



Team Building by Skip Kenney (1995)

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Internationally, nationally and collegiately - on every level Skip Kenney is the most recognized name in the men's swimming world. Kenney is to swimming what John Wooden is to basketball. Wooden coaches UCLA to 13 consecutive Pac-10 Championship titles and 10 NCAA Championship titles. Kenney, the 1996 head men's swimming Olympic coach, has won six NCAA Championships and 14 consecutive Pac-10 Championships, a new Pac-10 record that broke Wooden's mark. Coach Kenney is obviously one of the most successful coaches in Stanford History. He put together four straight undefeated dual-meet seasons (1983 - 86), and he has coached a total of 67 NCAA individual and relay champions. He has been named NCAA Coach of the Year five times and Pac-10 coach of the Year eight times. Coach Kenney stepped onto the campus of Stanford University in 1979. Using grit and determination, he took a 15th place men's swim team and turned it into a top 10 power. Six years later, in 1985, Kenney guided his team to its first NCAA title since 1967. The '85 title wasn't the end of it as Stanford won the national championships in 1986 and 1987 as well. Stanford swimming established a tradition of success under Kenney's guidance. Kenney is also an author, lecturer, motivator who finds new ways to rally his troops every year. He gains experience and stays on the cutting edge of coaching by coaching on the international scene every summer. Coach Kenney was selected as the American Swimming Coaches Association's "Coach of the Year" on September 24, 1993. The award was presented for outstanding contribution to American swimming at the international level over the past 12

months. Kenney, 52, has been a Pan-Pacific Championships head coach, a Pan-Am Games head coach and a U.S. Olympic Team assistant coach. Kenney was the assistant coach of the American team that competed at the 1994 World Championships in Rome. The 1993 American team, coached by Kenney, won the Pan-Pacific Championships in Kobe, Japan that summer. At the Los Angeles Olympic Games in 1984 (under Don Gambril and the Seoul Olympic Games in 1988 (under current Stanford women's swimming coach Richard Quick), Kenney was an Assistant Coach for the US Team . In 1987, he was the combined head men's and women's swimming coach for the US Team at the Pan-Pacific Games in Indianapolis. In that meet, Kenney led his teams to a record 57 medals, including 27 of a possible 32 gold. It marked the largest single USA medal haul in Pan Am history. Some of the well-known athletes who have trained under Kenney include US Olympians Pablo Morales (current world record holder), Jeff Rouse (current world record holder), Jeff Kostoff (former American record holder) and John Moffet (former world record holder). Coach Kenney and his wife, Debbie, the office manager of the Stanford Sports Information Office, reside in Menlo Park with their two children - Kristine (19) and Richard (17).

(Editor's note: Due to a technician's error, the first moments of Coach Kenney's presentation were not recorded.)

She says, "Well this is sort of a second grade philosophy." I said, "But I have a couple of guys that I think this would work on." So she talked about budding sunshine and how clouds just bounce away. And when you spread sunshine,

you feel good about yourself, you have a better self image, and you have a higher level of expectation.

I'd like to tell you some stories that maybe explain this a little bit better. Let me take you back to 1984. The Olympic games are in Los Angeles. John Moffet was a swimmer on our team training for the Olympic Trials. He was training very well. He had a small setback in 1980 with the boycott. And I say "small" to John Moffet because John was only 16 on that Olympic Team. It would have been a major setback for many of our athletes. But John says, "I'm only 16. In 4 years I'll be at my prime. It's okay, it's a setback, but it's okay. I can handle this."

So now it's '84, and he's at his prime. He's training great. We go off to the Olympic Trials. John breaks the world record in the 100 breaststroke. Two days later he makes the team in the 200 breaststroke. Now John has an opportunity to go into the Olympic Games and has a chance at a medal, and in fact, in reality, as the world record holder and the number one seed, he actually can say he has a chance at the gold medal. Well John is training better in training camp than he was prior to the Olympic Trials.

In the prelims of the 100 breaststroke John is swimming so well that he begins to talk to himself going down the pool. "Hold back. Not yet big guy. Not yet. Hold back. Not yet. Not yet big guy." He makes the turn at the wall. He does an underwater pullout and does the same thing, "Not yet big guy. Not yet." On the fifth stroke off the wall he says, "Okay now. Let's take it home." John gives a strong pull and a strong kick, and the kick is so strong that John tears his groin muscle. He struggles into the wall but he is

swimming so well at the time he just misses his own world record. But he is in a lot of pain.

The Olympic team doctor is called over and he says, "Well John, let's go back to the village. Let's get ice on it, let's rest, and come back early to the finals." John Moffet goes back, ices, rests, comes back early. He now comes back on crutches because the pain is unbearable. And the doctor says, "Look, we're allowed to give you a shot. Would you like a shot? Are you sure this is what you want to do?" John says, "I want the shot. This is the Olympic Games." The doctor gives him the shot and he waits a period of time. He goes to the diving well to try loosen up — no change. The Olympic Team doctor says, "I'm allowed to give you one more shot, but are you sure this is what you want?" John says, "Doc, I can't go the rest of my life wondering what if. I have to know. This is the Olympic Games." Second shot. Wait. The meet has now started. John was lucky he wasn't in the first event. He goes to the diving well and there is still no change.

The doctor says, "Look there is one more opportunity I have to help you and that's to tape the leg tightly enough where the muscle won't move." Well we all know what happens. If the muscle won't move, it won't work. "Come on doc," John says, "tape it up, let's go."

They introduce the finalists and world record holder, John Moffet, drops off his sweats. There's this huge wrap on his leg. In fact, on television they said, "Wow, look. It looks like his groin — he's trying to psych out his opponents. At the Olympic Games he's going to tape his leg to psych out his opponents." As the gun goes off, John sort of pushes off with one leg, struggles down the pool, and comes back fifth. Now back in 1980, that was a

setback, but that was a small setback. Here is the world record holder coming in fifth. Many people might say, “Well you’re in the Olympics. Fifth place in the world?”

But when you’re the world record holder, fifth place doesn’t mean very much. This was a major setback for John Moffet. In fact, he moved out of the Olympic village. He knew that someday the pain in his leg would heal, but how would he ever heal the pain in his heart? He comes back that very last day. He wanted to be in closing ceremonies, and he wanted to be in the team photo. And a photographer not understanding the situation said, “Wow! It looks like everyone has a medal here. Hold up your medals.” John walks off, picks up his bag and leaves. John went down to Mexico where his family had a little home just to get away. He had to start to heal his heart.

A few weeks later school starts and he comes back to Stanford. He says to me, “Coach, I can’t do this anymore. I can’t swim anymore.” Yet he comes back to an unbelievable group of guys that love him as a person. And they welcomed him with open arms. Wow! “John. How ya been? How ya doin’? How’s it going?” He came back to a family. He came back where nobody judged him. Nobody said, “Ahh, there’s the guy who should have medaled but didn’t medal.” As a team they reached out with open arms, welcoming him back, “We’re glad to see you.” Team chemistry — Is it strong? Is it powerful? You bet! The team was learning how to spread sunshine.

John Moffet continued to swim. Went on to win several more national titles, because of the strength of his team and how they felt about him as a person.

We were fortunate a few years ago to recruit a great athlete. A great young man and maybe the greatest role model this sport has ever seen. His name was Pablo Morales. Wow, we're gonna be good, right. I mean we have an awesome team. We have a chance to win the national championships. For sure we're gonna win some individual events and we have a great shot at the medley relay. The medley relay is the first day. We're seeded right next to the defending champions. "How do we want to do this guys? Do we wanna just swim and come back tonight?" "No Coach. We want to establish the fact this morning that we're the best." Okay. Then the relay goes off. We swim great. We qualify first. We smash the American record. There's only one problem. I see this hand go up behind our blocks.

From across the pool at Cleveland State I'm not sure if it is us. Now I am curious to see, are we disqualified? And as I walk around the pool, I ask about three other coaches, "Do you think we jumped? Do you think we jumped?" "Yeah coach, I think you jumped." So now I'm really curious about how this team is going to handle it? But most importantly, how's this young freshman named Pablo Morales gonna handle this? Now quite often, in fact most of the time when there is a relay disqualification, it's created by the person coming into the wall, but they always call it on the person leaving the blocks. So my concern was for the young freshman. When I went over to the warm down pool which was a shallow pool, they were standing together, four athletes with their arms around each other, their heads touching. I couldn't tell what they were saying, you could just hear that they were verbalizing.

We loaded into the vans and went back to the hotel. The team captain called a team meeting. Dave Bottom was the team captain. To this day I don't know what went on in that team meeting. No coaches, no adults, no chaperons, no

trainers — just 18 college men in a room together. Now knowing the young men that were in that room, I can only guess it went something like, “Pablo, we love you. You’re going to do more for Stanford than Stanford has already done for you. Let’s use this as a learning experience. Let’s together go forward.” How often do you see in a relay disqualification, finger pointing? Once again the strength, the team chemistry was working. I was in the hall when that meeting finished. 18 college men walked out of that room with tears coming down their cheeks. And they went on to have two more days of great swimming, winning several individual titles. The strength of caring for one another.

We had a young man on our team named Sam McAdam who was from Decatur Illinois. Sam came on his recruiting trip, and I offered him a scholarship because of his personality. I said here’s a guy who is going to make other people around him better. Now Sam didn’t score a point in four years at Stanford, but he was awesome. He was unbelievable. He worked so hard every day. Every day he would have less rest than everybody else on the team but every time he touched the wall he would say, “C’m on, let’s go guys.”

Then one day he buddied up with Moffet after practice for team teaching. They were working on breaststroke turns. He says, “John, you’re right handed.” “Yeah.” “Well you’re turning to the right. If you’re right handed you should be turning to the left.” John tried it then said, “Wow, hey coach, come here. Sam’s helping me with my turns. What do you think? This feels great!” “Wow, that looks great,” I said. Now John Moffet could have said, “Hey Sam, wait a minute. I’ve been on the Olympic Team, I’ve been a national champion, I’ve been an American record holder. How is it that you’re telling me what to do? You’ve never even scored a point here.” John didn’t say that. In fact, I guarantee you he didn’t even think that. That was the year John went on to break the world record.

Now, in Sam's senior year he finally makes NCAA's. We go off as a team, Sam swims, Sam doesn't score. But he makes everyone else better. And he's so excited because we win the title. Sam is a part of history. He has a national championship ring and no one can ever take that away from him. It's now June and his parents are coming to graduation and he wants me to meet them. "Okay. Sam, come here for a minute first. Talk to me about the highlight of your Stanford swimming career." Well I already know what the answer is. He worked four years to make NCAA. He finally made NCAA and we won. A national champion, Sam McAdam.

That's not what he said at all. He says, "Coach, you remember the day that I helped John Moffet with his turn? That's the day that was the highlight in my life with Stanford Swimming. That's the day that we went into the locker room afterwards and everybody said, 'Sam, way to contribute. Way to contribute to this team. Way to make this team special.' That was the highlight."

We only have five shower heads and thirty guys. So that's one of the reasons why our team is pretty close, but guys like Sam McAdam make a difference.

In 1988, I learned something new as a coach. I thought if you're a world record holder or an American record holder you made the Olympic team. As we know, Pablo didn't have a great week. And at the end of the week he came up and he says, "Coach, do you have anything that I can do back at school. You know I had put off law school for a year and I was wondering if you have..." I said, "Yeah. In fact we were going to start a masters team and

we need a masters coach. Are you interested in that?" "Yeah. Could I do that?" Well sure. And I walked away from that conversation saying to myself, what is that about? Most people when they're finished with school want to travel, they want to get away, they want to do something different. Pablo wanted to come back. I could only surmise that Pablo wanted to come back where he was safe, just like you at home where there's that unconditional love, where nobody was going to judge Pablo. Nobody was going to say hey there's the guy that should have made it. But they were going to reach out and say, wow there's the guy we love. There's the guy that leads this team. He came home to that unconditional love and did one of the greatest coaching jobs I've ever seen.

In 1992 we know there's a happy ending to this story. Pablo walks out on the pool deck. I hadn't seen him for a couple of years and here he is. Pablo. Wow. "What are you doing? How's law school? I'll bet you're freezing your butt off out there. What are you doing here?" "Well Coach," he says, "I wanted to come out of retirement. I wanted to see if you had room on your team." I couldn't get yes out fast enough. Let's go. We started what was one of the most exciting years I have ever been a part of. He makes the Olympic team by 4/100s of a second, wins the gold medal by 3/100s of a second, and he comes back to the team at our team banquet and gives the best talk I've ever heard, thanking the team as if he did nothing. The team. "I wouldn't have done it without you guys," he says, "I couldn't have done this. Thanks so much for letting me be a part of this. Thanks for letting me make the Olympic team. Thanks for helping me with the gold medal."

Now you look back to '88. One of the young men that beat Pablo in the 100 butterfly was his teammate, a person who Pablo had taken under his wing to teach him everything. So you'd think in a comeback he'd be saying, "Well maybe I won't do that again. Maybe I'll just keep what I know to

myself.” Every week Pablo took the freshman to dinner. Every week, to teach him about life, about swimming, about how to compete. Every week, he gave and he gave and he gave and he gave. And those of you who know Pablo understand what I’m talking about. Yet he comes after winning the gold medal to thank and give everyone else the credit. Giving, spreading sunshine, caring for one another.

You as a coach, and your athletes have to ask each and every day how can I contribute. How can I contribute to this team? Well, at our team there are several ways that you can contribute. You can be the very best at taking off the pool covers at 5:45 in the morning. You can be the very best at putting in the lane lines. You can be the best at writing a recruiting letter when you have a lot of other things to do at the end of your day. But the important thing is that you’re contributing. And in fact, you can be the first athlete to practice every day. Every day.

We had a great swimmer named Jeff Kostoff. He was at practice in the morning first, every single morning. He liked the attitude that it brought to the team. And so I said to myself I wonder what time he gets here. So I got up about 10 minutes earlier and I come around the corner and there’s Jeff. Darn. I get up about a half hour earlier now. Now maybe Jeff catches on or someone says something to him because I’m driving about 90 down El Camino. I’m going to beat the son of a gun to practice for once. And I come around the corner — “Hi, Coach.” We made that important and the team knew about it.

When Jeff graduated, we had a young freshman named Ricky Good whose father is the tennis coach at Stanford. He became the first person at practice

every day. And I made a mistake. I didn't acknowledge it to the team. And he finally came up to me and says, "You know it was important when Jeff was first, but you haven't said anything yet about me being the first guy at practice. How could you miss that coach?" I'm talking to myself now. How could I have missed that? It's easy to coach the top one third of our teams. It's how we treat and coach the bottom one third of our team that allows the team chemistry to spread.

I want to take you back a little bit now to that second greatest evening because there was one more step in that. As you know, on our teams once in a while we have someone that is a little bit different. In fact we might say, that guy is a little bit of a jerk. And on our team that sort of surprises me because I get to pick the people who are on my team. Well what do you do? Most times you'll see a team and they'll say, "Whoa, wait a minute. You can be on this team but you're really not one of our inside guys. I mean you're good, so you can be on the team. You're going to score some points, in fact you can even be on a relay, but you're really not one of us." It doesn't work. I want to tell today that nobody, nobody, even the greatest athlete on your team doesn't reach their potential unless the team chemistry is good, unless it's right. Oh, you may win. You may swim pretty well. But people don't reach their potential.

So how do you do that. You reach out, you pull them in. You reach out and you pull that person in to the team. And if you have somebody that's a little bit of a jerk, you need to figure out a way. So, as Nort Thornton once said at an ASCA clinic, "you kept people doing things right." So then you take the second grade sunshine gram. Is it a big deal? Nah, it's not even cut straight. It's just sort of torn across here. It's a yellow piece of paper that says sunshine gram and has a sunshine on it. You find that person doing something right and you write a little note, "Good Job", and you stick that on

their locker. Now they come in to practice. “Wow. The coach knows I did something well today.” But more importantly, the other team mates know. “Hey John. You have a Sunshine Gram. What did you do today?” “Well, you know Bob and Joe and I, we went to the bookstore, and the line was long and we were waiting and waiting and they finally had to go to class. I waited over an hour and got books for all of us.” “Way to contribute to the team.”

I remember one time when Stanford admissions called me. They said, “Coach you have a guy ranked number one on your list. He’s a great student and he’s a great athlete, but everything in his file is “me”, “me”, “me”, “me”. There’s no team at all. Are you sure you want this guy?” I said, “Yeah, I’m sure, because I think the strength of our team can help him.” Wow, he walks in on the pool deck the first day of his freshman year and he’s wearing that t-shirt with the great big ME on it, little tiny team, and I said to myself, “Oh, my gosh. We have one this year.” Little by little, we’d catch him do something well and we’d put a Sunshine Gram on his locker. This young man was unanimous captain in his senior year, made the Olympic team, and was NCAA champion. Now there was a freshman I wouldn’t have wanted to walk to the car with then. Now I’d love to drive across country with him — he’s a great guy. Why? The strength of the team and how they reached out to care for him.

Second grade philosophy? Yeah! Does it work at Stanford? You bet! Does it work out in the business world? Sure does. Sure does. Everybody likes to be cared for. Everybody. In fact, you may have some athletes on your team, cause I know I do. They’ve never been told in their life by someone, “I care for you” or “Hey, I love you.” You may be the first.

At the “88 Olympics, I was sitting in the stands as an assistant coach and we were watching the finals. There was a young man on our Olympic team sitting in front of me and he was saying some not very nice things about his parents to some other swimmers and I said to myself, “Wow! I don’t know if I heard that right.” The next night we were watching the finals and the same young man was sitting there and having the same conversation. Now I’m sure I heard it. So the Olympics ended, the summer ended, school started, and we were talking about recruiting. Our swimmers said, “Well coach, how about this guy? He was on the Olympic Team.” So I relate this story. Hey, we’re not interested in recruiting him. If you can’t show love and respect to your mother and father could you ever show love and respect to your teammates?

One of the all time great basketball coaches, John Wooden from UCLA is out recruiting back then. He goes into a blue chip home and he has a lot to sell, “You come to UCLA, you can be a national champion, you’re going to get a degree to UCLA, you’re going to go to the pros.” Finally the mom says, “Hey coach, can I ask a question?” “Sure.” The mother asks the question and the son says, “Mom, why do you ask such a stupid question?” John Wooden stands up and says, “I want to thank you for your time. I appreciate your hospitality. I appreciate you letting me come into your home. But, I’m no longer interested in recruiting your son.” And he leaves. Why? Once again, if you can’t show love and respect to your mother and father, how could you ever show love and respect to your teammates? It is critical.

Every day we need to ask, “Did I contribute something positive today?” You spread sunshine. You feel better about yourself. You have a better self image. You have a higher level of expectation.

There's another part of our program that we all share that's very, very important and that's the fear of failure. It's not too long ago that John Leonard could come to me and say, "Coach, I want you to speak at the ASCA World Clinic." No way. No way. I would come up here. I would finish my talk, and I would see two coaches over in the corner talking, and I'd be thinking, "Oh my gosh. They're talking about me." Or I would see two coaches over here laughing and I'd think, "Wow, they're laughing about my talk." But now it doesn't matter. Now, today I come before you with the best effort I have. I'm not afraid to fail. If it's a good talk and you can use it, fine. If it's not, it's the best I can do. This is the same atmosphere we need to create on our teams.

Now the role of the coach is to get young people to do things they don't think they can do, to get young people to do things they have never done before. That's how you make the first "A" standard. That's how you first break a minute in a 100 free? Or first break an American record? Now if I say, "Hey, come on up here, I want you to try something." "Well coach, I've never done that before." "That's okay. Come on. C'mon, try it." They fall flat on their face, and I say, "Look at that. You look like a fool." Now the next time I say, "Hey, come on up here and try something" what do you say? "No thanks, coach. The last time you did that you laughed at me. I'm not interested in trying again." Who wins? Nobody wins. Now if you asked a young person to come up and they fall on their face, and two teammates reach under and pick them up and take that next step together — forward and together, you now have created a learning experience where that young person wants to try again.

We can be a role model, and we need to ask our athletes to be role models. Now if Summer Sanders or Pablo Morales comes to one of your athletes and says, "Hey, how are you doing today." At the end of that

conversation, that kid sprints to the phone and says, “Hey mom, guess what? Summer talked to me.” It is the same thing with all of you. You’re the leaders. You’re the role models of the team. If you can help create a situation where the teenager talks to the 8 year olds saying something like, “Hey, Jamie, what are you swimming today?” “Well, I’m swimming the 25 fly, and the 25 back, and maybe I’ll be on a relay.” “Wow. Well, I want to wish you good luck. I’m going off to a meet but on Monday you let me know how you did, okay?” “Hey mom. Guess who talked to me today?!”

This is creating the atmosphere where people care about each other. I guarantee you that if Cal Ripkin walked into this room and talked to one of you, it wouldn’t be long until you got on that phone and called somebody. That’s the same role that we play in our sport. You are important.

Bill Walsh came to Stanford a few years ago. It didn’t work out the way he expected but in my mind, he’s the greatest football coach I’ve ever seen. Maybe it’s because I’ve been a 49er fan for 100 years. But Richard Quick and I wanted to learn something and so when Bill Walsh first came and was beginning spring football we went out there. And they started to practice and they were going — and you know how football practice goes, and Bill stopped practice, and he calls all of the coaches over, talks to them, and they go back. So later that week I saw one of the assistant coaches and I said, “Hey, what was all that about?” He says, “Bill stopped practice and he said to quit yelling at those kids and start teaching.” Quit yelling at those kids and start teaching. Spreading sunshine. Yep! You bet.

This past year we celebrated 50 years of the finish of World War II. (Many of you are probably too young to relate to it, some of us older people can relate

to this.) It was huge. It was emotional. It had a big impact on a lot of people in our country. And they interviewed four gentlemen, all in their 70's. All from a different part of the country. And they asked them why when World War II broke out did they volunteer? Why did they go on the bombers and fly over? You would think that the answer was the flag, and apple pie, and the country. It wasn't that at all. They said, I did it for their buddies. "I did it for my buddy." All four said the same thing. "We did it for our buddies." If we as coaches can create this atmosphere, we have done a heck of a job. You no longer do it for yourself, you do it for your buddy.

I would like you to take back to your program trust, love, and commitment. Trust, love, and commitment. We have a huge responsibility. "We" means all of us as coaches for 1996. As you know the sport of swimming is first in the Olympic Games. Our country badly needs role models. We saw one last night in Cal Ripkin. But when the Olympics start it's an opportunity for all of our athletes to shine. We will be the first athletes at the Olympics on television, the first in a magazine, the first on magazine covers, the first on the newspaper covers. I think that when the Olympic Games are going on, you're still going to see the O.J. Simpson trial going on. We're still going to be trying to figure out why in the hell did somebody bomb kids in Oklahoma City. And this country needs role models. And our Olympic Team can provide those role models. But we as coaches need to create an atmosphere where our young athletes understand that, and it's not take, take, take. They need to give.

When you make the Olympic Team and they give you a grocery cart and you go up and down the isle and you fill that grocery cart with team apparel until you need two of them, it's easy to say, "Wow, I've got it made." And you are taking and taking and taking. And that's not what we need. We need our swimmers to give. How do we do that? Let's take them down to the local

schools and have them speak on work ethic, and how they contribute to their team, and their teammate's growth. Let's take them to a shelter — a children's shelter.

If you have someone make the Olympic Team, allow them to have a press conference and hope nobody comes. And have it catered. And if nobody shows up — wow! You take all the food that you had catered to the children's center and you watch your Olympic athlete or your junior national champion or your high school champion give. Have them give. Then as we are all plastered on the tv and newspapers and magazines, we will be role models because we've learned how to give and not just take.

It's a big responsibility and we're all involved. It starts in the second grade, but it works for all ages. Caring about one another. Trust, love, and commitment for our kids.