

Focusing on the PositiveWhen all you hear are the negatives

By Kim Holmes

“Blast” emails have become an effective tool for delivering a lot of material too many coaches quickly. Recently, someone noted that our blasts had a lot of negative stories (rogue parents in violent situations, cheating, etc.), and asked why we don’t publish more positive stories. I tried to explain that much of what we post is for awareness and educational purposes, but when I really thought about it, it came down to this: We don’t hear good stories....we hear horror stories.

We don’t hear about a parent who’s done something generous for the best interest of the whole team; we hear about the disgruntled parent of a 9-year old (who’s only been in the sport for one year) getting the veteran coach fired because that nine year old wasn’t bumped up into the elite age group program or wasn’t put on the A relay.

We hear about the board or parent group who tries to get a coach to change his/her philosophy and expectations of excellence to accept mediocrity and to just allow the kids to participate and feel good about themselves. This is a competitive sport, and the kids will feel good about themselves when they are challenged to new personal bests, have some setbacks, and fight harder to become even better. This isn’t just about swimming...this is prepping kids to be successful in life!

Twice in the month of July, I had people ask me, “Isn’t the coach being too demanding of our children?” (In both cases, they were referring to senior level swimmers). Parents nowadays are trying to make the road as simple as possible for their children. It’s an admirable intention, but it is not helping the kids be prepared for setbacks, challenges and obstacles in the future. When parents allow the kids to take a practice off because they’re tired, it undermines the coach’s design for progression of skills, as well as affecting training and adaptation. It gives the kids an easy way out, rather than reinforcing that it’s OK for the coach to expect kids to show up to the practices offered, set goals, and work hard! It’s a good thing for kids to make a commitment, work their hardest, and reap the rewards of positive self esteem, pride, sense of accomplishment, sportsmanship, discipline, and time management skills, too!

It’s a rare call that comes from a coach saying, “I had a parent who thanked me today for teaching her child to push himself....to fight the physical and mental challenges of improvement. I even had to discipline the swimmer for being disruptive in the workout, and the parent reinforced the team’s message to her son, and told me that if he messes up again, to kick him out of workout....she’ll be the first one to come get him and will only bring him back when he’s ready to follow team rules and try his best!”

People today are busier than ever. Parents are working, and their kids are involved in a bazillion activities with the church, school, sports, drama, and music. The shuttle schedules are incredible. Swimming is a sport that tends to encourage the whole family to

become chlorinated. Parents are needed to volunteer their time to fundraising activities, run swim meets, and organize social events to build team spirit...swim clubs are not just a drop-off babysitting service. Usually, much of the team's volunteer needs falls to an over-worked (small) core group of dedicated parents. They believe in the benefits their children receive from the sport, and are willing to give their time to contribute to the team's overall success.

It's another rarity to get the call when the coach says; the core group of volunteers have been able to get more people involved! Now we have buy-in on the team concept from a bigger group of supportive parents, and no one is burning out from having to do all the work themselves! Or, even rarer is the call that says: our board president, who used to be a control freak, is delegating responsibilities to other board members and committee chairs. We all now have job descriptions, and each of us knows what we need to get done. We have short term and long term goals, we stay on task during board meetings, and he holds us accountable to getting our jobs done and reports filed before each meeting. Our meetings now are about taking care of the long-range planning for the club and looking at the big picture, rather than having to react to every little "crisis" situation!

No, unfortunately, we hear about the boards having to fight all the little fires that pop up due to lack of organization or education, and the rogue folks trying to get established clubs to change to their individual preferences. If positive stories are happening, be sure to share them with others! It's easier to teach a child how to do something, rather than how NOT to do it....it's the same with parenting and helping a swim club. Share your positive stories....we know there are good people out there doing good things!

PS....to the Mom I overheard on the concourse level at the Federal Way Sectionals as she kissed her son on the shoulder (he's taller than she) and she said, "Good luck, try your best, have fun....we love you!" We want to sign you up for speaking engagements!