

Punctuality by *Glenn Mills*

I have to imagine it's going to be tough to put down my thoughts on this subject without sounding like an angry old man who talks about how it used to be. With that said... what's the deal these days with swimmers, people, not showing up to practice on time? Has our society gotten to a point at which we're so important, so egocentric, that those we work with are there only to serve us? I'm sure people have a word for people, like me, who are habitually early or on time. I panic if I think I'm going to be late for a train, plane, meeting, lesson, or practice. I'm not really sure where that all started, but I can certainly pinpoint exactly where it was reinforced.

My Dad was a business professional with the same trait that I have... so I'm thinking he was the initiator of the habit. He always spoke of respecting other people's time, and if you had a time set up to meet, to be on time for that... no matter what. He was usually over prepared for things, and promptness was one of those things. My Mother certainly added to the trait. Being a music teacher, her entire passion involved time. She sang in the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus for 25+ years and was forced to respect time, in a different way than I'm trying to point out here, but imagine the exactness of time she had to respect. Come into a phrase too early.... STOP the conductor would yell. Come into a phrase too late... STOP he'd yell again. She had to be precise with her time, and we, as children, were also taught that in all that we did.

Pinpointing how the trait was reinforced is also very easy. I remember moving to Cincinnati to train under coach Skip Kenny (Stanford legend). I lived with a family (eventual Olympic Silver Medalist, Dave Wilson) and he drove to practice. We had to drive nearly 45 minutes one way to practice and we were never late. It simply wasn't allowed. We had people who drove nearly 90 minutes TO practice, and no matter what time practice was, they were never late. If practice started at 3:00 pm, the deck was filled at 2:40 with swimmers stretching and doing pre-practice ab work. When the clock hit the 60 at 3:00... we were either IN the water, or had to complete the entire practice butterfly. We didn't get kicked out, we were tortured (more than those who arrived on time). The coaches didn't see much use in kicking out someone who obviously didn't want to be there... so they would just make them work harder.

My next coach was Denny Pursley (former US National Team Coach and now UK National Team Director), and I remember morning practice starting at 5:15.

We were required to be on deck and stretching at 5:00. My Mom and I lived about 3 miles from the pool, but it still took about 8 minutes with the lights (yes, I had it timed down to the minute). Every night before I went to bed, I'd assemble all my gear in my bag. I'd set the alarm for 4:45 and there was never a



SNOOZE tap. On rough nights, I'd go to bed fully dressed just to make sure I didn't have to waste time dressing... who was going to see me anyway. While I shaved the time as close as possible, I always added 1-2 minutes of leeway, just in case. But I can't remember anyone who was ever late for practice, and certainly no one was habitually late.

It basically got to the point where there was simply NO ACCEPTABLE excuse for showing up late to practice. Now, I'm sure there were a few; I could just never think any up. OK, I have to admit, I remember one day when my training partner, Glynde Mangum, and I were stuck in traffic heading to afternoon practice with coach

Jay Fitzgerald (now of Pine Crest). We knew we were going to be in HUGE trouble, so to diffuse the reaction in any way we could... when we got to the pool, we proceeded to walk in and dive directly into the pool with our clothes on to show our remorse. We spoke just last week about it, and seemed to remember a chuckle coming from Jay, just before he gave us a set of 20 x 400 breaststroke long course. We paid the price.

What is the point of reminiscing about "how it used to be?" It's to, again, put the onus of performance on the athletes. If you're a coach and you're habitually late, then you get what you deserve. If you're a swimmer and you're habitually late, and you miss stretching, shaking out your arms, getting your gear together, or the proper warm-up for your practice, then... well... you get what you deserve, too.

Practices are generally designed by competent coaches who count on the swimmers to perform the workouts at a specific time and in a specific way. Those practices can also teach you so much about when your body is actually ready to swim fast. I know this sounds crazy, but that can play a big role at swim meets. Missing part of the warm-up really means that you, and your coach, really don't know exactly when, how much, how much stress, where the heart rate should be... when you're ready to swim FAST! You're setting up a guessing game for performance. If you're that talented, then good for you, but I can count people that are THAT talented on one hand... and I still have a couple fingers left over.

Even if I ONLY speak of your ability to perform, you should show up on time. When you consider your working relationship with your coach, and your teammates. When I speak of the respect for their time, for the fact that the coach has spent time prior to practice designing specifically something that will make you faster, or a better swimmer... and you show up when you feel like it, it simply shows very little respect for their time and preparation.

What I can tell you from age and experience is that coaches are generally SO forgiving, and care about you as an athlete so much, that they tend to overlook the fact that you're taking advantage of them when you're late. They want you to perform for many reasons, and see you smile at the end of the season so that you're happy. When you swim fast at the end of the season, you'll also be much happier.

Summary:

Punctuality = Respect

Punctuality = The Coaches ability to create effective training

Punctuality = Forming good habits that you can carry forward into your professional life

Of course, there will be times when things come up and you will be late for practice or miss it all together. But when you're habitually on time, it's not an issue. That's when communication becomes important... but that's a topic for another article. :)

Now, set your clocks 10 minutes ahead, and see you at the pool (on time).