



Dream: Secure a Team and Create a Scheme by Dr. Cathy Ferguson (1995)

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Well, it's been many years since I've competed in swimming. But over these last 10 years, I've been taking a good look at what I think swimming needs more of. We used to call things mental picturing instead of concentration. Or we used these fancy names that have been in existence since sports began or since humans began. I'd like to discuss today several aspects of coaching that I believe can assist a coach in the parent/child relationship, the coach/parent relationship, and the coach/child relationship. Basically none of this is new information, it's just maybe a little different twist and possibly the exception on how the information is treated or how we apply the principals. It's my belief that before we can help swimmers we must help ourselves.

How many of you have created your own mission statement, goals and objectives? Have you written them down and committed them to memory? I think it is absolutely impact that you create a mission statement, you write it down, and you know it by heart, because that is what you really are as a coach. I think all too often a lot of our problems in coaching arise from a situation where the coach applies for a job, takes the job, and gets into a parent situation that is very difficult for them to handle before all the cards were not on the table. I think it is important for us to understand as we venture out into selecting the clubs where we want to work, or the colleges at which are going to coach, that our mission statements fits together and that we can create a team and a team effort. Without the mission statement, you cannot be sure as to what your own goals and objectives are. Therefore, there is no driving force. As a result you may accept coaching positions that do not fit with you personally or do not move you toward those things that you have in mind that you wish to accomplish. Basically, it would be like getting into a car and just driving, and the reason you got into the car was because someone thought it was a good idea to go for a drive. Without knowing what you are dedicated to, without knowing your goals and objectives, it is hard to determine your priorities in life. Without knowing your priorities you will come to the awareness that what you are doing with your

time and what you feel deeply about do not match. This causes difficulty in your home life, your swim team life and your own satisfaction. They must be consistent.

A mission statement tells what and who you are. If you never created one for yourself it may read something like this: "Cathy Ferguson is dedicated to healthy living, intimate relationships with family members and leaving a legacy." I had given you 3 generalized areas that I feel very strongly about, but in order for me to progress along those lines I now have to create the goals that go with that. Something like this, "Maintain the role of a parent that fits under the relationships with the family". My objectives: be available for children to participate in activities and their events; provide spiritual development for my children by going to church as a family; provide financial security to my family by maintaining a balanced budget; spending down time for just the family once a week; take children on a vacation yearly; spend one night with each child every two weeks by themselves; and tell each child I love them at least twice a day. It sounds kind of funny, but as I look back at these goals that I have written for myself and the objectives I have met, those are ways that we can be accountable and learn to teach the process to our swimmers.

I have a little boy right now that is swimming for me and he came to me and said, "It's time for our meeting, I'm 12 now." And I said, "O.K., we'll have the meeting." And he said, "Well do my parents have to come?" And I said, "Yes, they do need to be there for our meeting." And I said, "Why don't you want them to be at the meeting?". "Because they have higher goals for me than I want and I don't want them to know." This is a lot of what we deal with in coaching. I'm sure all of you had parents "that have the greatest swimmers in the world" that are coming to you, but I think that it is important that we

listen to the children with whom we work, that we all get on the same bus, going in the same direction.

Another goal of mine is to become a coach who cares more about the process than the end product. My objectives are to teach proper technique; teach the difference between good and best, for there is very little discussion in us when we have to make a decision between good and bad, but many of our swimmers have a little more difficulty when we discuss the difference between good and best; teach the process rather than the outcome through planning; and always answer the question " why."

After creating your own mission statement, goals and objectives, you will have a vision of the whole picture. You will be a part of something much bigger than yourself. You will be able to select a coaching position that will allow you to achieve your mission and one that will allow you to uphold your priorities of your own life. I believe it is important for the coach to express, in writing, and verbally, their priorities to all concerned at the club. I hold a generalized meeting at the beginning of the year for all the parents who are interested in attending. At all levels, I think it is very important if I'm the head coach that the 6/7 year olds and 5/6 year olds parents know what kind of philosophy their child is swimming under. I interview my assistant coaches, so that I will know that we are on the same bus going in the same direction and that their issues are basically the same as mine – not that they have the same way getting there, but that they have the same mission to accomplish. Every child and parent in my organization understand my priorities. Now they have a choice. They can decide that doesn't meet their needs or their priorities then they go on to a different club or they remain with me. But I'm very verbal as to what my priorities really are. I explain to every one of them that God comes first, myself and my family second, my job away from coaching is third and coaching is forth. And the only way that

they can move my coaching job any higher is if the club offers me \$65,000 plus benefits a year and they are ready to put that on the line. And then I will change my priorities.

Because I want to coach, I select jobs that have a certain degree of freedom. I used to teach at a University, got a little bored after with the whole idea after 23 years, and wondered if there would be something else after. I discussed it with my husband, and he said, "It can't hurt if you put your resume out." So I put my resume out and low and behold, somebody actually answered it. It was at a hospital, to be a sports medicine director. It threw me into a whole new world. And my biggest concern was "are you going to let me out in time to make swim practice?" So I had to figure out how am I going to present this. Now my salary is doubled what it was and I really like it and so I'm thinking to myself "how can I do both?" So I came up front and asked, "I love coaching children, I don't want to quit. How can we work this out with my job?" Come in earlier, spend a little extra time at home, no problem. They fit me up with a computer that I had connected right to the fax at the hospital and I had wonderful support people that could carry on and be empowered to do the job so that I was not their baby sitter. So a lot of times you have to create the system you can work with but if you don't know what system it is that you want to work with it gets very difficult. So it is very important you, yourself, define that. And then I always try to do more than what I promised my employers.

I think that you need to represent yourselves honestly to your parents. You must be honest with yourself first, as to what your goals really are. Do you want to be an Olympic coach? I bet there are a lot of people who do not want to be an Olympic coach just like there are swimmers on your team that have no burning desire to be on an Olympic team. They just want to be part of the club team.

Now it's time to help others. I first communicate with the entire team in a meeting with parents on what my priorities are. I also send out, through our first newsletter, how the practices are going to go for each one of the age groups. I sit down and discuss with my coaches exactly how we're going to set up the entire season. Being an Olympic year and having one for sure at Olympic trials and a couple of other possibilities, it's going to be a very interesting year.

I'm going to be very dependent upon my assistants to help carry this out. In fact, I've gone out and actually searched out someone who can fill up a position for me a great deal during this next year. I fill out a form that says this is what we are going to do. This is the type of yardage that each group is going to be doing, the weight work starts here, we taper off here, and there is a little graph that shows what they are going to be doing as a total season up through the Olympic trials. That way each group at each level has some idea of what is going on.

I schedule half hour to one hour meetings with all the kids that are 11 years and older. Now I have 109 kids of record right now and of those about 40 of them will be requiring that private time with me. That's 40 hours of additional work outside of the pool deck, but I also know that it reduces the number of phone calls that I'll be receiving. It reduces the amount of time before or after practice where I have to tell parents who do not have a clue to what I am doing. They will now understand and have a very clear picture as to what their role is, and what I expect of them, what I expect of the swimmer and what I expect of myself. This meeting is set up with the parent, the child, and the child's coach if that is not myself. I find this type of meeting allows me to get to know about the swimmer, and allows all of us to know what the

swimmer's goals are and how they can go about achieving them. In this way we are all on the same bus going in the same direction.

Honesty is stressed. Don't tell me you want to be an Olympic champion and then decide that all the late nights are a problem, that you don't get enough sleep and that you are going to do all of these millions and trillions of other things. That's not probably what I am going to want to hear. That is something that I might discuss with you as we progress down the line. So all of the cards are on the table for everyone to see. We start with a description of my own priorities and why I am in coaching. I think that's very important for them to understand that really I don't need to win any more medals. I love to see the smile on the face on the 6 year old when he turns around in the middle of the pool to see that he is actually ahead and gets so excited that he gets to the end and rolls over on to his stomach on the backstroke and gets disqualified . I love to see the excitement of the kids when they just improved their time by just 1/10th of a second. Or the gal who has had a lot of early success and then comes back and has a rotten couple of seasons and doesn't know how to pull herself out of that. We've discussed how we are going to attack that problem and all of a sudden her times begin to drop and she sees that the plan and working towards the plan really is of benefit.

We then talk about what the swimmer would ultimately like to achieve and I have found that it is so interesting to hear what they want to do. Peter Daland said, "You know, it's not just enough to make an Olympic team, it's what are you going to do when you get there." I have a lot of kids that say, "I want to make an Olympic Team." And so where the guidance comes in, is why would you not say to me, "I want to be an Olympic Champion. Can you tell me a little bit about that?" So we discuss for a while and they may still be happy with, "I want to be on an Olympic Team or I want to get a full ride scholarship to college." So we discuss how many full rides to the large

institutions are available in the United States each year, which is about 10, and what you have to do to be able to make that. We make sure that they understand that they need to be at the top in the United States, in order to have one of those 10 spots, so that they are really fully aware of the commitment that they are making. Now at 11 it's a little different than at ages 15, 16, and 17 and up. But what is their ultimate goal in swimming, what would they like to do? I do this because when I was a 12 year old little skinny kid that walked into Peter Daland's office and sat behind a desk to this man who had a suit and tie on, he said ' "Ms. Cathy, what is your goal? " I looked at him scared to death and I said, "I want to be an Olympic Champion." He said, "Speak up young lady!" I said, "I want to be an Olympic Champion!" Nothing went across his face. He just wrote it down. It was not discussed, from that point on.

Other than the intermediate goals, time lines need to be looked at in order to use them as stepping stones to that goal. No times, because I didn't know what times I had to do to break a world record, to be an Olympic champion, four years away from the Olympic games. I had no idea. But I did know that I wanted to be an Olympic champion. Many of us pooh pooh that goal and laugh, and say to ourselves "Right!" Remember though, that greatly affects how we all get there. So no goal is foolish, but it needs to be calculated and it needs to be discussed and different things needs to be pointed out about that goal. The intermediate goals, and the time frame, need to be constructed. Now if you have a 12 year old and the Olympic trials are 2 years out it's probably fairly good odds that that 12 year old is not going to make the Olympic team. Then we are looking at six years. And then we are maybe looking at 10 years. So you as a coach need to sit down and back track what are the important landmarks in that six year period of time.

Now, I have a young lady who is a very good breaststroker and we sat down and poured over where she needed to be at what particular time. She's made it by the skin of her teeth but she has made it. So each goal that she marks off gives her the satisfaction of knowing that the road she is traveling is highly possible. An idea might be: in 1994 a kid comes up with Q times, in 1995 qualifies for Junior Nationals, in 1996 qualifies for finals at Junior Nationals, in 1997 qualifies for Senior Nationals, in 1998 qualifies for finals at Senior Nationals, in 1999 Qualifies for Olympic Trials and places in the top three at Senior Nationals, and in 2000 places top three at Spring Nationals and places top two at Olympic Trials. They need to see and so does the parent need to see the timeline we are dealing with. The reason I say that is because we get under this illusion and parents are just absolutely crazy about how quickly their children go through the age group program. They don't look at the entire picture. "My kid is swimming here and he hasn't made Triple A times and he doesn't get to go to JO's, but look at Johnny over there he's going." There is no consideration as to size, no consideration as to growth spurts, no consideration to emotional development, no consideration to child development. This is your opportunity to share that information with those parents.

I liken it to a story I heard by Lanis Bias. Many of you may recognize the name of Lyn Bias who died of an overdose on the Basketball court. I heard this woman speak and I have never heard such a dynamic person. Several of the things I took from her included, "Happiness is such an elusive goal." She says "You know, I was driving down my street looking at my big, beautiful, wonderful house thinking of what a wonderful marriage I had, and how successful all of my children were. I drove up into the driveway, walked into the house, the phone rang, I picked up the phone and my child was dead. Happiness is [she snaps her fingers] gone like that." We cannot base happiness on performance. It's too allusive. The picture must be planned, and you will save yourself an enormous amount of grief if you share this kind of information with your parents. I also spend time taking about the down

times and how parents need to handle those. We have back and forth two way conversations. They tell me about some problems and I'll tell them some of my ideas that might help them.

As we get to the goals and by what date, they are planning their routine. Now how can I achieve my goals, the objectives by what which I'm going to live by. I have developed it into main categories. Some other psychologists will use other types of categories, but I choose physically, mentally, psychologically, and spiritually to discuss.

Physically, we talk about lots of things in that category. We talk about making all of the practices they need to be making. We talk about nutrition. We talk about rest. We talk about types of training that they may engage in and at what point in time in their careers will that work, such as weight training. We talk about why not weight training. We talk about all of the different aspects that surround the physical part. We talk about leisure, and what they do for rest. What are the fun things they like to do? What are their hobbies? That lets me know a little bit about them and tells them I am interested in them.

Mentally. I am absolutely a crazy freak on understanding the value of splits in relating them to their work out and to their performance. Probably every one of my kids that are 12 and up, if I ask them to break out a hundred by 50 in yards they would all be able to tell me what their 25 repeats need to be in practice to achieve the time they were looking at immediately. The reason I do this is because it throws the responsibility back on the child to produce. I don't have to be the whipper. If they need to repeat 30's for 50 freestyle and they are repeating 34's they may not make that goal. So it is important to help them to logistically set up they're own time frames they wish to

work. With a 109 swimmers in the pool at the same time it gets a little chaotic. It isn't that I can stand over Johnny every 5 seconds, but I go back and ask for a recap. We go through this little mental game with them all the time.

Understanding the techniques and the science of swimming and reviewing and going over the films of the underwater films and so forth is important. We talk about improving and receiving critique. I'm sure all of you have a kid that comes out of the water, throws the cap down, comes over and stomps over to you. And then in the goodness of your heart you begin to tell them how they can improve their time. How do you think they are going to receive it? They won't hear it, because they are functioning in the emotional category and you are functioning in the thinking category. Look at your own lives with your significant other or your spouse. You come home, you're tired, you thought about bringing flowers home to set on the table or a gift or a little card. You set it on the table. It's your anniversary. Then you go in and sit down. You haven't said anything to your partner and he comes out and says, "You didn't even say 'hi', didn't give me a kiss." "Don't you understand? I love you, I brought you the flowers, I gave you a gift." One is in the thinking mode and the other one is in the emotional mode. Until they both get into the same mode, there is no communication. So its important after a race that you determine where the swimmer and you are. A lot of times I'll send my kids back into the warm-up pool and say, "You know, I think you need to calm down a little bit."

I explain in this meeting, how I want this conversation to go. I explain to them that in my opinion there is no bad, as long as you learn from the swim. Where could I have improved? What were the mistakes I made. Was I thinking about what I've been doing or did I just get to the block

unprepared? Knowing and understanding those things can help you improve in the races that day.

The psychological. Probably one of the most nebulous or second most nebulous areas that is difficult to discuss is the mental practice. I don't know if any of you are familiar with Bloom's "Study of the Talented Youth." In the book he states that almost every top level, including Olympic champions, do what he has termed "Zones." That means for whatever reason they have the ability to move completely outside of any other conscious thing and be able to go within themselves to self talk. A lot of kids self talk, but they don't get into the far enough mode that really becomes a belief and a passion inside. I think we need to do more investigation on this area, and how we achieve that. I've talked to them about the mental practice as well as the psychological practice. You can not expect and demand that on race day. That is something you prepare for everyday. You must practice. It's just like how you practice your swimming. When I was 12 and working to go to the Olympic games every night, I would lie in bed and I would think of the stories that Carol House had told me about her Olympic experience and how wonderful and exciting that would be and what it would be to stand up on that awards stairs ceremony and I could get there mentally. Every night before I went to bed, that was my blanket, because I could calm down and I could reflect, and I could go to sleep knowing that was still my goal and I had some comfort to hold on to. It must be practiced. Positive attitudes need to be practiced.

We do a little game at the beginning of the season. We do not have negativity during our practice at anytime. During those two hours their phraseology must be in the positive frame. So whether they are having leg irritations, their right thumb hurts, or whatever it is they have going, we don't express it unless it is an emergency or a severe injury or something like that. Then the swimmer and I discuss it because it is amazing how the

coughing spells start up, then the bathroom routine starts in and then it gets catchy. So we work on that. We put little rubber bands around their wrist and I say every time at school you wear this rubber band all day long and every time you catch yourself saying something negative about somebody, having a negative thought, I want you to pull that rubber band. They think it's really funny, but they all come to practice with that rubber band on for about the first week and then I start to see the rubber bands fall off and I start hearing a lot of positive talk among themselves. They start to help one another to get moving in practice when somebody is having a bad day. Again, we are practicing the positive, positive living.

Expressing feelings honestly is also very important. Anger is usually an overlying emotion of hurt. It's really important that you get down to understand what hurts. I also have a tool that I use that I would like to share with you. Believe me, I don't own any part of this, but I happened to come across it and I love it. It's called the "mental games plan." It's really designed by Thomas Tutko, who is a sports psychologist out of SJSU, and a fellow by the name of Parride. In this book, they take a questionnaire that is given to all the kids 11 and up. It asks things that deal with their abilities to concentrate. It gives them the idea of their level of aggressiveness commitment, assertiveness, confidence, concentration. I have every swimmer do the questionnaire and then I know what areas need improvement. So if we were to look here, this person does a pretty good job of just about everything but knowing this young lady, she has some areas in the social area that needs to be worked on. So we talk about that in our conference together. I have some that fall in the average category on assertiveness so we talk about how in practice we can be assertive. For example, instead of being last in your circle to go, be first. Practice some of the things and set your goals. It sets up a whole goal sheet on how you can improve in these particular traits. I find it very interesting and usually I'm pretty close on the personality traits of these kids. But it does give you an

idea of things they need to work on. Therefore, construct a program that teaches them how to work on those specific problems in their own workout.

I saved the hardest to the last and that is spirituality. I believe that if you really don't feel it in your heart, it won't happen. It's difficult to describe and so I used a couple of references to help me phrase this. It's not religion, although it may be, but it's the importance of knowing and understanding that you are a part of a greater scheme, a greater whole, a sense of meaning and overriding purpose, a sense that you know there are greater things than just swimming. Additionally, understanding that there are many things that you will learn from your swimming experience that will carry over into your life struggles. You may see this greater whole in terms of life after death, reoccurring cycles of life, or intergenerational legacy, but the bigger picture puts the challenges of daily life in a contextual framework of meaning. When I was a little girl and I would I'd crawl out of a practice I didn't do so well that day, my dad would harp on me about why I didn't do this or why I didn't do that. Then I'd crawl into bed and think to myself, "I'm not going to die if I don't swim my best time." And I could go to sleep. That was one way I handled it. Every kid handles it differently and you handle it differently. According to David Myers' book "The Pursuit of Happiness," a study shows that those who have this bigger picture are happier, more satisfied and greater contributors. I usually ask the family if they have a religious orientation. So I share the orientation that I do, and I express the value of knowing that there is someone always to love you regardless, and that there is someone to share your sadness and your cheers with but there is someone always in your corner.

Myers also states that religious consciousness shapes a larger agenda than advancing one's own private little world. It cultivates the idea that my talents are unearned gifts in which I am the steward of. He indicates that even

though a person may not consider themselves religious they spend a great deal of time contemplating the meaning of life. Renewing activities in spiritual dimensions whether it be through meditation prayer, formal religious activity, studying wisdom and sacred literature, or memorizing and reviewing a personal mission statement, are virtues the big picture. Renewal plays an enormous role in the education of the heart. It gives us the passion, and the power to prioritize all the aspects of our lives. In my opinion it is the heart that is needed most in United States Swimming today, and yet we spend so very little time at it. We seem to forget that it also takes practice.

Finally we discuss what the swimmer needs to work on most in their swimming. We go over the mental game plan at that time. We discuss if they are having troubles with turns or starts and how they can get extra help on those kinds of things so that I can help and assist in providing them. Some of the older kids say that they get to the block and they just don't feel it. So we talk about why and how can they can get that feeling back. There are some pretty interesting questions they ask at this time, some I don't know the answers to. But it is the basis for discussion and one thing they know when they leave that hour is that I know what they want and their parent knows what they want. We talk to the parents about the schedule for the whole year and when and when not to take the vacations. I asked the to try not to dangle the carrot of a skiing trip before Junior Nationals. We talk about the part the parent plays. Usually after we go through all of this commitment sheet I find that the parent has probably benefited more from the experience than the kid. Most of them have not created their own mission statements and most of them don't even know how to set goals. They may feel they're too old or too tired but tell them they cannot be that way and have young swimmers who are aspiring to do greatness.

The key factors include the coach knowing her own mission, goals and objectives; expressing their own priorities to parents and the team members; assisting the swimmers to have a dream, to build their team and to create a scheme. The dream, the people and the plan. I believe if you follow these steps you'll see wondrous things happen with your swimmers and you will know that they are not swimming for you, but they are swimming for some greater reason. You have assisted in helping them access the process they will use the rest of their lives. Your workouts will be more directed because you understand where the swimmer is going and so do they.

As I stood on that first place award stand and had the medal placed around my neck and heard the national anthem played while the American Flag was raised for me, I understood that I wasn't standing there for just me but for my team, the parents who gave me the opportunity, and for the coach who believed in me and inspired me to learn more and more. And to all sorts of other people. Only one person stands on the platform but the platform is shared. You may be an age group coach that no one has ever heard of except that one kid who is standing on that first place platform and you're watching it on T.V.. Not a whole lot of gratification will come your way but remember in the spiritual aspect of it all, it educates the heart. As I look back, I can safely say that the most important thing in the Olympic games is not to win, but to take part. Just as the most important thing in life is not the triumphs but the struggles. Teach your kids the process and we will have wonderful champions.