

Orinda Aquatics Parent Education Series #3

PUTTING CHARACTER FIRST

Summary

A life's work, and the most pressing issues facing children and society –

in 40 minutes





Overview

Philosophy/Rationale

Challenges

Lessons/Purpose

Process

Policy





“Integrity has no need of rules.”

Albert Camus

Integrity-based vs. rules-based.

Background



Growing up

Exploring/near obsession

Life commitment to coach

Sports as life's greatest learning ground

Life mission to work with youth in a moral/ethical backdrop

The art of teambuilding

Success at Pinole and Meadow in the 80's and 90's



Ran "Character Camp" for 10-14 year-olds in Lamorinda

For ASCA

A six hour “Life Skills” presentations

A 385-page guidebook on character in sports

Several articles on character development, culture, leadership, club development

Lectures at numerous World Clinics and internationally

Orinda Aquatics is widely, if not unanimously regarded as the model for character in swimming

Coaches come to visit Orinda Aquatics

Boards (of the largest clubs) reach out for guidance

The American Swimming Coaches Association

Developing High-Character Athletes and High-Character Teams



"Character is the basis of happiness and happiness the sanction of character."
Santayana

Donated to ASCA
Purchased/utilized by many coaches at all levels

Don & Ron Heidary
Orinda Aquatics

The American Swimming Coaches Association
World Clinic, Cleveland, Ohio 2015

The Cultural Headwind



"Stay ahead of the culture by creating the culture." unknown

Don Heidary
Orinda Aquatics

Introduction



The vast majority of teams and athletes underperform (and under experience).

Where does character fit into coaching?

- You don't get paid for it.
- You don't get (professionally) recognized for it.
- You will get push-back early in the process from parents and the "ruling class."
- The time you commit to it will cut into pure coaching.
- For the most part, colleges don't recruit character.



So who really cares, and at what level does it really make a difference?

And the real benefit may very well be in the unseen…

- Self-esteem
- Self-awareness
- Accountability
- Connectedness
- Improved academics
- Saying no to a drug, alcohol, or sex introduction
- Choosing role models over social models
- A better/healthier family life
- A more productive college experience
- Being a better employee
- Dealing with a life crisis
- Becoming a true leader
- Making a difference in the lives of others



And mitigates burnout

And quite possibly in becoming a better swimmer and teammate.

Developing Leaders



In sports and in society

50 collegiate team captains

Empowering Cultures



“To say that your fate is not tied to my fate is like saying your end of the boat is sinking.” Hugh Downs

Anchor

Culture must be an anchor in the organization

A blanket wrapped around the team

NOT driven by the “social elite” or …



The Standard Model



Integrity and sportsmanship mentioned in Mission Statement

Coaches may talk about it at a higher level

It is generally absent in the daily process

Coaches (and boards) end up putting out fires of poor behavior, giving up, or looking the other way

No “lines in the sand”, or coaches are complicit



A Character Culture vs. Society



Trying to offer an alternative to the teen social norms

Challenge the (societal) Status Quo

Key to understand…

Where in our culture do we celebrate character and humility? We would argue that society is anything but character based.

How does one become humble, self-confident, positive, and selfless when marketing tells us that we are not good enough and society tells us success is the only measure of achievement? It is either self-doubt (marketing) or EGO (winning to be fulfilled), and neither support a healthy athlete or team.

Why are so many teens depressed? Were they at 6, 8, or 10?

Teachers and coaches are “noble”, but…

- Pro athletes are idolized (with so many ego- driven, materialistic, and poor role models)
- Wall Street executives are envied for their money, power, etc. (not ethics)
- Celebrities are worshipped for their popularity and lifestyle (how many are really happy?)
- Why are there so many character breakdowns in politics, business, etc?
- How many teen magazines are character, or service based vs. fashion, or appearance based?
- How many character-based video games would sell?
- How many kids get into a great college because of character, compassion, or leadership?

How many TV Shows are character-based vs. attitude, materialism, sex, promiscuity, language, alcohol, appearance, etc.

And with Reality TV, it is conflict that sells

"the EDGIER THE BETTER" says a popular TV network when they orchestrated 57 "F bombs" during a prime time awards show. The goal, "bring in the younger viewers".

Even music (the language and the message) "explicit" vs. "clean" purchased at10-1 (if that!)

Musicians as role models?

- **One was asked to pull his saggy pants up prior to boarding a plane, His response, "F - that".**

Pro Athlete – "grows up" (at age 28). One of the greatest football players admits that he "had it all wrong", that after spending his career focusing on himself, he now realizes it is about the team. This could have happened when he was 10!

Questions Quintessential

Why can't the most successful people be the most humble, and appreciative?

Why can't athletes instinctively put the team first and look to ensure the success of others even ahead of their own?



Why can't kids welcome and embrace every challenge?

Why can't kids' best friends be their parents?

And, why can't a child dream of being a leader as well as an Olympian?



In an age where media and celebrity seem to create more false identities than products or music, we ask them to not follow the masses or the trends; but their heart and their conscience. *DR*



(Concurrent) Challenges

Drugs

Alcohol

Vaping

Bullying

Cheating

Lying

Language

Social Media

Peer Pressure

Self worth/Sense of self

Apathy

Work ethic



What the Heck is Water?



"Two young fish swam by an older fish. As the older fish passed, he said, "Hey boys, how's the water?" One of the younger fish looked at the other and said, *"what the heck is water?" David Foster Wallace, This is Water*

Do most kids even know what their culture is and what it represents? Or when they're hooked?



“Prepare the child for the path, not the path for the child.”

Unknown



"The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.
Albert Einstein

The Culture of Cultures - we must:

- Understand why cultures exist
- Understand what they are
- Understand their affect
- Redefine them in terms of what is:
  - Right for humanity
  - Right for athletics
- Sell the benefits
- Implement them
- Change the paradigm
- Change the world
- Give kids and athletes back to themselves

A Change in Culture, A Change in Life

(from a 17-year-old girl who changed teams and cultures)

"I think about where I would be had I not changed teams, and honestly its scary. I was becoming a person I did not want to be. I have learned what is truly important in life, and I am not sure when or if I would have figured it out. I never realized what it was like to be around negative people because that type of person was always me. Additionally, I dreaded swimming and now I love it again and it has been a rebirth."

The team culture sways a social lifestyle

Dear Orinda Aquatics,

I can only imagine where I would be today, right now, if I had never joined Orinda Aquatics back in seventh grade. I see myself spending this Saturday night in my parentless house with a dozen members of my high school's top partiers, already a few drinks deep in my parent's liquor, behaving like a sloppy mess. I see myself dancing with boys I don't even like, breaking my mom's glass top coffee table, and getting into a car with a girl who swears she's safe to drive but clearly isn't. And I wouldn't even care. It would just be another typical Saturday night. Instead, I'm here sitting on my couch writing a letter to the team that changed the entire course of my life, the team that I owe everything to.

In middle school, I found myself, like so many others do, at a crossroads of sorts. The girls I considered my best friends were making choices that made me uncomfortable on all kinds of levels, but I could still feel myself slipping down with them. Looking back, I can see just how far I was about to fall.

Olympic "Toxic Environment"

Their London Olympics swimming team was beset by "culturally toxic incidents" including misuse of prescription drugs and bullying that highlighted a failure of culture and leadership, a report said. A culture existed within the team which "did not appear to assist or support high-level performance for most people."

"There were enough culturally toxic incidents across enough team members that breached agreements (such as getting drunk, misuse of prescription drugs, breaching curfews, deceit, bullying) to warrant a strong, collective leadership response that included coaches, staff and the swimmers," the report said. "No such collective action was taken."

The review recommended creating an ethical framework of what the (Olympic) team stands for, updating internal codes of conduct and implementing better processes for managing issues around standards and expectations.

"It has been a time of reflection and review and a time to be honest and open about how we can take the right steps towards future success. Before we look at winning gold medals, we want to win back the admiration of the nation."

Disciplinary issues affected the team's unity in London and some swimmers were pursuing their own goals rather than those of the squad, the news paper reported, and that some swimmers behaved more like schoolboys than Olympians at a pre-games camp. (no team concept)

"Poor behavior and disrespect within the team were not regulated or resisted strongly by other team members, and it was left unchecked or without consequence by staff and coaches on a number of occasions," the Review said. (no leadership)

This is not an "Olympic" issue. It is a club issue, an age-group issue, a high school issue, and a societal issue.

Developing athletes against a societal backdrop that challenges the very core of our sport…



and the essence of human development



How do you get from this, to...



Culture creators?



- Giant youth party, fueled by alcohol and the internet, turns violent and abusive.
- "Mob Scene at High School – 500 students participated in what was a mob scene with rampant alcohol abuse and hazing and bullying.
- Two bus loads of students on a ski trip detained for massive drug and alcohol use/possession (parents defended).

Are we raising resumes or high-character individuals?

Two sides of the same coin

(

The *resume* of a high school athlete

- 3.8 GPA
- Eagle Scout
- School Officer
- Popular
- Volunteer
- All-American athlete
- Polite and respectful in public



The *character* of the same high school athlete

- Heavy drug/alcohol use (and thinks it is OK) *on campus/at competition (a "train wreck")*
- Lies to parents, coaches
- Cheats in school
- Self-absorbed/self-destructive
- Drove kids while under the influence
- Losing identity/needs acceptance

Who can/will draw a line in the sand?



“98% of teenagers lie to their parents.” … why?

Cute kid

Who and what will he become?



- **Bully?**
- **Into drugs/alcoholic?**
- **A discipline problem?**
- **Social elite?**
- **Apathetic/lazy – path of least resistance?**
- **A non-athlete?**
- **A great "athlete"?**
- ***A great leader/a difference maker?***
- **A collegiate athlete?**
- **A collegiate leader?**
- **An inspiration?**

What will be the driving influence(s)?



- Luck
- Destiny
- Self-esteem
- Parents
- Siblings
- Social friends
- Community
- Teachers
- Teammates
- Coaches
- Team culture



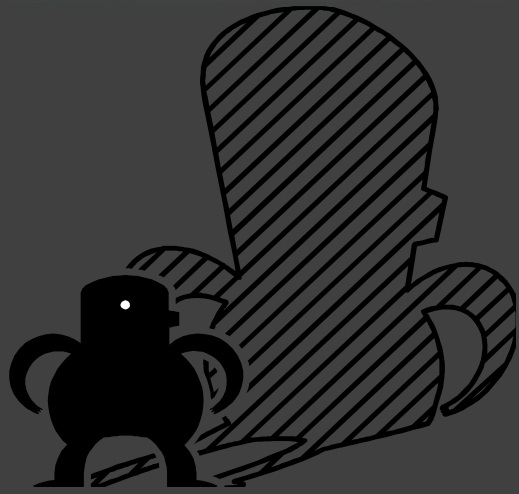


High school meet example

This formula is irrefutable.

It would equate to:





The better the person
The better the athlete
The better the swimmer
The better the teammate
The better the culture

An all-too-common story
(same person)

A Great swimmer
- Innately talented

An average athlete
- Poor attendance
- Poor work ethic
- Little focus
- Comes late
- Just cares about winning

A *bad* teammate
- Doesn't help
- Doesn’t cheer
- Doesn’t mentor or lead (in a positive direction)
- Doesn’t really care



Parent Survey? Do parents really care?

If you asked parents why their children are doing sports, or what they hope their children would get from it, *how many would say…?*

- **Work ethic**
- **Humility**
- **Perseverance**
- **Sacrifice**
- **Team (first) attitude**

(the most important life virtues)



How Many Parents Even Know if Their Child…. (or want to know)

Really works hard?

Really cares?

Respects others?

Is at risk?

Has any leadership skills?

Deals with adversity?



We, as coaches, do. We quite possibly have the most critical information as to their child's overall well-being.

Vision



Create a vision of a high-character, positive group

Wind at back vs. wind at face



Vision – for athletes and leaders

"A rock pile ceases to be a rock pile the moment a single man contemplated it, bearing within him, the image of a cathedral."

Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Perpetual Leadership Model

Seniors driven to lead

Integrity, humility, work ethic



Junior Swimmers eager to learn (and lead)

Areas of Focus/Demand

Integrity – do the right thing

Respect – NEVER lie

Attitude – Always positive

Work ethic – path of most resistance

Humility – NO EGO

Service – be a good teammate

Sell virtues as opposed to norms

Implied Consent

There should be implied consent for any athlete, at any age, to:

- *Be a good teammate*
- *To commit to the athletic process*

This is where breakdown begins, only to accelerate.



Demonstrations of Integrity/Leadership

Self-run Workouts

Travel (75 teenagers – no chaperones)

an extremely

Discipline

NOT the moral police (and do not want to be)

We watch very closely

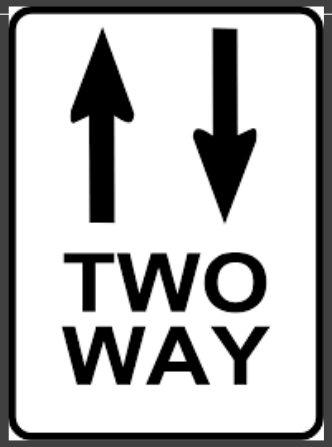
We take action if:

- it affects the team
- the child is at risk

Reciprocal Relationship

A two-way street – the basis of our relationship

They give everything – We give everything





Voicemail from Kevin Honey last week: “What you do is different because you ask kids to sign a 3–4-year commitment (agreement/contract) and you sign a life commitment (agreement/contract)

Senior Group

Weekly Meetings – articles, letters, discussion

Aggressive discussion about hard teen issues

Quotes on workouts

Examples of inspiration, leadership, challenging the social status quo

Coach vigilance (watching in all areas)

Junior Group

Promotion of the bigger concept of “future leader” (learn it now) and avoiding teen traps and pitfalls (discussed)

Make clear that you cannot be on the team if you are not a good teammate

Weekly Meetings – articles, letters, discussion

Quotes on workouts

Examples of inspiration, leadership, challenging the social status quo in middle school)

Coach vigilance (watching in all areas)

Challenges

Kids – being accountable (and honest)

Parents – defending kids to any extreme

For other teams - Boards (fire coaches)



"If you step in a puddle, don't blame the puddle."

Questions?



Thank you for attending.