

Flipturn

On the Mental Side of Things Indicators

By

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The dictionary defines indicator- as something “to give evidence of.” Have you ever used indicators to help you believe in yourself and get mentally ready for a big meet?

Here is a story about one of my former swimmers.

John was in the middle of his taper for the Senior Championships where he hoped to make his national cut in the 200 free. He was just at the point in the taper where he was low in the water and pretty sluggish. In his words he felt like crap.

You know that feeling in a taper where you have rested a few days and started to feel good because your body got a little recovery, then you started to feel bad and began to worry. There is no mystery to why this happens to nearly every swimmer. Your body is adjusting to the change in workload just like it does when you start the season. This adaptation period only lasts a day or so.

John started to panic and he let the negative voices in his brain start to take over. **Ever happen to you?** He was starting to set himself up for failure.

He walked into my office before practice, sat down and was almost in tears as he explained how bad he felt in the water and how he was afraid that all of the work he had done in the last 6 months was going down the drain. He also explained how the little negative voice in his head kept telling him that he wasn't in shape, wasn't fast enough to make nationals, wasn't as good as the other swimmers in the meet.....You know the story.

The truth is that John had trained his tail off all season and was as ready to make his national cuts as any swimmer I had coached. How did I know? Because all of the indicators were there. **Notice how we got back to indicators.**



I asked my assistant coaches to run the first half of practice and John and I had a good talk. Here is how it went:

John: Coach I am really worried that I am not going to hit my goal times at the Senior meet.

Coach: John, what makes you think that?

John: I feel really bad in the water and I am not sure if I am in shape.

Coach: What do you mean, “feel bad”?

John: I feel low, my legs hurt, my timing is off and I am tired.

Coach: OK John, let’s look at the reason you feel this way.

I proceeded to explain to John that the body is temporarily adapting to the reduced work load and he will start to feel great again in a few days.

John: OK Coach, now I understand that I just need to be patient, but the little voice in my head keeps telling me that I am not in shape and not good enough.

Coach: Let’s examine the facts or the indicators of your training this season.

Fact: (you are stronger). This is the first season that you have been really dedicated to strength training. Indicator: Last season you were able to do 5 pull ups. Two weeks ago you set the team record at 33.

Fact: (you have trained more). Last season you only came to one morning practice a week. This season you have averaged 3 mornings a week. Indicator: With two extra mornings, you averaged 13,000 yard a week more that last season.

Fact: (your legs are in better shape). Your kicking has improved. Indicator: Last season you could only hold 5 x 100 free kick on a 1:40 interval. Since December you have been able to hold 5 x 100 free kick on a 1:20 interval.

Fact: (you have more speed). You have more easy speed at the beginning of your races. Indicator: Last year you best 100 free standup was :47.9 tapered. This season you have already been :48.0 unrested.

Fact: (you are in better shape). You are better able to finish your 200 free and have improved your 500. Indicator: Your best average sets are 2 seconds per hundred faster than last year and you are able to hold tighter intervals on your sets.

Fact: (you are ahead of where you were last season). You are close to your life-time best times unrested. Indicator: In January of last year you went 1:45.6 in the invitational and this season you went 1:42.6 at the same meet. When you shaved and tapered for the Senior meet last year you dropped 4 seconds off your unrested 200, so you can expect at least the same improvement this season. You should expect a 1:38.6.

Coach: What is the little voice saying now?

John: What voice?

What John learned is to look for the indicators that give evidence of his ability to reach his goals. Many swimmers do just the opposite; they look for indicators to show that they won't reach their goals.

There is a mental process in psychology called the *Pygmalion Affect*.

The Pygmalion Affect is when you think you will fail; your brain does everything it can to assist you in fulfilling that negative prediction or prophecy. When you think you're going to fail, you're about 90% of the way there already.

HOWEVER, the Pygmalion Affect also works in your favor. When you can visualize yourself being effective in competition, your brain does everything it can to assist you in fulfilling that positive prophecy.

When you trust that you're going to be effective you're about 90% of the way there.

It's your choice. You can choose to listen to the negative voice and risk your entire season or you can choose to do something about it.

Look for the positive indicators that help you trust in your training and preparation for a meet. Make a list. Write them down. Talk with your coach like John did.

Indicators are there if you know where to look for them. Remember to have fun and enjoy the opportunity to compete and leave everything you have in the pool for every race.

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