



Building A Mental Toolbox

6: SELF CONFIDENCE

Our year-round, multi-level aquatic programs emphasize
Personal Achievement, Team Unity & Competitive Excellence

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Coaches Guide

- Begin by having your athletes define what self-confidence means to them. Encourage them to give examples of when they feel high and low self confidence.
- Explain the difference between too much, too little and just right self-confidence.
- Tell your athletes about the benefits of increasing their self-confidence.
- Use one of the exercises of your choice to help your athletes become aware of their self-confidence.
- Instruct your athletes on ways to improve their self-confidence.

Sandwich Feedback (adapted from the Team Building and Team Cohesion Chapter)

Coaches, whether you know it or not, you can influence your swimmers' self-confidence. Swimmers look to their coaches for feedback and approval. Do not take your job lightly, what you say to your swimmers and the tone of voice and words you use will greatly influence their perceptions of themselves.

When correcting mistakes and giving feedback, use the “sandwich technique” – meaning try to sandwich the critique between two positive comments. Start by relaying a positive comment, follow that by a correction (what they should do) and end with encouragement and hope. For example, Bob, you really had a fast start you were the first one in the water, remember to hold your streamline off of your start, with a little extra work in practice on streamlines off your walls you should get it.



Self-Confidence Exercises

Below are some ideas of ways for swimmers to develop their own sense of self-confidence.

Exercise 1 is developed to encourage swimmers to brainstorm about their positive abilities and attributes. This exercise can be used for both younger and older swimmers.

Exercise 2 emphasizes using mental imagery as a means of increasing self-confidence.

Exercise 3 suggests that the athletes begin keeping a success log. A success log in a place where swimmers are encouraged to write down things that they do well, both in and out of the pool. This again will help raise the swimmer's awareness to their personal accomplishments.

Exercise 4 helps athletes create their own personal affirmations. Personal affirmations serve to remind athletes of their strengths or the behaviors they want to develop into strengths.

Self-Confidence Exercise 1: Raise Your Self-Confidence Awareness

As a way to begin thinking about self-confidence in your sport, the first step is to identify your abilities and other positive attributes. Complete the following statements with a variety of different skills and attributes, using examples from both in and out of sport.

1. Something I do well in my sport is:_____
2. Something I do even better in my sport is:_____
3. My greatest strength as an athlete is:_____
4. I am proud that I _____
5. My greatest strength as an individual is:_____
6. I can help my teammates to:_____
7. I have the power to:_____
8. I was able to decide to:_____
9. I'm not afraid to:_____
10. I want to be strong enough to:_____
11. Something I can do now that I couldn't do last year is:_____
12. I have accomplished:_____
13. If I want to, I can:_____
14. My greatest achievement is:_____

This activity highlights the many talents you possess. Concentrate more on developing this list rather than spending valuable time worrying about what you can't do.

Self-Confidence Exercise 2: Building Confidence Through Past Performances

Consistent good performances directly and positively impact self-confidence. So it stands to reason that the more consistently good performances you can have, the more likely they will help to feed your self-confidence. This is especially true for athletes who know they have the ability, but have trouble building their confidence to believe that their ability will transfer to different situations (like big competitions, for example).

Remember back to your best performance ever and answer the questions pertaining to that race.

What did you eat the night before?

How many hours of sleep did you get the night before?

What time did you wake up? How many hours was it before your race?

What did you have for breakfast?

What did you do for warm-up?

How did you feel in warm-up?

What other things did you do pre-race?

How did you feel right before the race?

How did the race feel?

What did you do for warm down?

Now that you've reflected on all of these thoughts, feelings and actions, try to incorporate them into your next swim meet. By recognizing what you did the last time you were successful and incorporating it into your next swim, hopefully you can begin to practice success on a regular basis.

Self-Confidence Exercise 3: Success Log

Some athletes have difficulty recalling previous performance or training successes to use in their confidence building. Sometimes this is due to a simple lack of awareness--the athlete has never had to "tune in" to this before and may need to learn to pay better attention to his or her performances. Often, especially for perfectionistic, high achieving athletes, it has become much easier for them to pay attention to their mistakes as opposed to good things that have happened in practice or competition.

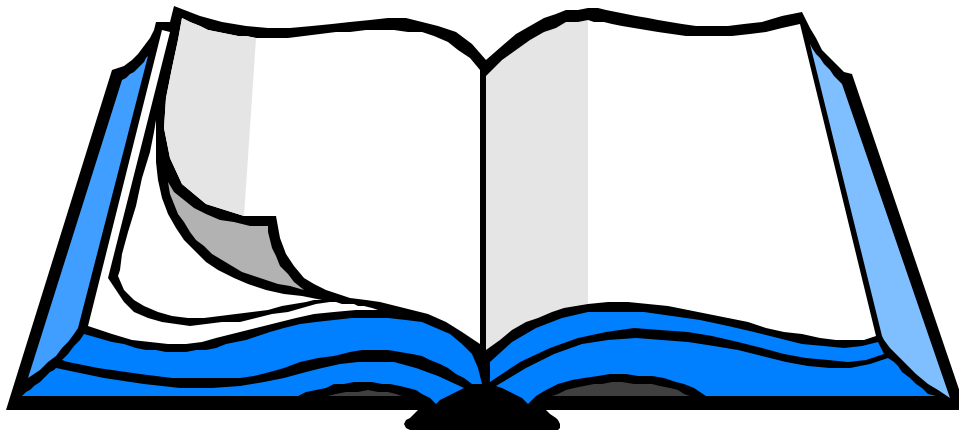
To help you begin to redirect your focus to include the awareness of your successes, the "success log" has been developed. The idea is simple. After each practice and competition, you must write down three things that you did correctly or successfully. At first, some athletes find this adjustment in focus a little hard since being critical and focusing on mistakes has been their habit for so long. Filling in your "success log" on a regular basis can help you see the whole of your performances--both good and bad--and will provide you with much more confidence-building material.

Example:

Monday

1. I got to practice on time!
2. I was able to maintain good form through all practice drills.
3. I hit my target time on over 3/4 of the timed drills.

As you can see from the example, you can begin with positives that may not be directly related to your performance.



Self-Confidence Exercise 4: Affirmations

Affirmations can be a strong tool to help build self-confidence. An affirmation is a statement that regards to something that is true or that has a realistic chance of becoming true. Affirmations are conscious, preplanned, positive thoughts that swimmers can use to direct their thoughts and behaviors in positive ways. They can be used to redirect negative thoughts. Often people feel that when they use affirmations they are deceiving themselves however it is better to think of affirmations as a sense of direction not deception

There are five criteria to keep in mind when developing your own affirmations.

1. Be positive .
2. Write in the present tense.
3. Be short and concise.
4. Try to make it rhyme, it'll be easier to remember.
5. Be conscientious, try to recite your affirmation at least once a day.

Examples of affirmations used to boost confidence.

"I am fast and sleek as I move through the water."

"Regardless of the time, I am fine."

"I am a champion."

"I am strong and ready to go."

Now write some of your own affirmations for self-confidence:

Remember to post your affirmations on 3x5 cards in obvious places around your house (i.e. the bathroom mirror, your closet door, your desk, by the phone...) to remind yourself of the confidence you want to exhibit.

For more information on writing affirmations read Thinking Body, Dancing Mind, by Chungliang Al Huang and Jerry Lynch.