

So You've been Elected Team Captain.....What's next?

By Wayne Goldsmith

Everyone is excited. The election for swim team captain is today.

Everyone takes a piece of paper and writes down the name of the person they want to be the team captain for the next season. Each swimmer folds their voting paper and places it carefully inside the ballot box.

A hush falls over the team as the votes are tallied.

And the winner is.....**YOU!**

Wow – your team mates have elected you team captain. Congratulations!!!

Now what?

Being elected leader of your swim team, school class or any group is excellent. Very few people get the opportunity to learn how to lead. Even fewer are good at it.

SEVEN GOLDEN RULES OF LEADERSHIP FOR SWIM TEAM CAPTAINS

1. Surround yourself with great people

All great leaders know a secret.....you can't do it by yourself!! Now that you are team captain, you need to surround yourself with great people who can help you do the job. A good leadership team might look like this:

- An outstanding senior swimmer
- A relatively inexperienced younger swimmer
- A really popular "social" type swimmer
- Someone who loves computer work
- A recently retired older swimmer who wants to give back something to the sport

Great leadership teams are truly representative of the people they represent. A common mistake in swim team leadership groups is to fill it full of only the best and / or oldest swimmers. This can often mean that the views, opinions and thoughts of the younger swimmers are not heard. Everyone has something to offer!

2. To lead is to serve

Leadership is not just about making speeches and accepting team trophies. It is about being in a position to help and serve your team mates in the best way you can. To paraphrase another great leader, "Ask not what your swim team can do for you. Ask what you can do for your swim team".

3. Listen more than you talk

A lot of people confuse leading with talking. There are times when a leader needs to talk but there are many, many more times when leaders need to listen. Listening to the needs of your team mates and aiming to help them is critical to good leadership.

Aim first to understand – then to be understood: this is a great phrase that many leaders use in their communication. Listening – really listening to the issues that are important to everyone in the team is the first step to understanding them and in turn provides insight into how to best lead (serve) them.

4. People don't care how much you know – they want to know how much you care

Most surveys about leadership show one clear message – people want to know that their leaders genuinely care for them as human beings. People want to feel appreciated, valued and respected by their leaders. So how can you achieve this?

- Learn everyone's name and use it every time you see them
- Remember little things about every person in the team, e.g. their dog's name, their birthday, their school, their favourite football team, their favourite music.
- Try to spend 2 minutes one on one with every person in the team each week – mostly listening.
- Recognise little things about every swimmer in the team and their contribution to the team's success. For example, "Hey Julie, I really appreciate your hard work in the relays today" or "Jim, your turns were outstanding. Great work. Keep it up."

As one great leader said, "The thing I've learnt about people and little things...is there are no little things".

5. Sometimes it is lonely at the top

Sometimes as a leader, you have to make difficult and unpopular decisions. Sometimes you may have to be involved in discipline actions involving friends and long time swimming buddies. Sometimes you may be involved in a team selection panel which decides a close friend or team mate misses out on an opportunity they have wanted.

As team captain, stick to these five leadership principles – the "Be-s" of leadership:

BE FAIR – make decisions which are fair and reasonable and just.

BE HONEST – always, always be 100% honest in your dealings with people and issues.

BE CONSISTENT – apply the same rules to the youngest members of the team as you do to the senior swimmers or even other members of your leadership team.

BE CARING – show care, consideration and compassion regardless of the issue.

BE DECISIVE – once you have made your decision – deliver it clearly and with conviction.

6. A rising tide lifts all the boats

The toughest way to lead is to try and do it all yourself. The easiest way to perform well at the top is to be supported from the bottom!

Empower everyone in the team to contribute and to feel comfortable about speaking up. Encourage all swimmers to express their views and to show leadership in some way that contributes to the success of the team.

The better you can tap into the passion, knowledge, experience and energy of everyone in the team, the better you can lead: in fact you lead by not leading! That is, if you empower and energise people to take responsibility for their own performance, you have to do little actual leading.

7. If all else fails, stick to the three Ps – PASSION, PERSERVERANCE, PATIENCE

People with little or no actual leadership training have made fantastic team captains because they lived the three Ps – Passion, Perseverance and Patience.

Passion – people respect and admire leaders who are passionate about what they do and who are passionate about wanting others to succeed.

Perseverance – people will follow leaders who never give up – who are determined to succeed and who will fight hard for their team members in tough times and difficult situations.

Patience – no one is perfect. People love leaders who show patience under pressure and tolerance and persistence if things go wrong.

So congratulations Captain. An exciting, rewarding and enjoyable experience awaits you as leader of the team.

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