



Expectations of Excellence: A Guide for the 90's for Coaches, Swimmers, Parents by Kandis Perry (1995)

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I was really excited when ASCA asked me to do this talk because first of all, I feel like there's a lot of frustration among coaches and I hear a lot of it. So I'm excited that ASCA's making an effort to help the frustration that I feel is among a lot of the coaching community. I don't want to talk about just the problems today. Hopefully, I'll be able to give some solutions and start with the basics and give some ideas that I've tested with my own club. And remember, if you're not part of the solution, you're probably part of the problem.

I swam from 1972 to 1988 and retired in 1988 and went to work in my major for two years which was criminal justice — which kind of fits in with what I'm doing now. I've coached for 5 years. I started in 1990 as an age group coach and then became head coach a year later. I was fortunate enough to be put into that situation. When I first started in 1991 there was a coach that told me I'd never make it in coaching and his reason was that I could never take my kids and throw them up against the lockers. So, I kind of wish he was here today to hear what we have to say. Maybe I'll send him a tape.

Has anyone ever heard Sippy Woodhead talking about “doing it the old fashioned way?” It made an absolute impact on me. This picture right here reminds me of doing it the old fashioned way. It’s a cave man where everybody worked and worked and did everything and put their nose to the grindstone.

When I first started coaching I had wild free for all children. I promise you, this is a lot of what my kids looked like when I first got them 4 or 5 years ago. It was a challenge. As a new and a young coach, I heard a lot of “kids are different,” “society is different,” and “the level of responsibility is different” from kids and parents and that these days you can’t just demand the level of excellence. I’ll tell you right now, that’s a cop out and nothing upsets me more than someone saying “I’m not going to do this because of...” and on and on. It’s crazy. If you’re not willing to get off your butt and do it then you’re in the wrong profession. I have three words for people with that attitude and this is it: Deal with it. Find what needs to be improved with your club and find some ways to do it.

In our professions, we as coaches are creative, otherwise we would not be in this profession. We come up with workouts everyday for our kids and I can’t imagine one single person in this room does the same workout every single day with their kids. We use our thinking tanks every day, so be creative with your club and try to make things better for ourselves.

First I’d like to talk about why kids are different. By understanding the problems it may be easier for us to fix some things. The number One word I

hear from everybody when we talk about this, is “parents” or “parenting.” There’s less parenting and there’s more parenting. That’s what I’m hearing from everybody. I personally feel that it’s both. I think we have more parenting these days and I think we have less. Parents are extremely judgmental. Kids are not allowed to wander anymore. Parents direct them to where and when they want them to do things at a young age. Little Johnny: they put him in a swim meet and Johnny’s not winning. What’s going to happen? Chances are, if the parents are really involved with the child, they’re going to take that child and put them in something that they’re winning with. So, we have to try to keep the kids in swimming.

So, you have less parenting versus more parenting and how do you sell the dream? How do you sell the dream of becoming an Olympic athlete and how do you sell the dream of becoming an elite swimmer? I feel that you sell the dream by finding a happy medium between the two. You have to find out what the children want and you need to find out what the parents want.

There are two ways we can deal with kids from my eyes: positively and negatively. The positive approach uses rewards and encouragement. The negative approach uses punishment and criticism. The positive approach creates a more positive atmosphere for everyone, increases their enthusiasm, and it looks at the athlete first and winning as second. I don’t know how many of you have seen the study that Norway put out on their athletes. Norway feels that by conquering three issues with the athlete they’re conquering winning overall. They look at the physical, mental, and social aspects. They look at the physical, as far as taking care of them in and out of the pool with the dryland and the swimming. The mental includes sitting in team meetings and making sure they have people coming in and giving talks and so forth. For the social they take care of their kids outside of the pool. When those kids leave the pool deck, they have a little more say in

what they do and they try to encourage them more towards the positive than the negatives. They feel by doing this, winning will just happen and take care of itself.

Winning is a healthy philosophy to teach our athletes as long as we do it positively. Success is not just winning. Success is achieving and improving skills and striving to win by giving your best effort. By stressing as players, and not losers, by giving their best effort you reduce their fear of failure. They will try harder. By using rewards and encouragement to reinforce, you'll help strengthen the behaviors you want to develop for your athletes and increase their motivation. We're all human. We make mistakes every day whether we want to admit it or not. And our athletes will make mistakes just like we do. How we react to those mistakes is vitally important whether you want to really realize it or not at that age. A negative reaction to those mistakes can effect on how they feel about themselves, on you as a coach, and also about the sport of swimming. So, when a mistake happens, I think the best thing to do is to give them some encouragement right away.

Athletes deal with mistakes in different ways. Some of them prefer immediate feedback and others just need some time to go off on their own for about 15 minutes and then come back. So its important that you know your athletes for who they are. All of your athletes are different and you need to know them individually. The bottom line is to try not to embarrass them. You're embarrassing yourself and you're embarrassing them. I can't tell you how many times I sit on the pool deck at a National Meet and it makes me sick to my stomach seeing a coach ream out an athlete on the pool deck. Using a negative approach mainly leads to just frustration and resentment. You might not see it right away. You may see it 5 years down the line, or even 10 or 15, but eventually it will happen.

Experts recommend a 3 part approach to giving a corrective instruction. This will help your athletes to do some things right rather than to avoid failure and disapproval. Reward them. For example, after a race, even if you know they did 20 things wrong, find one thing that they did well and tell them “Hey, nice finish.” Then come back and give them something else, but make sure you’re using a positive with your negative. Give a constructive suggestion, emphasizing not the negative but the good things that will happen if they follow the instructions. And third, make sure you encourage them. For example, “Nice finish, but we need to work on this, so keep working on this because it’s going to get better.” Don’t be hostile and throw them up against the lockers when giving your instructions. Don’t punish for their mistakes. Punishment can block their learning and can make your athletes afraid to try.

It’s a fact that 85% of our communication is non-verbal. Be sure that your body language and tone of voice aren’t sending them a different message.

So, how do we deal with misbehavior and lack of attention? Researchers say that preventing the misbehavior is a question that coaches want most answered. Expect them to have fun; they want to have fun. Your athletes really do want to have fun and you can do this. I have to look at it as fun. Expect your athletes to test limits. They’re going to push you. I learned that in the first couple of years I was coaching. I also learned that even though they’re going to test me, they really want the limits and structures. They really did. You can provide structure by setting expectations right away. For example, at the beginning of the season have a team meeting and involve your kids in this. Let them know the rules and know what happens if they break them. Even involve them in some of the decisions as far as the consequences that are going to happen if they break those rules. Try to

balance structure with a little bit of freedom and encourage behaviors like teamwork and sportsmanship. Have respect for officials — that's a big one — and support for teammates.

If an athlete doesn't cooperate give your athlete a chance to explain. Be consistent and impartial with them and make sure you keep your cool. Try to keep the responsibility on the swimmer. We really emphasize that at our club. Explain to them the rule that they've broken and give them the consequence and tell them why. We feel that we have a healthier attitude among our swimmers for that reason.

Moving from rules to behaviors, sometimes its best to just ignore behaviors rather than reward and punish. Punishment sometimes gives the athletes the attention that they want and it will actually encourage the negative behavior. If you ignore it, it will just eventually disappear. This works best for players that are clowning.

The difference, (there is a major difference) between discipline and punishment and we really like to emphasize that it is discipline with somewhat of a natural consequence. By being positive, you've to try to keep the discipline. Some forms of discipline would include setting limits on behaviors and make sure that your rules are consistent from one athlete to the next. Be a role model. I feel that's very important with our athletes. By discipline they'll know what to expect and they'll become responsible for their own actions. Forms of punishment would go back to throwing swimmers against the lockers, the yelling, the sarcasm, the verbal threats, and so on. My husband and I came in last Friday and went to a Saints and 49er's game on Sunday. This really opened my eyes because most of the athletes that we

deal with are very young. In the panel discussion last hour there was a big discussion on what the difference is between an age group and a senior swimmer. Looking at these professional football players (and mind you I don't know anything about football) and I'm not saying in particular about these two coaches, but there was a couple of times when they went back to those players on the sidelines and those coaches were just going at the players. You couldn't hear what they were saying, but on the screen you could sure read their lips. I thought we would never, hopefully, do this with our athletes. But then you have to remember that the ages that we're dealing with, we're not dealing with them right here right now, but what we're dealing with is setting them for their future and setting them for when they get older — 30 years and 40 years old — and they have not developed their self confidence and they cannot cope with those negatives yet. Whereas those older athletes can. They've already established their self confidence and they'll be able to come back and play off that a little bit better.

In order to create a positive atmosphere remember we are teachers. Coaches are teachers and we have got to remember that. Try to acknowledge your athletes once during each practice. It's hard. I've got 60 kids in my group and it's hard for me to do that but I try everyday to acknowledge every child as an individual. Try to relate to them at their level. Remember, sometimes you've got 13 year olds in with 15 year olds or 17 year olds and make sure you mixing them and that you're not treating the 13 year old like the 17 year old and vice versa. There's a big difference in their ages.

Being a role model is something that I decided when I first started coaching that I really wanted to be to my kids, more than a coach. And I think just being in it for 5 years, I've just been kind of lucky. I don't even know if this is a profession that I want to do. I want to help the future and I want to help the

future of these kids because I swam for the Michiana Marlins for 17 years off and on and I decided that I wanted to give back to my club something that they gave to me, and setting a good example for them is important. Showing respect for others, being positive and confident, and most of all accepting our own mistakes — these are things that we can do to help our kids. It's hard sometimes, but taking that big deep breath often and actually saying "Yes, you're right. I need to take a step back and look at this" is important for the kids to see. Appearance — believe it or not, how you look on the deck is important to them whether it is everyday at practice or at a swim meet.

Motivation should come from within but we all know a lot of times it doesn't with our athletes, so we have to remember athletes participate in sports for different reasons. Just because we see a talented youngster down here we want him to be an elite level athlete, does not mean that's what they want. So we have to understand why they're in the sport. According to the handbook for sports coaches the top five reasons are: to have fun, to learn and improve skills, to be with their friends, to succeed or win, and of course, to stay in shape. Those are the top 5 rules. So make sure you find out. We worked hard on that. We know a lot of the family backgrounds, we know why the kids are into swimming, and we take that all into consideration. It is my responsibility to help with motivation, to know kids as individuals, to teach them that success and winning are not the same, and to try to make the practices fun. Give sets that they can accomplish. If your child's best time is a 1:15 for freestyle you don't want to give them 10 x 100's on 1:15. Make it a gradual process. Start it at 1:40 and bring them down. And if they get down to 10 x 100 on 1:20 and can't make 10 x 100's on 1:15, give them 10 x 100 on 1:17. Challenge them. I think that challenging them has helped me the most with the motivation of my kids. And help them set realistic, individual performance goals.

On dealing with fear of failure, I dealt with this growing up as an athlete and I think more people suffer from this than we think they do. You generally have two kinds of motivated athletes: achievement oriented athletes and failure oriented athletes. Achievement oriented athletes want to succeed and they peak under pressure. Failure oriented athletes worry that they won't perform well, they dread critical situations, possible disapproval of their coach, their parents and their teammates. They fear failure and are motivated to avoid it. You have athletes who fear failure and may try to protect themselves and their self worth but putting forth a token effort only. This way, they think, we won't find out. We as coaches don't realize that they're actually afraid to fail and this is very frustrating. I know from myself, maybe from others as well, that we, as coaches, think often that this is lack of effort instead of lack of motivation. So, coming up with other ideas on how to motivate by knowing your athletes will also help individually.

To reduce fear of failure help them set personal goals, and it's also good to have the team goals. My age group coach has a meeting at the beginning of every season and the kids cannot get in the water before they fill out a goal sheet. She'll then have meetings with them throughout the year and at the very end again to go over the goal sheet. She really pushes the goal setting process and I think she does a great job with the younger kids keeping them motivated. Our drop out rate is very small.

Over emphasize striving to win instead of winning and remain positive. I'm going to talk about some things I do with my own club. We just work really hard to keep our team solid. A swimmer's identity is usually molded by the way a coach develops their program and we look at that as a coaching staff.

I had a major clean up job when I started. I had 12 kids in my senior group and I had 60 kids total on my team. Two of those kids on my senior team were Junior National level swimmers. They were sisters actually. The coach before me had accepted the fact that kids just don't want to work hard and that parenting was different. He wasn't willing to change things. I remember the times on the deck where he would just say that. I spent 6 months on just hard, solid disciple with my kids. I set rules and guidelines and took the attitude that when they were on the deck, they were mine. And I told them that. You're walking in the door, you are mine. When you leave this pool deck, you're on your own. But, when you walk in this door you're under my rules and my guidelines and if you don't want to be here, that's fine. You can go somewhere else.

Well, I lost a third of my team in 6 months — I lost 4 of those 12 kids. I thought, "You know, it's O.K.. This is what I wanted." I wanted a clean team and my strategy was a successful effort and just a few would create a positive snowball effect. I set standards for swear words. This group of 12 kids, the 4 of them that did quit had the worst language of anybody — worse than an NFL coach or any player I've seen. I came up with a rule that every time they used a bad word they would have to do five pushups for every letter in that word. "Oh, this was cool. It was great to do pushups." I thought "What am I doing?" Well, what happened was, by the time they got up to 30 they were like "This is crazy. I don't want to do pushups." So, we have one of the cleanest pool decks I think in the nation. It actually trickled down to another club in the state. The kids started keeping track of each other's words during practice and then when they would see me at a meet, one of them would come up and tattle and say "They owe you so many pushups." And they would get down and do them. So it worked in the long run.

Remember those four kids who left the team? One day, before they left the team, they all came in to practice with earrings. I don't have anything against earrings, but those 4 kids' attitude was, "It's cool" and all I could picture was

my 8 year old boys going home and saying, "Mom, I want an earring." I thought, "Not only am I going to be dealing with parents, but how am I going to deal with this?" So I said, "Look, no earrings in practice. Period." And they don't wear earrings. Occasionally I will have a couple of kids that go out and get them and they don't know the rule. But once I tell them there isn't a problem. The only reason why I said anything at all about the earrings in the first place is because those four kids were so negative. Those are the 4 that did quit and didn't want to do it anyway. I think they were there just because they're parents dropped them off.

Sometimes when I give a hard set an athlete would say to me, "I'd like to see you get in here and do this." I would tell them, "I've done it in my time and even if I hadn't, it's not what I'm here for. I am here as a coach. I'm here to help you. And it's fine if you don't want to be here." I ask them to leave and 9 times out of 10 they didn't leave. Every now and then one would.

If the kids are out in a lane, I make sure I go out to the side and I stand so they can see me and see what I'm doing and how I'm saying it. If I see anybody even talking while I'm giving a set, they know they're in trouble. Every now and then I'll get a new athlete who doesn't understand the rules but they catch on real quick as someone's tugging on their suit. I can see them down there saying, "Shhhh, or we're all going to get in trouble." So they're real attentive towards what we do.

I knew I was going to lose some kids going in but my job was to coach and I knew they ones I had left would want to be there. From 60 kids and 12 kids at that time, my senior group today is 50 to 60 kids. I average 10 to 18 kids on my National Team. I have over 130 kids on the team. I have had Junior and

Senior National finalists and I had a triple gold medalists at the Olympic Festival this summer. So, we as a club are extremely proud of that and I think the attitude going back 4 to 5 years when I first started with this club has helped us. These kids are tremendous kids and I am complemented even at Junior Nationals. This summer someone came up to me and complemented me how well behaved my kids were. As a group they have come together nicely and I'm really proud of them for that.

I tell you, staying in coaching was tough the first year and it took a lot of energy. but it's paid off. I just kept remembering my long term goals.

Even though the kids and I are getting along, I'm still getting phone calls from their parents. Parents, I know, play a major role in the kids' sports experience and put completely too much pressure on the kids. So, how am I going to get rid of these parents who are calling me? This is crazy. I'm not fortunate like a lot of people — I don't have an office to go to. The phone is in a room in my house so I hear it ringing, unless I turn the ringer off, and it was always ringing. I couldn't figure it out. So, I decided that parents needed to know what I was doing with them. They needed to know. So, I decided that before the season started, just like I did with the kids, to have a team meeting to set everything, I was going to talk to the parents.

We decided to have a Fall Kickoff Party. It was potluck — everybody brings a dish. It was big and the parents didn't know what I had planned. They thought a general meeting that would be a lot of fun. Well, I started out by telling them some of the goals and what we had done over the summer and at our National Meets. Some of you who are in a situation like I am where we hardly get any publicity in our town so the younger parents may not know

what is happening with your older swimmers. If that publicity isn't out there, they don't know. Some of them, because we did get a lot of press on our Olympic Festival triple gold medalist, may know, but they probably wouldn't have known that he was a Senior National qualifier. The publicity is horrible. So, I told them about my philosophy a little bit and what I expected and so forth. I wanted them to know that I deal with the kids positively, or try to deal with the kids positively, and I would hope that they would do so as well when they go home. The topic at the dinner table doesn't need to be swimming and how was practice and what were your averages and so forth.

I firmly believe that until you're 12 years old it's your choice and I don't want parents standing behind the lane and yelling and screaming at these kids for doing a bad time or not doing their best time or whatever. Once they turn 13 it's their opportunity to take a different choice and if they want to go on, up to another level, then that's great. I want the parents to know that — that we're creating a great, fun atmosphere for them. You won't get through to all of them, as you all know, but you will get through to some of them.

I decided to hold Parent Education courses. I passed around a sign up sheet. I took a little piece of paper and a pencil and told them, "I want to know what you want to learn about. I want to know what you want to know from me, I want to know what you want to know about swimming, and athletics as a whole." I can't believe the response I got. It was huge. They told me everything that they wanted to learn and I'm looking at this thinking, "This is really crazy." Well, it's not crazy. They don't know. We take things for granted. We think that they know. We want them to know, but they don't know. So, I devoted two Mondays out of every month in the fall. I didn't interfere with my Senior practice. As soon as my Senior practice was done on a Monday and the age groupers were starting I held the meetings. I figured that was the age when the parents were still bringing them to practice. We'd

publicize it in our monthly bulletin that gets sent out to all the families. I put all the parents in a cafeteria. I had about 20 parents show up. I was really surprised at the amount of people. I thought for sure that they're all going to put it down here and nobody's going to show up and I'm going to be the only one talking to myself. But they showed up and it really opened my eyes how much the parents wanted to learn and know about their children.

One of the topics that I covered was taper, and I waited to cover taper to after Christmas and then later in the season I had another one and tied nutrition and taper together. I probably had nutrition as my first one, if I can remember correctly, because that was the biggest request that they had. I covered weight lifting, even though we don't do weights as a team. I have a USS representative that lives in my area and I had her come in and talk about volunteering and how important it is to volunteer for your club and how important it is for your kids that they get help with their athletics and so forth.

I thought this was a great opportunity for volunteerism. So, we decided that the president of my club and another official in the club hold an officials clinic. I don't know if it was sneaky or not but by the second Monday I ended up with 15 new officials for my club. We were just tickled pink. It really helped out with all the meets that we host. These parent education courses really helped the overall morale of my club more than I can say. It cut down a lot of questions from parents and the phones don't ring as much as they used to. It made the coaches more available and less threatening. They looked at us as "Hey, I can really ask you a question and we can really be open with them about things we want to know about." Because we started out in all these parent education courses by saying, "There are no crazy questions."

Here are a couple of other things that I do. These may sound kind of crazy. I know about 90% of my Senior Team by their middle initials or by their middle names. It's kind of funny because they use it with each other now. They know in practice if I say "Stephen Richard," he's mouthing off or he's getting out of control. But, kids like it. They probably know everybody's middle names as much as I know them and it's actually kind of trickled down into the Age Groupers.

We also do log books and I think this is vitally important with having 50 to 60 kids because there's no way absolutely I can communicate one on one with those kids. So, I decided that in their log book they have the date, the workout detailed down to the sets that they did, the intervals, and the averages that they held on the set. They have their weight listed on there. I don't weigh my kids, but if there's a problem I'll pull them aside and talk to them about it. It's really not a major problem that we have. Total yardage for the day and a comment are also included. They have to comment after every practice because I found that, especially being an athlete, going home, what's the last thing on your mind? Probably that 3000 for time that your coach made you do. So, what do you do? You hate your coach at that time. So a lot of them do it in the car on the way home or do it before they went to bed and I found that it really kind of released a lot that they had built up inside of them.

So, I would get their log books every Monday. I usually take them home and turn them back in on Tuesday. I really bust my rear end to get them back to them on Tuesday because it's important to them. It's like a diary. It's between the athlete and myself. Nobody else can see these unless the athlete shares it with them. I write back to every athlete how I feel their week was, how I feel what sets could be better, what sets were great, and actually comment on little things by writing, "Good job."

On the inside cover they have their goals for the season and every time they open that log book they're going to be looking at those goals.

I have this triple Olympic Festival gold medalist, Steve Barnes. He came in the spring and had this red swim cap on. He had written three times on the cap. These times were goals he wanted to accomplish. The first 3 to 4 weeks I said, "Take the cap off. Who are you fooling? I think it's a great idea, but it's not a great idea if you're not going to work for it." So, he went home and he thought about it and came back the next day and said, "You know, the reason I put that cap on, the reason I had those on there, is because my brother does that in college." I said, "I think it's a great idea but you've got to know why you're wearing the cap." He took it off for a couple of days, which really shocked me and then he came back in with it, but he had gone over it and made it darker and heavier. So, I said, "What's with the cap?" He said, "I remembered what my goals were."

I think a lot of times we forget, I know I do, in the middle of a season, how to keep track of 60 kids and their individual goals. So, by having that log book, and every time they open it and on that front cover are their goals, if they're not doing what I think they should be doing, I can tell them to look at the front cover. And they all know what I'm talking about.

To recap some things I've discussed today before we open for some questions, I'd like to say kids are harder to coach today. You can have any excuse you want. There are more broken homes, that's a fact. There are more dysfunctional families that stay together. If we keep making excuses things aren't going to get any better. We've got to learn to just deal with it.

I've given you some examples but you really need to figure out what works best for you and your club. Don't let your athletes become too dependent on you; I really put a lot of independence in my kids. If you feel they're strained or headed the wrong way, help them by redirecting them back to the positive. Sit them down and talk to them one on one.

I'd like to thank ASCA, (I was on short notice for this) for inviting me to give this talk because it's helped me going into my season to motivate myself to make sure I follow through on some things that I haven't done in the past and I'd also like to say "Let's strive for a drug free Atlanta."

Response to Questions:

Regarding preparation of kids for college:

Jean Freeman, head coach of the University of Minnesota women's team, has a girl of mine, a freshman, and she won and set a Big 10 record in the mile, and Jean gets the credit for that. She is asking what I did to prepare my kids to go to college. My goal, as a club coach, is to get my kids to college. My goal is not to try to keep my kids. I want them to go on and learn and experience the things that I have experienced in a positive manner. I do a lot to prepare my kids for college. I spend a lot of time coming up with a recruiting package for the kids for college. I came up with 40 to 50 questions that I felt they should ask when they go to a university or a recruiting trip. They should ask the coach, they should ask the other athletes, and anybody they could possibly ask.

I don't do any weight lifting with my kids. It's completely optional, because I know, chances are that's going to give them room to improve once they do go on. Fortunately it has gone well in this situation as Kim has gone on to work very well with Jean. It's funny because sometimes you don't realize the impact that the club coaches have on their athletes. Now that I look back at my swimming career, that's what I remember when I'm dealing with it. They made me what I was when I went to school. They helped me become the person that I am today. Every coach I ever had has helped me become a better person and I try to remember that when I deal with them.

Regarding personal evaluation of teaching methods:

This is for not only coaching your own kids, but for coaching all kids period. The best thing to do, I found, is to have somebody video tape you when you're not looking and you don't know it. A lot of times you're either too lenient with your own kids or too harsh on your own kids. Usually you're not just strait down the line like you are with the rest of the kids. By having someone video tape you when you're not looking really opens your eyes. Even for those of us who are just starting out in coaching. Just make sure you don't know when you're being video taped. Then it's not a real fair judge.

Regarding education and learning:

Well, I think there's a lot of trial and error with everything, especially with myself. That's a good question because I hope it's not a normal circumstance for everybody. I was fortunate enough to get into that position. I look back at it as I swam — we had an Olympian back in 1976 swim for the coach that I swam for — I swam for Terry Stoddard at Mission Viejo for a while and Terry was a real father figure for me. He did a lot for me. I was raised by a single mother and he helped bring me to reality. David Marsh from Auburn

absolutely was the biggest motivator, and he was just an assistant when I was there. He helped me steer down the straight path instead of veering off. The thing I try to remember and tell myself is that you've got to have enough confidence in yourself with what you're doing because if you don't, you're not doing the right thing. It's your decision. It's something that you're doing and if you come across with enough confidence and those kids know that you are there for them, that's mostly what I have received. I am very fortunate because I see a lot of athletes that I swam with and they went on to other programs and I don't see them as real healthy today. Some are and some aren't. But we make more of an impact than they do. I have a ton of mentors that I could just list and name. I've talked to several coaches here that I've never talked to before and you don't know it, but you've helped me in a major way because I'll ask you a question and you won't even know what I'm getting at. I'll usually get an answer out of you one way or another.

Regarding pre-season goal setting meetings and parents' involvement in the child's goal setting:

I personally think that you're opening a wide door for these parents if you sit them down in a room and say, "This is my philosophy. This is the way it is and I want you to buy into this and be part of this philosophy." I think those parents know what to expect. I think you should find out the expectations of the swimmers. You're going to find out a lot about those families and those kids but I don't know about actually having a meeting to find out what their goals are. I think if you set it initially and tell them what you are doing with the club and what you'd like to see happen with the athletes, they're going to come to you if you have a problem with it.

Regarding discipline with log books:

We don't threaten punishment for failing to keep a log book, we offer a consequence. You don't do your log book, this is what happens. And they know.

Regarding condition of the athletes that are sent to you:

I'm never comfortable with the way a parent sends their child to me. You always want to change something and it goes back to what I was saying in the beginning. Less parenting vs more parenting. You have parents that are not strict enough and parents that are too strict. I think I've got both. I'd like to see some more that are too strict and the kids behave when they come. There are others that are well behaved but they're spoiled rotten, to put it bluntly. So, you've got to be able to find the happy medium between those two and I really don't have a major problem either way.

Regarding how you handle squabbling among groups in practice:

I don't know if I have a handle on that or not. The biggest thing my kids fight over is who leads the lane. No kidding. I had a kid come back from college this summer, who's going to be a sophomore at Michigan State, and my kids are just running circles around him. He came back to me (he's been out of the water for a couple of months) and said, "The crazy thing about this team is that they all want to go ahead. I always get stuck going last because I really don't care. But they fight over who goes first." I think that goes back to when I was doing age group when I felt if you want to do well in a meet you have to race in practice. You have to be able to do your skill in practice before you do it in meets. For example, breathing every 3. If you're going to go to a meet and not breathe every 3, you're not working hard enough on the skill in practice.

My 13 year old girls are just like everybody else's 13 year old girls. I was a 13 year old girl once and I know what they're like. There's a little problem with 13 year olds but I don't have parents calling me. I can't think of anything specific that we do. Really, I think it's attitude that stems from the coaching staff. I don't argue and bicker with my kids and hopefully they don't argue and bicker with themselves. Jeannie and I don't stand on the deck and argue with each other.

Regarding fine tuning the team on a day to day basis once major obstacles are dealt with and settled:

That's the goal. I want to be able to walk on that deck and give those athletes everything every single day. By having that many kids in the pool at one time, it's difficult to handle a problem that's happening over here and deal with the kids that want to be there. I don't have a lot of riffraff on the team right now that has attitude problems.

Regarding consequences:

Consequences would be something that is natural. For example, say its winter time and your child doesn't want to wear a coat. Fine. They don't want to wear a coat and they go outside and what's the consequence? They catch a cold. Punishment is yelling, screaming, threatening, throwing your kids up against the lockers. Because I have my kids do pushups for their language, I'm on the line whether its a punishment or a consequence, but I set it up so it's a consequence and the kids were part of that also.

And I've slipped. Believe me, I've slipped once or twice. I get down on that pool deck and it doesn't matter where it is, a swim meet or practice, and I've done my pushups. So, it's set up more as a consequence rather than a punishment.

Regarding balancing your family life.

I'm a newlywed. I've been married for a little over a year now and I think it was tougher actually when he and I were just dating because he did understand. He was, I think, coaching gymnastics for a little, so he did understand where I was coming from and what I wanted to achieve with my athletes and where I was going with them.

I'm in a real fortunate situation. The office is in my house. It's a room that I have devoted to swim business and I had it before I got married. He understood what was happening when he was coming in.

My husband's job is really out of the ordinary. We have a lot of time together. He's a morning disc jockey and he does a morning radio show and so we get up similar hours and he goes to work and comes home during the day. So our time is not evening time, and we don't have kids yet, but that's probably something that's going to come about. At this time it's not a problem.

I travel a lot, obviously. He came with me to New Orleans for 4 days at the beginning. You've got to find time and as long as you and your spouse, or

whoever, understands what your goals are. He knows it's important what I do. Before we got married I wanted him to understand that this is what I wanted to do and the time I needed to devote to this and time it was going to take. He's extremely supportive.

Regarding dealing with parents once some kids had left the team:

I now coach the three boys of the coach that I swam for, and he sits on my Board. He sat on the Board when I first started and he's been supportive ever since then. I'm lucky in that situation. But it's still been a fight every year with new parents. You get new parents that come in and that's when I decided to start with the parents education. Educating the parents so they understand what swimming was about, knowing what winning is about, and knowing what it is to train the athlete. They just don't come in and go up and down the pool. Let them know you know what you're talking about. You go to these clinics and the reason you go to these things is not to have fun.

It all goes back to communication. We have a monthly bulletin that we put out and we include a "Coach's Corner" and I will write, every month, an article for that "Coach's Corner." The next one will be on this clinic and I will put things in there that I have learned here and share with them. I don't want them to think that I came here just to have fun. I came here to learn. By going back and sharing these things with them they support me more, support our group, and they know that we come back really fired up over these things. Communicate with them. People tell me I talk all the time, and hey, however you're going to get your point across that's how to do it.