

WHAT IT TAKES TO HAVE SUCCESS

Here's a salty part of success that doesn't get enough attention: No matter how grand your goals, the process will suck some of the time.

Understanding this is one of the drivers that demonstrates how willing we are to handle the tough patches and setbacks that inevitably arise.

The Sacrifice-Free Myth

Big time success requires sacrifice. The S-word has gotten a bad rap lately. Modern culture and media demonstrate that we can have our cake and eat it too. Common ad headlines such as the following should immediately come to mind: "Lose 25 pounds in 6 weeks eating whatever you want!" or "Get a six-pack without having to go to the gym!"

We are being told that we can have the best of both worlds. We can satisfy those short term pleasure drivers (eating McDonalds three times a day) while also getting the long term goals we want (excellent health, a six pack).

Don't buy into this myth.

Anything worth achieving comes with a corresponding amount of sacrifice. Generally speaking the bigger the goals, the harder you will have to work, the more you will sacrifice.

If you want to crush your best time but you aren't willing to show up to every workout it's probably not going to happen. If you want to beat a long-standing age group record, but you aren't willing to go above and beyond in training, then your odds of success decrease at a nearly hysterical rate. If you want to make the Olympic team, but don't believe you have to live the lifestyle of a 24/7 athlete to do so, then I have some bad news for you.

Defining What Sacrifice Is — And Isn't

Let's consider what the word sacrifice actually means. It doesn't mean giving up something for nothing – even though for many people that's the knee jerk definition that comes to mind.

If anything, it is the opposite. We aren't giving up something we want for something we don't want. **We are giving up one thing in order to gain something greater.**

The hard part about sacrifice is giving up the short term pleasure of something (staying out late with friends when you have morning workout) for the long term pleasure of something else (having a great workout that will lend itself to achieving your goals down the road).

When some swimmers see what would be required of them to be successful they balk. They stall. They can't imagine themselves being comfortable with the sacrifices needed to swim to the outer reaches of their ability. And believe it or not – that's okay. In fact, it's *normal*. Being uber-successful in the pool is weird. It's unconventional, and it requires going against the current.

What Are You Willing to Sacrifice?

Instead of listing the things you have to do to achieve your goals, write out the list of things that you are willing to endure, to suffer, and to sacrifice in order to punch your goals in the face:

- Will you eat a well balanced meal instead of mowing down convenience food?
- Will you stick through the workouts where your stroke feels off and your muscles and lungs ache?
- Will you show up to morning workout even though that bed of yours is calling out to you?
- Will you pass on a night out with your friends because you have a mammoth workout in the morning?
- Will you give up watching TV mid-week so that you can get your homework done and get the sleep you need to recover?
- Will you give up the temporary comfort to gain permanent success in the pool?

It's easy to say what we are willing to do to achieve our goals, but take it a step further and think about you are willing to sacrifice in order to achieve your goals. Consider the questions above, think on the answers, and ask yourself if you are truly prepared to do what is necessary to achieve greatness in the water.

11 Things Your Swimming Coach Is Tired of Yelling

1.) Don't breath in and out of your turns

Let's just face it, even the most dedicated athletes can have a lazy moment. Being a distance swimmer myself, I have grown accustomed to breathing just about whenever I feel like it. Just know that breathing in and out of your turns not only adds time to your race, but actually slows you down after you propel off each wall.

2.) Dolphin kick past the flags

Obviously there are some exceptions to this. For example, don't dolphin kick past the flags if you're swimming the 100 breaststroke. Other than that, always use it to your advantage. The dolphin kick is Michael Phelps' signature move each race. It's practically his secret weapon that helped him take down his opponents in Beijing, London, Sydney, and Athens. If you strive for perfection like Phelps, listen to your coach and do the kick all professional swimmers have down pat.

3.) You don't need 10 breaths in a 50 freestyle

For the top sprinters on my team, I'm always hearing my coach tell them to not take any more than three breaths in a 50 freestyle. Taking a breath during your sprint takes away the momentum you built from your start and turn. As all sprinters know, it only takes one breath for you to be in or out of a final night swim.

4.) Finish the ENTIRE cool-down

It's the end of practice and you've had enough of swimming, you just want to get out and go eat everything in your refrigerator. So, you cut that 400 warm down into a 50, along with some dolphin dives and blowing bubbling rings up from the bottom of the pool. It might seem fun, but the point of cool-down is to flush out the lactic acid you built up in your system so you're not tight and sore the next day for practice or the next race.

5.) Don't breathe into your finish

No matter if you're a distance swimmer or sprinter, there is never a need to breathe into a

6.) Don't break stroke

It can be hard to swim butterfly in a lane with a bunch of other swimmers, but sometimes it just has to be done. Don't try and take the easy way out and break stroke unless you really feel like you're going to hit and seriously injure another swimmer.

7.) Breathing at the flags doesn't count as doing the whole lap underwater

My club coach was always yelling this at my team in high school. If you have an underwater set and you come up at the flags, you're cheating yourself about five yards each lap. That's only going to hurt you in the end.

8.) Complaining about the set will not change it

No matter how much you pout, cry or yell, the set is going to stay the way the coach wrote it. It's meant to be challenging and hard. If it's not, you're not getting anything out of it and you won't go any faster at championships than you did the year before.

9.) Don't circle swim in your races

Doing this when you race actually adds to the yardage you have to swim. Would you rather race 50 yards or 53 yards?

10.) Do the breathing pattern correctly

If your coach says breath 5, 7, 9 by 25, then don't breathe every 3. These types of sets are coaches' favorite to reset if they see their team doing it incorrectly, so you might as well do it right the first time.

11.) KICK I'm guilty of this too. Pretty much every meet I turn to breath and I see my coach making the signal for me to kick more. Getting into a good kicking rhythm in your race is important for every swimmer – don't let your arms do all the work!

TEN THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AT PRACTICE

1) Look Down

Everyone jokes about following the black line all practice, but I've known plenty of athletes who spent more time looking for the wall than down at the pool bottom. Raising your head out of the neutral position does wonky things with your body position – not to mention it can give you a seriously sore neck after two hours. Relaxing your neck to lower your head may, at first, feel like you're burying it. Ask a coach or a teammate to tell you if your senses are giving you accurate information. The waterline should be about mid-cap on the top of your head, deep enough that when you rotate to breathe, one goggle is easily submerged.

2) Finish Past the Wall

Frequently, sprinters are the only ones who seem to grasp this concept – and only during their fast sets. What's the difference between finishing well in a fast set and making sure to touch the wall before lifting your head during warm up? Really, there is none. Your body will do in a race what it has trained to do in practice, and if it has learned two different behaviors in workouts, your body is going to pick the easier one when you're too dead exhausted to tell it differently.

For distance athletes – maybe most races don't come down to touch-outs, but how great is it to be able to brag that you out-touched your competition by .01 *in the mile*? Or, in a race that isn't supposed to be so close, would you rather explain to coach how lifting your head and gliding on the way in managed to lose you that race by a hundredth?

So here it is – whether it's reps in warm up, warm down, hard aerobic work or guns blazing pace sets, drive hard into that wall. It's not hard to do, and everyone loves down-to-the-wire victory stories. Especially the victors.

3) Where's Your Hand?

When you're swimming, can you answer this question? Where do you put your hand in? Where do you lock into your catch on the water, and what's the pattern of your pull? When you do butterfly do you make a keyhole shape, or do you pull straight down like two simultaneous freestyle arm pulls? Knowing where your hand is in the water can help create a physical awareness that will allow you to make adjustments in a set as you get tired. Know what swimming "right" feels like, so you can keep your body engaged as it gets tired.

Also, building a kinesthetic awareness can help you make changes in your stroke – like if you sweep out too wide in your catch, or cross over underneath your body as you pull. Ask a coach to look at your stroke for suggestions.

4) Count Your Kicks

If you do underwater kick sets, counting your kicks is the surest way to get across the pool without panicking that you are going to drown. There's just something about knowing that there are only X more kicks to go before you can surface and gulp in sweet air for a few seconds before having to resubmerge and do it again.

Counting doesn't just help with kick sets though – knowing how many kicks you take off each wall in a race can help you prepare in practice to become better. Experiment – do you swim faster with a few more kicks? Or fewer? Once you know your number, try to maintain it off every single wall. If you're doing repeat 200s, make sure that last wall has the same (or more!) kicks as the first wall. If you don't count, you won't know.

5) Count Your Strokes

Along the same vein as counting your kicks, counting your strokes provides a good idea of where you are in the pool, and how your training compares to your racing. If you are practicing at race pace and you know you take 15 strokes a length, but today you're hitting 19, think about holding onto more water, and maybe slowing the arms down a little. If you usually are at 15 and today it's only taking 13 strokes to cross the pool, see if you can decipher what's different. Are you going slower? Are you going faster? Are you taking more kicks off the wall than usual? Are you holding onto water better? Knowing what you are doing in practice is a good way towards becoming your best self.

6) What's Your Time?

While at one point or another, we all want to kill the clock because the sendoff approaches too soon, or time stops and practice takes *forever*, the clock is a tool for you. Use it. Know your times – on everything. I know my splits for a warm up 300. That's probably overkill. However, knowing how fast your easy is will give you an idea of where you stand before workout even begins for the day. You might feel crappy in the water, but if you look at the clock during warm up and see you're cranking out 1:10s on easy 100s – maybe despite how you're feeling, your body is ready to go today!

The other part of this is *remembering* your times. I don't know how many times I've heard coaches ask their athletes, "What's a good time for you on this set?" and all they get is a shrug in response, or a wild guess after a minute's hesitation. Don't be that athlete. Know that a 30 second 50 breast might be outside your range on :40, but that you can cruise :28 freestyle 50s on that same interval without breaking a sweat.

7) Turns

Do not look up when you start a turn. Do not raise your head. Do not grab the wall and try to climb to the ceiling before giving up and re-submerging to push off dejectedly in the other direction. Turns are like finishes for many people – we've got so many of them during practice that we just sort of tune them out. In some aspects, turns are *worse* because there are so many more. That's good news as well as bad. Because there are so many turns, and because we get sloppy in long sets where we'd rather think about the latest gossip on Facebook or what's for dinner, often we train our bodies to be sloppy where turns are concerned. Heads raised, feet crossed, one-handed open turns – all sloppy. All fixable. *Because* there are so many turns, if you think about them all the way through that set of 12 x 200, in the space of one set, you can begin to make a difference in your swimming. Pretty cool, huh? The downside is that to keep any alterations you make you'll have to keep thinking – for a lot of practices, until the changes take hold and your body forgets how bad it once was in light of how good it has become.

8) Breakouts

Ever heard another athlete tell her coach that she *could* have had a great 100 fly, but her breakouts were bad? Got caught under water, kicked too far so her feet were breaking the surface, lost momentum, just plain stopped in the water.

Don't be that swimmer. When you're dealing with breakouts, some sort of speed is key. Gliding to the surface is not okay. Off every wall, you have a chance to figure out what the best way for you to begin swimming is. Coaches can give excellent pointers on things like this one.

9) What's the Point?

Usually I don't condone asking questions during a practice, but if you're really stuck for things to think about, this question can sometimes work wonders. Occasionally a coach will ask you to do something that sounds ridiculous. Maybe it's a 200 of backwards swimming. Maybe it's butterfly with a freestyle kick. Maybe you'll spend twenty minutes swimming in circles without touching the wall – whatever it is, sometimes asking what the point of a crazy notion is, is a good idea. Knowing what you should be striving to accomplish in the set is part of the point, after all – no good going through the motions if you won't be able to gauge your own success!

But don't ask questions when it's an aerobic set you want to get out of. You won't escape.

10) Eavesdrop

If you've run out of things to think about in practice, then this little nugget might get your brain going again. Listen to what your coach tells other athletes. Think about your own stroke, and whether you are doing what your coach is asking someone else to do. This one requires a lot of control: if Coach tells Swimmer A he needs to stop reaching so far on his freestyle and *you* take the advice, you may not be getting from it what Swimmer A would (if he turned his brain on and listened). Maybe your freestyle arms are already right. The point of eavesdropping is trying to gain nuggets to compare to your own technique and see if there are areas where you might be able to improve. But check with your coach before making any radical changes!

Any other thoughts or ideas for things to work on and think about during practice?

COLLEGE SWIMMING

To all aspiring college level swimmers out there, here are 10 things you should know about the college recruiting process.

ONE

You are allowed to contact any coach via e-mail at any time. This includes sophomores and freshmen. During that time, however, coaches are only allowed to send general info via snail mail. As a sophomore & junior, your job is to fill out recruiting forms of any college you are interested in swimming for. Be sure to fill out as many of the fields as possible, as accurately as possible. This will create a file of your information in the coach's office.

TWO

"General correspondence" can begin any time after September 1st of your junior year. General Correspondence means that a coach can begin to contact potential recruits via e-mail. These emails will likely invite you to fill out a recruiting form on their website if you haven't already. If you are interested in a coach who reached out to you, keep the contact going. Update the coach on your athletic and academic progress. The more you improve both in and out of the pool, the more they will want you. Remember: even though coaches are allowed to e-mail you, they are not allowed to call you. You are, however, permitted to call them. If they are able to answer, they can talk to you, but they are not allowed to call you under any circumstances, including returning a voicemail.

THREE

The summer following your junior year is when coaches are allowed to contact recruits via phone (July 1 for D-I, June 15 for D-II, no restrictive dates for D-III or NAIA).

FOUR

If a coach is interested in you, they will invite you on an official recruiting trip. These give you an opportunity to stay over in a dorm with members of the swim team, go to class with them, and get a feel for what it would be like to attend the school. Official recruiting trips are typically paid for by the team, though policies are changing to increase the financial burden on a prospective athlete. Unofficial recruiting trips require the athlete to pay for their food and other fees while they are visiting, in addition to covering their transportation and housing costs. But remember, an unofficial trip can become official if a team so much as buys a recruit a hot dog. Coaches will often invite high school juniors to attend a more general Junior Day, which are often available to all prospective students, not just student-athletes. Official visits only allow a recruit to be on campus for 48 hours.

FIVE

As seniors, athletes are limited to 5 official visits to Division I schools. Because Division III schools do not offer athletic scholarships, student athletes can take recruiting trips to an unlimited number of Division III schools, but only one official visit per school. As of last year, Division II now allows unlimited official visits by prospective student-athletes.

SIX

High school student athletes are not allowed to practice with Division I teams on recruiting trips, though they can use the practice facility as long as coaches are not present. Athletes can practice with Division II teams.

SEVEN

Rules about accepting compensation to swim are very complex. The NCAA rules were changed a few years ago and this area is still pretty gray. If a recruit has inadvertently accepted “prize” money they can usually return it and regain their eligibility. As long as money is given for expenses recruits are allowed to receive it. As you know FINA has also started to sponsor swimmers from underdeveloped countries by paying for everything including extra living expenses, which is allowed by the NCAA. When in doubt, seek out advice directly from the NCAA.

EIGHT

Once you have received your athletic scholarship details, you may decide to sign a letter of intent. This binding agreement commits you to attend the university and swim for their team, receiving the amount of scholarship money you have been given.

NINE

Once you have signed a letter of intent, you are allowed unlimited contact with your future coach.

TEN

Before the signing periods, an athlete may verbally commit to a college or university, however, verbal commitments can be broken.

Although it can be overwhelming, remind yourself that whatever happens, you will end up at a school where you can excel academically and athletically. Have fun when choosing the best place for you. You are preparing for what has the potential to be the best four years of your life.

General Collegiate Swimming Information

[NCAA – National Collegiate Athletic Organization](#)
[NAIA – National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics](#)
[NJCAA – National Junior College Athletic Association](#)
[CollegeSwimming.com](#)

Athletic Scholarship

An athletic scholarship is a one-year contract between you and a Division I or Division II institution. A school can reduce or cancel a scholarship if you become ineligible for competition, fraudulently misrepresent yourself, quit the team or engage in serious misconduct. During the contract year, a coach cannot reduce or cancel your scholarship on the basis of your athletic ability, performance, or injury. An institution may choose to not renew a scholarship at the end of the academic term provided they notify you in writing and provide you an opportunity for a hearing.

Remember a coach cannot offer you a “four year full-ride scholarship.” They do not exist. Each student athlete award is reviewed annually. It is important to ask current collegiate swimmers if they are still on scholarship. Parents, it is not uncommon for a college program to offer and renew an athletic scholarship for the first 2-3 years of college and then ask the student to pay full tuition for the remainder of their college career.

General College, Scholarship, and Financial Aid Information

[beRecruited](#)

[College MatchMaker](#)

[FinAid! – Financial Aid, College Scholarships and Student Loans](#)

[Savingforcollege.com – Funding College and 529 Plans](#)

[CollegeApps.com – Get In To The College of Your Choice](#)

[FastWeb – Scholarships, Financial Aid and Colleges](#)

[GoCollege](#)

[Degree Directory – Colleges, Universities, Career Schools and Online Degree Programs](#)

[Vault Education Center](#)

[National Association for College Admission Counseling](#)

[National Association of Higher Education Loan Programs](#)

[CampusTours – Virtual College Tours](#)

[National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities](#)

[US Department of Education](#)

[FAFSA – Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#)