

The Value of Being a Confident Swimmer

As has been discussed, high self-confidence is a characteristic that we tend to see in elite level athletes. To convince you that working to develop and manage your self-confidence is important, we are going to describe positive characteristics that are associated with high confidence. To increase your self confidence try thinking and behaving this way. Hopefully you'll begin to feel like you're "sitting on top of the world":

Confident swimmers consistently work hard in practice.

Confident swimmers know that much of their confidence is developed through experiencing success. They have learned to work on the controllable factors in practice that can be developed to help them enhance their abilities (and give them a feeling of success). They know that to be confident when they step up to race, they have to have put in the work.

Confident swimmers focus on controllables. Instead of spending time worrying about what they cannot do or might not be able to do, or otherwise doubting themselves, confident swimmers are more able to focus on the task at hand. While the doubt and concern they experience is real, they know that what is most beneficial is to focus on what they CAN do.

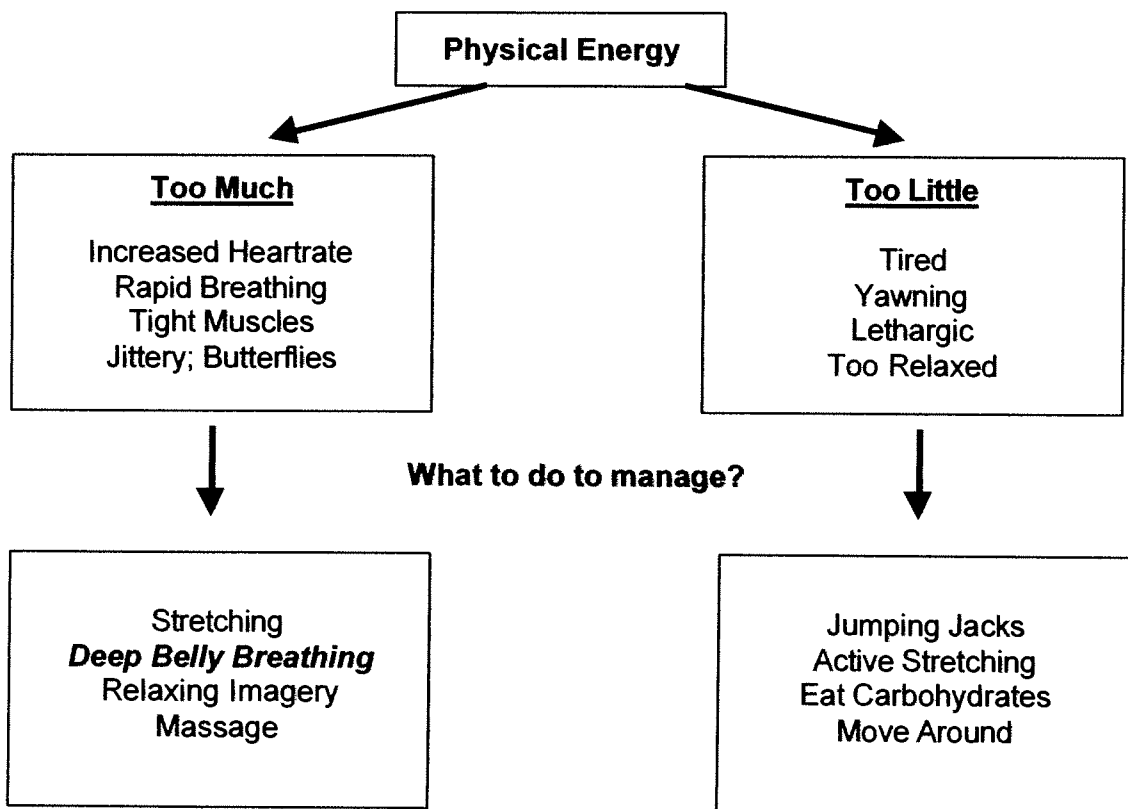
Confident swimmers try even harder when they don't reach their goals. One difference between more and less confident swimmers is how each group interprets "failure". Confident swimmers are more likely to view failure as a result of a lack of effort, preparation, concentration, skill execution, or other factors they can change. On the other hand, swimmers who are less confident view failure as a lack of ability, something less changeable. After a game, Michael Jordan was asked why he kept shooting the ball when he was 0-8 and obviously not "in the groove". His comment was that he KNOWS he is not a 0-9 shooter so the next shot was bound to sink. What confidence in the face of seeming failure!

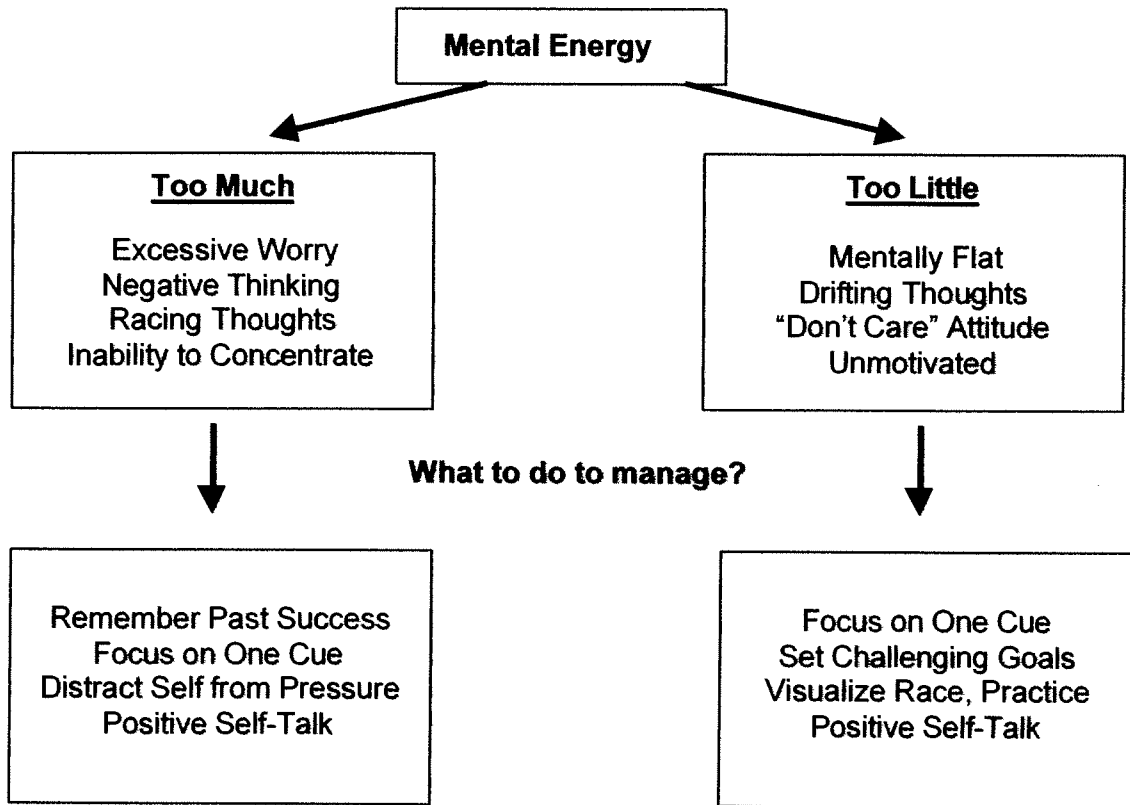
Confident swimmers "swim to win". You've probably heard the comments "swimming to win" and "swimming not to lose." While these might sound the same, they're very different. Swimming to win means one is not afraid to take chances and take control of the race. When one swims "not to lose" the focus is on the negative and is a reactive as opposed to proactive way of behaving. Confident swimmers swim to win.

Confident swimmers manage their emotions. Confident swimmers are better able to rebound from adversity (like swimming poorly in prelims) than those athletes who are less confident. Instead of getting angry, upset, down, or pessimistic, confident swimmers manage these potentially negative emotions. Swimmers who are confident in themselves and their abilities have a "never give up" attitude--viewing situations where things go against them as challenges as opposed to immovable barriers.

Strategies to Manage Energy Levels

Now that you are aware of what zaps and charges you, let's take it a step further and discuss specific strategies you can use to manage your physical and mental energy. In doing so, we'll also discuss symptoms related to too much or too little energy to help you identify when you need to put these strategies into play. One of the strategies, Belly Breathing, will be discussed in detail at the end of the chapter as it is useful when trying to manage excessive nervousness - - a common ailment of athletes.





Now that you know about physical and mental energy, the importance of managing energy in practice and competition, and strategies to help you manage your energy levels . . . it is time to GET STARTED! Begin with monitoring your mental and physical energy levels in practice. Use some of the strategies outlined in the previous figures and at the end of the chapter when you feel your energy is either too high or too low. Then, once you have practiced these skills and strategies, use them in competition to help you manage your energy.

Sample Imagery Script for Swimming Race Simulation

(100 meter freestyle race... you may adapt this as needed for other events)

As you enter the pool, you immediately recognize the familiar smell of the chlorine... You scan the scene... taking in the overall layout of the pool deck and it's inhabitants... You notice the sounds of the pool... the coaches and the swimmers talking... the sound of the water splashing... the periodic beep of the start, as other heats go off before you.

You imagine yourself getting ready for the race... getting into your suit... spending some time stretching... and going over last minute details in your head... This is your best race... you're well prepared for this event and you are feeling mentally strong...

The official calls your event... Imagine yourself on the blocks... the starter commands "take your marks"... you bend down into the starting position... At the sound of the beep you take off... A strong powerful dive into the water... neat, clean and streamlined... a powerful kick to propel you to the surface... As you surface you begin strong beautiful strokes... You feel the water slipping off your skin... the sound of the water splashing as you move quickly through the water.

Each stroke you begin to feel stronger and stronger... moving through the water with speed... You notice another swimmer near you... you put him out of your mind ... and strive to race your own race... Even more you concentrate on each stroke... as you approach the first turn... You come to the wall quickly... start the turn... throw your legs over your head ... and push off hard into a tight streamline... You take several quick kicks and again surface... attacking the second half of your race.

As you begin your swim home, you are still feeling very strong... you've trained all year for this race and it feels great... stroke after stroke you propel yourself forward... with about 35 meters to go, you kick it into over drive... more on the legs... faster... faster... As you pull towards the finish... you feel your speed increasing... You are completely focused on your stroke... your breathing... you are doing everything as it should be done... with poise and purpose... With each stroke you dig into your reserves... pushing yourself above and beyond your expectations... Pulling, propelling... surging forward... you move yourself forward... put your head down and lunge towards the wall.

You immediately look up at the scoreboard... a best time... and a win on top of that... You slowly begin to regain awareness, colors come into focus, you hear the roar of the crowd... you realize you've achieved your goal... you get out of the pool and dry yourself off... you become aware of the feelings of excitement and accomplishment... pride builds inside you... you have succeeded... you are a great swimmer.



Goal Setting Exercise 1: How Far should I Look Ahead?

Long-term goals tell you where you want to go and short-term goals tell you how you are going to get there. Both are important for effective goal setting. Try this exercise to help you breakdown your long-term goals.

- 1. What is one of your long-term goals for this season?**

- 2. What are the abilities or skills you need to achieve this goal?**
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

- 3. What can you do between now and the end of the season to develop those abilities and skills?**
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

- 4. What will you do this week to develop those abilities and skills?**
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

- 5. What can you do next practice to develop those abilities and skills?**
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

Goal Setting Exercise 2: Moving Beyond Outcome Goals to Task Goal Setting

Outcome goals tell you where you want to be which can help motivate. But, on a daily basis, they do not tell you what you need to DO.

1. Start With an Outcome

Choose an upcoming meet, and pick a challenging but not impossible outcome goal (win, place, get a certain score or time, etc.). Write that goal down in detail here:

2. Moving From Outcome to Task Goals

How can you maximize your chances to achieve this goal? Write down three things (i.e. pacing, stroke count, concentration, good breakfast, plenty of sleep) **you can do at the meet** in order to increase your odds of achieving the outcome goal.

1. I will: _____

2. I will: _____

3. I will: _____

[You have just gone from goal setting to task goal setting.]

3. Practicing the Task Goals in Training

What can you do in practice between now and your competition to increase your chances of achieving your three competition tasks? Write down two things to focus on in practice that will gear you towards your competition task goals.

For example, if your competition task goal is to hold a specific stroke rate, you might focus on specific stroke rating sets in practice.

1. In training, I will _____

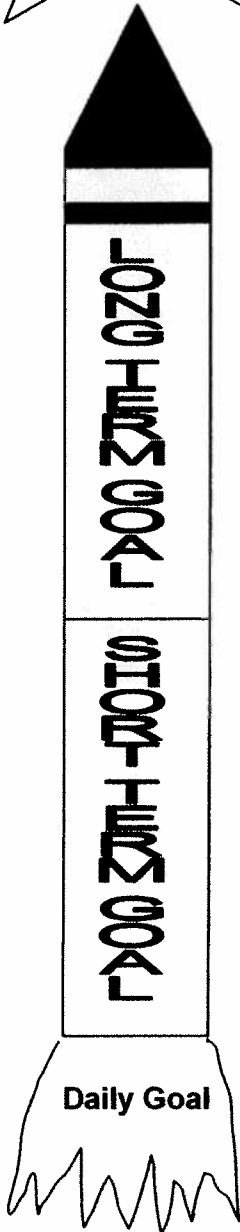
2. In training, I will _____





Exercise 6: Shoot for the Stars!

Use the goal setting rocket to help define your dream goal(s), long term, short term and daily goals.



Dream Goals	
1.	
2.	
Long Term Goals	
1.	
2.	
3.	
Short Term Goals	
1.	
2.	
3.	
Daily Goals	
1.	
2.	
3.	

Becoming All You Can Be Some Keys to success in Competitive Swimming

Thousands of swimmers begin careers in competitive swimming each year, yet some end up making it and some doom themselves to failure. Why is this and how can a swimmer avoid not "making it" in the sport he or she really loves? The answer may vary from swimmer to swimmer. However, I feel it lies in the points listed below:

- Know what you are going to do and how you will go about doing it before you begin. Make that goal specific in your mind or you might lose sight of it when the going gets tough. Brian Goodell, who was seventeen years old when he set two world records at the 1976 Olympics, put it this way- "Winners see what they want to happen and losers see what they are afraid might happen." Without that goal, what are you working toward?
- Be specific and predictable in your training. Use the right formula for the right result. A math problem cannot be solved with just any formula, and swimming cannot be successful unless you go about it in the proper way- using the proper formula for the predictable result- success. Your day-to-day work should relate to your goal so that it is real and your training always appropriate. If a certain stroke drill or set given by your coach will help solve your problem of low elbows, lack of endurance, weak kick, etc..., then include it in your mind as part of your formula for success. Don't fight the workouts or coaching techniques. You might be rejecting the right formula to the problem while, instead, using your own formula which hasn't yet been tested, proven, and correctly used before.
- Take one day at a time. It is good to think about the big picture and the overall goal, but the daily workouts and goals are just as important. In order to achieve the ultimate goal at the end of the season, you need as many successful daily goals as you can manage out of the 365 possible each year. The daily goals will support the ultimate goal and draw you closer to it if you make them relate to it and work them as if your ultimate goal depended upon them. In fact, it does.
- Be patient. If you aren't, you may not be able to achieve any goal whether it be in swimming or in life. Mistakes, problems and setbacks will be a part of trying to really make it in competitive swimming. Be confident and be patient.
- Don't worry about not receiving recognition for your accomplishments. Many people, swimmers included, lose sight of a goal and can lose interest because others have the spotlight. Make your own spotlight shine on your own goal even if others don't happen to be noticing it at the time. After you keep plugging away successfully, it will be hard for others not to notice the raging fire which began as a flicker of light.
- Learn to work with other people and not always against them. Work on an attitude of holding one another up rather than trying to push one another down so that you might look better by comparison. Use put-ups not put-downs. Swim shoulder-to-shoulder not head-to-head.
- Be a sponge and absorb anything related to your goal. Make sure you sort out the good from the bad so that you will be developing good habits, ideas, outlooks and techniques rather than harmful traits. By doing this, you will be more valuable to the team, the sport, your goals, your family, the human race, and to yourself. You cannot limit your knowledge and understanding without limiting yourself and your goal.
- Learn to give as well as receive praise and reward yourself and others. Praise and rewards can be positive reinforcements needed in pursuit of a goal. An encouraging remark hurts no one, but negative comments, teasing, arguing, and the like, pull everyone down. So learn to encourage, praise, and influence positively yourself and those around you.
- Learn to accept correction. Take constructive criticism and apply it and you will move toward your goal more rapidly. Accepting correction can save time, effort, and point you in the right direction.

- Learn to accept pain. In the U.S. especially, the trend has been toward constant comfort with all the labor saving devices, climate controlled homes and buildings, a "never walk when you can drive/ride" attitude, and on and on. Training will make you uncomfortable but you can use this positively. The discomfort can be used as a gauge as to how hard you are working toward your goal. Nothing of any value comes cheap and the more you have to put out for something, the greater the feeling of accomplishment.

- Train for your goal, don't just exercise toward it. Exercise can be defined as "a change in body physiology from rest to activity." When you stop exercising, the body goes back to its resting state. To train, on the other hand, means to "change from an untrained state to a trained one." Training produces a lasting result on the body which doesn't disappear when the work stops.

- Stick your neck out for your goal and for what you want out of life in general. If you don't stick your neck out- you will never be seen above the crowd. Take a chance- go for it- try your best.

Competitive swimming is not all there is to life, but it can be a valuable tool in the hands of its user in attaining more out of life than the average person is capable of attaining. The above ideas can be successfully applied to swimming or to life so that goals can become more realistic, more meaningful, and hopefully more attainable.

Remember: Total Commitment= Ultimate Success