agree on. But the most significant was, a passion about a vision. In northern California, for those of you that may be aware – the famous De La Salle football team began a dynasty in 1982 when a young coach named Bob Ladouceur was hired. They were a losing team. A quote by a former player, “When Coach Lad was hired, he articulated a vision where he wanted to take the De La Salle program. We all shared in that vision and committed to him.” Now if you are not aware, that became one of the greatest sports success stories in all of high school.

So what I want to do today is ask you a few questions that may be a little introspective, and go through the components of the swim team from a visionary perspective. We all can learn drills. We all can learn sets, but in my opinion, the glue that holds all of that together is the vision that you have, the vision that you sell and the vision that your team buys into. Vision is the invisible force that shapes the world, countries, corporations, individuals and teams. It is said that people spend more time planning a vacation than they do their life. What about your coaching life? Your team’s life?. Not on a day-to-day basis, but a road map to an incredible environment or culture that breeds character, success and fulfillment.

One thing that I would like you to do is list three significant things about your life as a coach – or think about them – what are the three most significant things about your coaching career? For me: I love what I do, I have an opportunity to change lives, and I have an opportunity to serve a community. List the three most important things about your team. What would be the three most significant things about your team? Again, I did this this morning: our character, our respect, our success in developing student athletes that go on to swim in college.

Next question – If you had amnesia and remembered nothing about your past, how would you like to be remembered as a coach and how would you like your team remembered? It is worth taking a minute to think about that. And how would you like other coaches and teams to think about you as a coach and your team? In terms of vision and visualization, we do an exercise every year. This is what I ask the kids to do: to visualize the greatest team in the country – anywhere – I want you to see them clearly in every aspect – what they are wearing – how they carry themselves – how they communicate – how they walk in the gate – how they act in the locker room – how they walk out of the locker room – how they get into the pool – how they warm-up – how they deal with adversity. I want you to create that visualization. We do that with every team every year. And then I ask the kids to put our uniforms and our suits on that team and I ask them, why is it that we cannot be this team? If anybody has a good response, please tell me. And obviously nobody does. We move forward and I tell them – this is our objective. If you can see it – we can be it. It is only our limitations that prevent us. So in terms of vision, that is our vision – nothing less. I would encourage you to do the same.

The next line asks a few questions. What can you sell 200 kids, 400 parents and a staff that will make them commit and sacrifice to you? What are you offering that is worthwhile following? So – what is your vision? Again – there are an infinite number of drills and an infinite number of sets, but I truly believe the vision and your ability to sell it is the glue that holds everything together. What is your hero’s journey and how would you like your story written? I don’t think it is unfamiliar to anybody that coaches do this for passion and I truly believe it is closer to a hero’s journey than anything else. I think it is important for you to know what you would like to be remembered for and what you would like to be accomplished.

Now, I read a great book called, “The Secrets of the Millionaire Mindset.” Now, it was a financial book, but I read it in context of a coach and in terms of success, and he had an interesting concept. If you took all of the money in the United States and put it on a plane and flew over the country and distributed it evenly, within five years it would end up in the same hands. So I thought a lot about that. The interesting thing is – from vision to reality – it probably takes on the average – five years. For somebody to have a vision and to create a reality – it is probably a 5 year plan. So what about swimming success? If you could take all the swimming success in the country – put it on a



plane – fly over the United States and distribute it evenly – in 5 years would it end up in the same place? I think that the answer is yes, and the reason is – we all have a success blueprint.

So it is important to understand what your blueprint is. And if it is not the one you want – you need to change it. You need to be willing to reach for more. Next question: What is preventing you from getting you from where you are now, to where you want to go? These are common obstacles: staff, swimmers, parents, facility. In my opinion, the only real obstacles are vision and mindset. There are too many teams that achieve success and Olympic level swimmers out of a small six lane pool with minimum staff. I believe, and I have seen, and it has been a part of our program, that you can do anything that you truly believe in. The rocking chair test: What could possibly matter 50 years from now – when you are sitting in a rocking chair – for those that are a little bit older – it would be 50 years, but what could possibly matter 50 years from now in terms of what you are doing now? Can you define it? I would say if you can define it, then sell it every day to your team because ideally, 50 years from now, every one of your kids will reflect back on something that was significant.

The next page – some quotes from some books that I have read. The first one, “Jesus, CEO.” What do you tell yourself on a daily basis? What is your mission? Can you define it in one or two sentences? Do feelings stir inside you that might contribute to a better way of life for others? How much do you believe in yourself? What daily energy keeps you from being focused? How do you show your daily commitment? And on and on – again – I truly believe the end result is directly affected by the big picture plan. The next page I am going to talk about selling the vision. There is a quote that says if you want to be happy – set a goal that commands your thoughts, liberates your energy and inspires your hopes. That is not just for you – that is for every kid on your team.

Another one of my favorite quotes, “Come to the edge he said – they said we are afraid – come to the edge he said – they came – he pushed them – and they flew.” Now, it is definitely a quote, but if you think about many teams – too many kids are afraid to make 100% commitment. They are afraid to fully immerse in the process. They like to stay with the mainstream – stay with their friends, but the ones that fully commit realize the benefit. And in addition to that – for a lot of coaches and teams – they fail to fully engage kids in the program. The next quote – “The most pathetic person in the world is the person who has sight, but no vision” – so you can see and you can do, but you have no vision about what is possible. So what is your vision about your team? What is it that you are going to sell every day to kids and to parents? In our program, clearly and simply, we want to create a model organization. We want to have an extraordinary environment where character, integrity and mutual respect rule. We want kids to love swimming and love coming to practice every day. So much so that they want to go on to swim in college and train harder for four years. That is our vision.

You need to have a vision and you need to sell it every day. We talk to the kids constantly about this – why we do what we do. Be clear while you are here. Your vision must be about the greater good. We talk to the kids constantly about this – why we do what we do. Be clear why you are here. Your vision must be about the greater good. When we talk to our kids it is not about us – it is not about the program – it is about them – everyday and they understand that. Specifically, you need to know the community – the environment – the needs – the challenges – the individuals and the opportunities. It has to be a win-win situation. There are programs that focus on winning for the team or winning for the coach. The kids need to know that they are involved in the process.

Sell the bigger picture. Regardless of what your objectives are – you want to win a national championship – you want to win a conference championship – whatever your objectives are – there is a bigger picture and in our view the great lessons of sports and life are here to be learned and enjoyed by everybody. The virtues of commitment, spirit, teamwork, attitude, effort will stay with you forever. Specifically, keep it simple. One of the teams I coached many years ago – we had a catch phrase – simply the best. And it was simply the best about everything and we told the kids that. The way you walk in the gate – the way you warm up – the way you look – the way you talk – the way you act – simply the best and we used the Tina Turner song, “Simply the Best.” It is a great song. We played it at all of our parties, but we reinforced it every day. Our objective is to be Simply the Best at what we do – at everything we do. And the kids bought into it. It was easy to discipline after the fact because they liked the idea and when we did something or somebody did something that did not fit into our philosophy – we talked about it and we made it very clear.



We sell everything - anything and everything – as positive, which I will talk about later. Discipline, as a statement of character; technique, as a statement of efficiency and focus; punctuality as a statement of commitment to the process; team attire as a statement of pride; and humility as a statement of selflessness. We made sure that they understand every component and why it was significant.

What is possible? We talk to the kids a lot about this. Be an athlete as opposed to a participant. Too many kids participate. They show up – they go through the motions. What is the essence of being an athlete? The best of an athlete? Do a sport as opposed to doing an activity, be a team as opposed to a roster, and create a culture as opposed to an organization. We talk to the kids constantly about these things. Anybody can participate. Anybody can do an activity. It is easy to create a roster and it is easy to create an organization, but can you create a culture of athletics, sports that is superior?

The strategy: Communicate and articulate at every opportunity. It is easy to visualize what you want to do, but how do you communicate it? We do this every chance we get – team meetings – pre-meet meetings – group meetings – coach's meeting – parent meetings – workout meetings, individual meetings. I would encourage you to talk to kids and parents at every opportunity. Ask for buy-in. I know that it is a rhetorical question when you have a group of kids in front of you and you say something like, do we want to be the best team in the country? And they say yes, but once they do, they have bought in. And two significant things happen – they have made a commitment and you now have the responsibility. So buy-in is critical. Everyone must be on the same page. Too often there is an identity crisis in teams. Some want to have fun – some want to win – some are striving for success – there has to be a common theme on a team and everyone must understand it. Now, don't make it about winning – make it about mastering. It may seem a little bit off what your objective is, but winning is relevant. If you are in a weak league – winning may seem successful at first, but it is not really moving you forward. Make it about mastery – getting better at every aspect of your team – training – warming up – walking in the gate – your appearance. In that respect, everybody can win. Don't make it about being better than somebody else - people want to beat teams in leagues, but you know what? If the next year that team is weaker and you beat them – you may be weaker as well. Make it about being better than you were the day before.

Reinforce the positive – don't tolerate the negative. We make it very clear to our team – when they do well we let them know – when they do not do well as a team or as an individual – we are very aggressive about sending that message. Empower leaders, engage laggards. If there are people that are moving forward, pull them out and talk to them. You are doing a great job. If there are people that are struggling – pull them out and talk to them. These are the things that we want you to do. Begin with tactical discipline – it is just not how we do things and this is very important. If things are not working you should send a message of discipline. The reason is – this is not who we are. If you have articulated a vision – you need to send the message back – we don't do it this way. You need to understand. The kids that buy into the bigger picture will understand.

Visualize everything. We have a saying that we talk to our team when we do things and if they think they do a good job we say, well – that would be great for an average team. Is that your objective? And they realize again – a rhetorical question – well no, but it is poor for a great team. You need to understand because in simplified context – kids think they do a good job. If they want to be the best team, it needs to be better, so you need to put it in perspective.

Okay next – on selling a team – building the team. The best way to improve the team is to improve yourself and again with regard to team there seems to be a disconnect. Kids think the team is an entity and they are over here. If they like what the team is doing then they will get involved. If they don't – they will stay over here. Maybe they come late – maybe they get in late – maybe they are not as focused. You need to make sure there is no disconnect. Everybody affects the team in every way. And we talk about this – literally from the time you walk in the gate – how you take the covers off the pool – you are a part of the team process. There is no disconnect. You do not get to choose when you are a team player and when you are part of a team process. Another quote, "Personal relationships are the fertile soil from which all advancement, all success and all achievement in real life grows." We



sell that. So what is your vision with your team? Our vision is to have the greatest team environment possible. We do not tolerate any negative behavior. There was a great quote from the movie, "Miracle." I am sure most of you have seen it. "This cannot be a team of common man – who do you play for?" If you saw the movie – emotionally it was a great point in the movie, but the significance which we told our kids – it is not that that was emotional, it is that that was the point where all of the players in the US Hockey Team abandoned their individual identity and

gave in to the team process. They let go of themselves and gave over to the team. The other thing that they did was they embraced work ethic. If you remember that scene again – again – again – they finally got it, so the two significant things in that movie that changed the course of the US Hockey Team and the greatest sporting event in US sports history was the abandonment of individuality and ego – giving over to the team and embracing work ethic. And if you really look at what a team needs – that's it. It could not have been more evident and certainly wasn't more evident than in that movie.

I read a book called "Mutant Message Down Under," which I do not think was widely distributed, but I think it had a good message. There was a US reporter that ended up with an Aboriginal tribe in the Australian outback and she wanted to learn more about them and she wanted to write a story. In one specific instance, they wanted to play games and she said, "Well, I have a game. Why don't we all line up here and we will race to that rock and see who wins." And there was silence and she looked around – they didn't speak English – there was a translator – and she said, "I do not understand." and the translator came back to her and said, "Why would we play a game where one person wins and everyone else loses?" Well, to me, that was the most significant thing in the book, and I thought, "Can we create an environment where everyone wins?" Certainly we want to swim fast and we want people to do well, but can we have a winning opportunity for everybody? In selling the team, you have to sell commitment and sacrifice, as talked about in the movie "Miracle." Without sacrifice, it won't happen. The more you sell the kids – the more they sell the parents – the more you sell the parents – the more they sell the kids. Your success depends on the team success and we tell kids this often in developing a team vision. It is not about you, it is about the team success. The better the team does – the better you do.

Another concept – the team is no more than the collective actions, attitudes, and efforts of everyone. As I said earlier, it is not an entity unto itself. If somebody walks into morning workout with their head down I stop them. You can't do this – this is not good for the team. Tell me why you don't want to be here. We reverse that pretty quickly. So in terms of selling the vision and the team, everybody must understand the greater benefit. This is probably one of the most significant aspects in visualizations – you can have the wind at your back or the wind at your face. We talk about this regularly with the team. A great team environment is like you as an individual having the wind at your back. A weak team environment is with you having the wind at your face – which do you choose?

Another concept is One Stitch. The one stitch concept is - visualize the greatest piece of clothing that you have. It is probably easier for the girls than the guys, but they come up with something. I ask them to think about one stitch coming undone from a seam – it is not a big deal. Two? Probably not a big deal. You would still wear it and it looks good. Three, four – a hole develops in your favorite article of clothing, but if you don't deal with it – eventually it unravels and you need to understand that. So, what is the one stitch? Is it walking in late? Is it having a negative attitude? The kids need to understand – the one stitch concept. The power of one – we talk about a lot. The power of one is – it only takes one person to make a commitment to the process and to the team and that is you. One – one person will make this an extraordinary organization. We have 70 kids in our high school group. We only ask one kid – make a commitment.

Create an environment where people swim more for the team than for themselves. We recently had a situation at our championship meet where a kid came up to me and said, "Don – I would like to talk to you about the free relay." My first thought was, there is a problem. I said, "What do you want to talk about?" and he told me about a kid in the group that had been working hard and really wanted to swim on the relay and I said, "What is your point?" And he said, "I want to give up my spot." Now, that is not too common, but if you create an environment that is focused on team – the kids will pick up on that sort of thing.



In terms of the strategy: the thing that we demand is team attire at all meets. Team caps – we tell kids they cannot swim in a meet if they do not have a team cap. We have team caps worn at workouts. We reinforce everyone as part of the team – its success and its failure. Celebrate the success of others. We go to a lot of meets and we demand that kids cheer for everyone because you will never know when you will be the one in the water in a final swim, struggling to win an event and you want to see your teammates at the other end of the pool. So we demand it. We create a “WE” environment. We use WE always. It is never “I” or “You.”

This is another significant thing. We punish and reward as a team. Now, if you do this the individuals will not like it. They may rebel. They may even quit. “Well, that is bullshit – I didn’t do anything wrong.” – clearly the individual. The team players embrace it. “You are right. We didn’t do a good job.” So that is another thing that we do.

Communicate with everyone every day. We try to talk to every kid every day about something. Two cancers on a team are ego and negativity. Recognize them early and take action. On our team – it is not tolerated and not allowed. We have a saying, if you have an ego – you have a problem. We will help you with your problem or you can get help somewhere else, but not here.

Manage the life of an athlete – not the season of a swimmer. Very big picture. We like to write workouts. We like to make sure that workouts are the right workouts for the day, but can you take a step back – enough to look at this workout in the life of a swimmer? We do that. Be great the way you walk in – warm-up – cheer, as I talked about. Being a committed team person and being great is not just one action, but it is constant. In this picture we were at the San Diego President’s Day Classic in February and you can see that there was a lot of team support. This is the thing that I watch, and I am not going to sugar-coat it, we tell the kids to do this. But they actually embrace it and, as you can see in this picture, everyone is in team attire. Even the coach on your right is in team attire. That is definitely a high priority when we travel. When we went to this meet we had 50 teenagers with no chaperones. They were on time every time. They were in team attire at every point on the trip and there was no problem. And I want to tell you – this was our vision right here. That we could take 50 teenagers, when in a community everybody was concerned about traveling. But because we had established an infrastructure that was based on character, integrity, and respect, that we could do this. And not only did we do it – it was easy. We really did not have to do anything. So, this is a phenomenal group of kids and this picture was one example of the great things that they did at this meet.

So to conclude: When I was young, at meets I used to watch times. Now I watch the team and I try to see if this team is moving forward in the way we want, that this team is creating the vision that we want. It is less important how they do in individual races and more important how they act in the big picture. The next slide is selling the coaches. Now in terms of the coaches, what we look at is – a team within a team. Coaches need to understand, if you are the head coach, that your staff is working with you and not for you. It will accelerate the process. There is a quote that you may be aware of. “The mediocre teacher tells, the good teacher explains, the superior teacher demonstrates, the great teacher inspires.” There was a book by Jim Collins, “Good to Great,” which talked about the close link between a great company and a great life. Now we certainly look at our swim team as a great company and it is the people that you ride the bus with. Are they people that you love and respect on a daily basis? You need to make sure you find those people, hire those people, embrace those people and keep those people.

So in terms of your coaching vision, what is it that you are trying to accomplish? Again, our objective is to be a team within a team. On our coaching staff, we literally go back 40 years. We have known our next assistant coach since he was two years old. We grew up with him, coached him, hired him and have been with him ever since. I think that the staff that you employ is critical to your overall vision. Some of the things that we sell coaches: How many people can influence a large group in some of the most significant areas of their life? If you think about it, and I have talked to even young coaches about this, it is not a common thing and it is very significant. How many people? Can an accountant do that? Can a lawyer do that? Maybe a doctor. A coach can do that. The opportunity to work with and positively influence a large group of people – primarily children – is the greatest thing you can do. Now, I can’t imagine anything better, so in terms of coaches, we sell the benefits, we sell the vision, we make sure



that we hire the right people. The strategy: It begins and ends with you. Lead by example. The staff must buy in. You must speak the same language and see the same vision – everyday. A divided staff will lead to a divided team. You may not realize that early on, but it will materialize.

Another concept: Who is grading you? After 30 years I literally do this on the way in. I challenge myself to do a great job. On the way out, I grade myself. And actually, when I don't do a good job, I get upset with myself. Do you have ten years experience, or one year experience repeated ten times? A great saying I heard a long time ago and I thought about it. You know, a lot of people have some something a long time and they think they have a lot of experience, but they repeat the same thing over and over again. Are you gaining experience or repeating experience?

Create an environment where people will want to volunteer to work for you. Be a leader: look like a leader, act like a leader, talk like a leader. Respect is key. The kids and the coaching staff must respect you. On our coaching staff, some small things: we don't sit, eat, socialize. We try to send a message back to the kids every day – "We are as committed as you are to this process." Be willing to do what is in the best interest of the team – even if it is not popular. Now, in terms of strategy: Hire from within, all things being equal. Hire great people, great role models, great character, great leaders. Have a progression plan, a succession plan, a backup plan. Delegate. Have regular staff meetings, pre and post-meet meetings. Have workout meetings, head coach to spend time with all of the staff. The kids used to joke with us that we would set up meetings to schedule meetings. The main thing was communication about every aspect of the program. I am going to go quickly through the rest of it because this is important.

Selling the parents: Now, can I take a quick show of hands? Positive or negative: Positive – you view parents as positive. Raise your hand. Negative – raise your hand. Okay, so the question is, Clearly they can be an asset – how do you embrace them? How do you bring them into the process? How do you get the best of parents? I know that it is a double-edged sword. Some programs do not allow parents on the deck, some programs do. I will be honest with you. In our program parents ask if they can come and watch workout, and I tell them, "I want you to watch workout because I want you to see what your kid is doing. I want you to see the peer group. I want you to see what the workout does. It is an extraordinary process. Please come and watch it. Understand your boundaries, but yes – watch the workout. We would love for you to see what you are making an investment in." In terms of the parents – sell the benefits of the program, the process, the sport, at every opportunity. Every time we talk to parents, whether it is an individual, or a meeting or community event, we talk about our program and the process. We just keep trying to sell it. We know it is not easy, but we want parents to buy in. One note: Know how you are perceived. There are some coaches that are not perceived strongly by parents and they discount them. In my opinion you should always understand how you are perceived by parents. You should know, and if there is something you do not agree with, you should address.

Selling training: This is an easy one. In my opinion, and I think in general consensus, the greatest virtue in the world is a work ethic. So we sell that. Don't look at it as getting up in the morning or coming to workout. Look at it as embracing workout ethic – the greatest virtue that you can have. The strategy: Have kids start with the big picture. When we do goal setting we don't look at times. We don't look at records. The first thing we look at is attendance, work ethic and attitude. If you cannot set those goals and meet them – forget the time. It is never going to happen. Set the big goals first. In terms of selling training – it is the greatest virtue you can possibly master. There was a movie out recently called "The Greatest Gift". It was not widely viewed. I went and saw the movie. The first gift – the first gift that was given to an arrogant, undisciplined, young man was a work ethic. The first one – the foundation of everything else was work ethic.

In terms of training: there are things that we do – we monitor the workout in every capacity. We try to make sure that we prepare the best workout, for the week, the cycle, the season, the year, and I'm going to be honest with you, the career. When we write a workout, does this fit into the career – will this make him better? Make them think – make the stroke better – create an environment where discipline is inevitable. We try to control technique and control endurance. It is easy to do. The things we emphasize: If you don't count, you don't care. Every lap, every stroke matters. We make sure we organize groups to build a team environment. In terms of selling



technique – we clearly sell it as the foundation of your development. Perfect practice makes perfect. Practice makes permanent. Technique is like ironing the wrinkles out of a beautiful shirt, and we create that visualization. The most valued thing that you own is wrinkled. Imagine doing stroke work as ironing the wrinkles out, because most strokes can be beautiful, but they need work. The strategy: Stroke keys. Every swimmer must know personal stroke keys and fundamental stroke keys in their stroke. The way we do things – we get buy-in from kids on committing to technique. We make technique a source of team pride. We take pride in the way we value technical development. We talk about bottom up or top down. We will either train you and develop your strokes or develop your strokes and train you. If you do not focus 100% on your strokes, you are going to get trained – You choose. They always choose technique.

Okay, my personal favorite is selling the negative, building the team. This is probably the most significant and the hardest. Obviously, in sports and in anything that is adverse, there are challenges. What we try to do is position them as a positive. That which challenges you makes you stronger. The glass is always half full. A thing is not good or bad – only your perception makes it so. We talked about this the other day. Vegetables, homework; the kids go – ah, that's good – that's bad. But in terms of things being bad, if you can deal with them and get good at it, that only makes you better. We have a very strong theme – that is, to be above the weather. It is a mental and a physical challenge and our entire team has embraced it. We had a championship meet and it happened to rain. And we did really well. Our team embraced the concept. What we try to do is find the most negative thing and position it as a positive. The positive is that, if I can do this well – what else can I do? We also tell them, taking pool covers off in the wind and rain at 5:30 in the morning may be a negative thing, but can you position it as a positive? And it is pretty easy to do. If I can stay positive when I can do this – how will I be in the rest of my life? So, we strongly encourage that.

The c-word: no complaints – not tolerated – not allowed. You are not allowed to complain about anything. In our workouts we get kids out of the water on a regular basis. That is for several reasons – mostly to explain the sets. A lot of times it is windy and it is raining. We tell them simply, "If you cannot deal with five minutes of wind and rain, how do you expect to be an elite athlete?" And immediately they realize, "I need to deal with this." And they do. So, we get kids out of the pool in the wind and rain, and we go over a set, and nobody says a word. They don't even shiver. They do not let their teeth chatter. They just listen, because they understand the mental and the physical challenge and they want to overcome. That alone is a great concept and we all often hear kids say, "Be above the weather." And another thing – well actually it is anything. If you are warming up and the pool is crowded – typically kids will come out and say, "It is too crowded. I can't do a good job." We say, "But what if you had to do a good job? What if this was the biggest meet of your life and you had to do a good job in a crowded pool? Would you do it?" "Maybe." "Well, do it." So any negative repositions as a positive. Get kids to do that and get them good at it.

Selling character: This is easy, and our catch phrase is "Character first." Our philosophy is, "With character first – work ethic, integrity and everything else follows." I think you end up chasing a lot of things if you put character last. So we tell them right off the bat, "This is a character first environment. If you can't live in that environment, it is probably not going to work out well for you." So from a character-first environment, it is easy to get work ethic. It is easy to get kids to focus on technique. It is easy to get kids to focus on the team commitment. "Do the right thing." The litmus test that we use, which makes it easy for kids is, "If Ron or Don were standing next you, would you do it?" And, the answer gets pretty easy. "We sell character as the foundation of your life – not the foundation of this swim team, but the foundation of your life – do the right thing. The better the athlete – the better the person – the better the team."

I will conclude with: Let's get real: which is based on a story from years ago and my public service message to coaches. When I was young and I was coaching 16 hours a day – I remember a dad came up to me and he said, "How is it going?" And I said, "Ah you know – it is actually pretty hard. You know, I am up at six and I am going to bed at 12 and doing a lot of work and I am in the sun." And his response was, "Wait until you get into the real world!" And I thought, "Wow – the real world. I wonder what that is like?" because I was pretty stressed and pretty fatigued.



So as years went on, I thought about the real world versus my world and I realized eventually that my world *was* the real world. We were dealing with life. We were dealing with change. He was dealing with success and money. And I really remember looking up to him – he had a white shirt, red tie, navy suit. He was very successful and I did want to be like him.

One note I made on this is, depending on your coaching situation, negotiating with a 5 year old to swim the fourth leg of a relay, as the third swimmer approaches on a cold Wednesday night meet – some of you have been in that situation – giving a motivational speech to bring a team back from a deficit, dealing with a teenager that decides to put themselves ahead of the team, staying composed when dealing with an upset parent – we deal with this sometimes on a daily basis.

So what is the real world? Being creative? Being challenged? Communicating clearly? Having a positive attitude? Dealing with pressure every day? Being analytical? Being organized? Supervising? Teaching? Motivating? Negotiating? Managing? Disciplining? Planning? Goal setting? Creating a vision? It is not uncommon for you to do this every day, so what is the real world? In my opinion – and I did work on the business side for years – the real world is what we do. We do change lives. We do make a difference. We do deal with things every day that most of the world doesn't deal with. And I made a few notes – business has too much individualism, ego, selfishness. They want what you offer. I have talked to several people over the years and their response is. "I would love to do what you do and I would love to be who you are." So in conclusion, on the summary, I encourage you to create a vision for your team. Sell it with a passion. Articulate it. And all things will follow. And again, in terms of drills and sets, they are there for everybody. But I truly believe there is an invisible force that really drives the success of your team, and it is not a drill and it is not a set – and I love them and I use them. But you need to have a vision, and you need to sell it, articulate it and you need to build your team from that point. Finally, I thank you for your time and I wish that your vision becomes your reality. Thank you very much. Don Heidary

