The most common challenges faced by coaches in the swimming community are related to swimmer retention, coach burnout, access to pool space, financial challenges, administrative tasks, and lack of facilities, according to the recent survey conducted by ASCA. Coaches are seeking support and resources from ASCA, USA Swimming, and their local swim committees to overcome these challenges.

The survey revealed the biggest challenge coaches believe they will face in the coming year is work-life balance. Following closely behind according to the survey is rising expenses. Rounding out the top five are athlete mental health, swimmer retention and over-involved parents.

Coaches are seeking more educational opportunities, especially on learning how to build and own a swim team, coaching opportunities for those who teach during the day, education on conflict resolution, leadership, and resources for board-run clubs. Coaches are also looking for support in decision-making areas of USA Swimming, more authority from parents and board, and promotion of swimming through regular local ads and visible marketing.

Coaches are asking for resources to help deal with their administrative challenges. They want education geared toward time management, finding qualified staff, and communication with parents and board members. The coaches in this survey take advantage of coaching education opportunities, with many citing online courses, professional periodicals, podcasts, and clinics as their preferred methods of education. ASCA is a popular resource, with many attending ASCA clinics and accessing ASCA resources and materials on its website.

Similar responses were found when asked what the challenges that coaches will face in the next 3-5 years in their personal and professional lives. It is clear that swimmer retention and coach burnout are the most common challenges coaches expect to face. Coaches burnout was mentioned most, followed by attracting new families to the sport of swimming, swimmer retention and career advancement.

Survey respondents mentioned they are seeking education on the following topics:

- Learning how to build and own a swim team
- Coaching opportunities for those who teach during the day
- Education on conflict resolution
- Leadership
- Resources for board-run clubs

In terms of support, coaches are seeking more authority from the board and parents, involvement in decision making areas of USA Swimming, and resources to help them cope with challenges.

Coaches are seeking fewer repetitive requirements to remain certified with USA Swimming. Other asks for support included more meets at the LSC level and more marketing for all clubs beyond the Olympic surge.

When it came to the biggest challenges swim teams are going to see in the next year, respondents ranked staffing and pool time and space number one and two. The next most popular responses were swimmer retention, ability to provide staff benefits, and meet scheduling.

Coaches specifically mentioned the ability to attract and retain qualified coaches and officials, as well as providing benefits to staff as big concerns. Pool time and space were also a common issue, with many respondents expressing a need for more space or better utilization of existing space. Several respondents said teams are looking for ways to retain swimmers and attract new ones. Finally, meet scheduling and the cost of participation were also mentioned as significant challenges facing teams.

Needs for the next 3-5 years were similar to the one-year needs. Coaches reported a lack of facilities, high costs of the sport, and staffing issues more than any others. The need for more education, practical experience examples, and resources for smaller teams were mentioned specifically.

Recommendations from coaches included promoting the sport as valuable to diverse populations and reaching out to past members to design scholarships for youth to join local teams. Additionally, coaches recommend focusing on assisting smaller swimming venues/teams with outreach in their neighborhoods, increasing opportunities to "grow" coaches locally, and finding ways to fund and manage upkeep of facilities.

When it comes to the sport of swimming itself and the challenges it faces, the top five issues mentioned were retaining swimmers, attracting new swimmers, improving coach training and burnout, providing financial assistance, and keeping swimming fun. As echoed in other parts of this survey, other challenges include cost and access to facilities, meet schedules, lack of enthusiasm for the sport, and the perception of swimming as an individual sport.

The top three most common administrative challenges that coaches reported facing are time management, finding qualified staff, and communication with parents and board members. Many coaches feel overwhelmed with administrative tasks such as billing, registration, and scheduling pool time, which leaves them with limited time to focus on coaching and developing their team. Finding qualified and enthusiastic staff, particularly coaches, is a challenge due to low pay rates and lack of fringe benefits.

The most common communication challenges mentioned include getting parents to attend meetings and respond to emails, as well as interacting with over-involved and sensitive parents. Respondents also expressed issues with board members who lack leadership, budgeting, or communication skills necessary to run a non-profit organization.

The cost of attending in-person clinics can be a barrier, as can scheduling conflicts with coaching responsibilities. Many believe that continuing education is crucial to improving their coaching skills and developing a winning team culture.

When asked how coaches onboard their staff, the top 3 answers were: shadowing an experienced coach for a period of time before they start coaching solo, providing staff meetings

and mentorship to help them learn the team procedures and culture, and encouraging them to get all ASCA and USA Swimming certifications. The emphasis on mentorship and training highlights the importance of creating a collaborative culture that allows new staff to learn from more experienced coaches. In addition, certifications and shadow coaching help to ensure that new staff are familiar with best practices and team procedures, and can start coaching with confidence.

Parent education was also explored as well. Most respondents use a combination of meetings, emails, newsletters, social media, and other online resources to educate parents about their child's swimming experience. In terms of specific trends in parent education, it is clear that there is a growing emphasis on educating parents about safe sport practices, as mandated by USA Swimming. Other trends of parental education included encouraging parents to become officials or volunteers, emphasizing the importance of nutrition and mental preparation, and providing parents with more in-depth information about how swim meets are run.

ASCA also asked what motivates coaches and there were several common themes. Firstly, coaches are passionate about the sport and enjoy watching athletes improve their skills and achieve their goals. Many coaches view coaching as an opportunity to teach life lessons and develop characteristics that will help young people become more successful and caring individuals. Additionally, coaching is often seen as a way to give back to the community and help young people grow personally and athletically. Some coaches have personal connections to swimming, such as having been a competitive swimmer themselves or having overcome physical challenges through swimming. Overall, the sentiment was that coaching can be a challenging profession, with coaches motivated by the desire to constantly learn and improve.

There are several common themes that arose when coaches were asked what coaches would change about the sport of swimming. The most common answer is that swimming should be more accessible and affordable. Some also mentioned that coaching should be a viable career path, with more financial support and a focus on athletes' needs. Additionally, there are calls for shorter meets, more TV-friendly events, and less emphasis on results.

Respondents feel ASCA is doing well in supporting the coaching community through education and communication. They are happy with the variety of learning opportunities, such as clinics, webinars, and certification courses. The new leadership was praised for updating trainings and launching better programs that support coaches. ASCA's rebranding has helped in restoring trust in the swim coaching profession. Overall, ASCA has made progress in reaching out to its members and providing resources, inspiration and support.

According to the survey results, the things coaches want the most are a simpler process for yearly certifications with USA Swimming, more mental health support. and helping coaches transition to coach-owned and operated systems.

There is also a desire for more communication about productive age group programs. Many coaches also expressed a desire for resources for cheaper insurance and retirement advice.

The ASCA Coach Needs Survey was conducted in February and March of 2023 to better understand what coaches in the swimming community want and need. Any ASCA member and member of the swimming community was eligible to participate in this survey.

ASCA takes the needs of coaches very seriously. If you would like to get involved in the ASCA's efforts to support coaches, please reach out to education@swimmingcoach.org. Make sure to watch This Week At ASCA eNews and stay involved on social media for all updates related to ASCA programs, resources and initiatives!