

A PLACE AT THE WALL:

CONTINUED LIFE
LESSONS LEARNED IN
MASTERS SWIMMING



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This little book is dedicated to the awesome swimmers of the Rose Bowl Masters Swim Team, in Pasadena, California, and our terrific coaches, Chad Durieux, Lauren Turner, and Tristan Sawers. Registered 2021 - photos by Allis Druffel unless otherwise specified

A Place at the Wall: Continued Life Lessons Learned in Masters Swimming

1. Make a place for all folks to get ahead.

Hey, “leader of the pack” (or in this case, the lane), don’t come into the wall and stay in the center. Move over so others can have a place at the wall and rest easily without having to hang on to the laneline. As Heidi in our Masters team once said, “I don’t feel like I’ve rested until I’ve been at the wall.” Moral of the story? Make space for others in leadership positions; don’t hog the spotlight. It’s not about you, it’s about us. (Plus, you will make friends when those folks behind you make it to the front!)

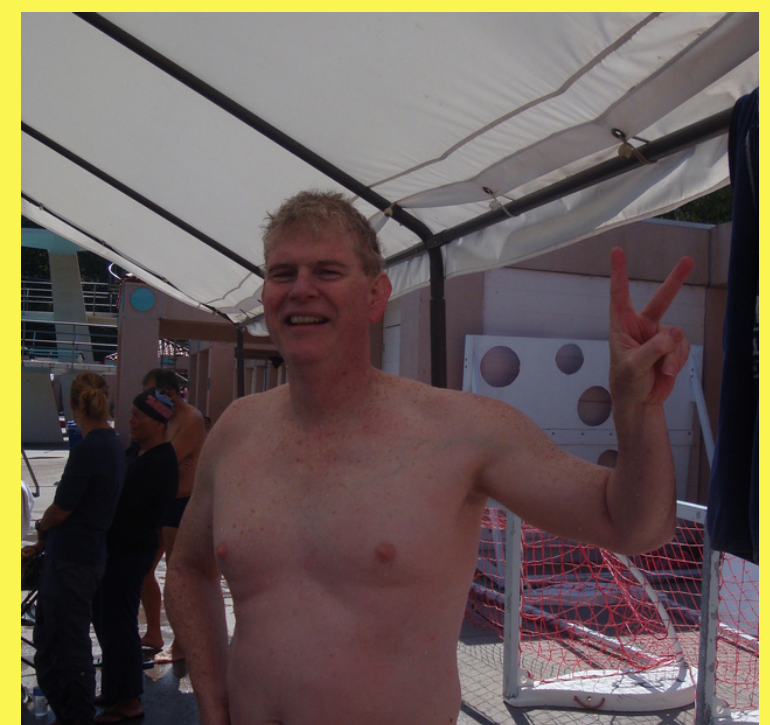


2. Sometimes you have to change your perspective

One day, while waiting for an afternoon practice to start, I overheard a youth swimmer state, “Today’s not the greatest day. I’m swimming long course with a short course attitude.” Such revealed wisdom from a teenager! Some days, you wake up with a very limited view of life and you struggle mightily against everything that comes your way. This is a perfect time to stop, settle your mind and body, take several deep breaths, and ask the universe to show you the Big Picture. Life will be easier if you change your way of thinking. Don’t resist reality; it will just make you crazy.

3. We all need a cheerleader sometimes

On days as described in #2 and the deep breathing didn’t work, Masters swimming is the perfect place to go to. I have heard countless words of encouragement and compliments among swimming friends, especially when someone had a rough day at work or is going through a difficult situation. These words of encouragement support our goals and make life a little easier. Thanks!



4. Learn people's names.

Name-sharing builds community and enhances enjoyment. Often, I already know the names of the people in my lane and the lanes adjacent. But it's not uncommon to go to a different practice, have new folks join the team, or just plain forget the name of the person you haven't seen in a few months. Many swimmers don't bother to ask the names of their fellow lane mates; we just hunker down, get into the "my zone" thinking and tolerate others. Hey, we're all in this together, so you might as well be on a first-name basis with those huffing and puffing from a "Chad special."

In life, I've found it very rewarding to learn people's names, especially those who I may not see very often like the woman who works in the kitchen at my church or the wait staff at the local Corner Bakery. Folks love to be addressed by their name and are apt to be more friendly because you've taken the time to remember their name. You can engage in conversation more easily and problem-solve issues together that may arise.



5. Practice good hygiene.

Okay, so maybe not everyone wants to talk about this issue, but it's important! Outside of a global pandemic, we swimmers are all sometimes squished together; talking, and laughing just a bit (when we can get away with it.) This is the perfect time to be confident in your pre-workout tooth brushing and/or breath freshening with gum or even a spearmint Life Saver.

We all learned in sixth grade Health class that good hygiene is important. Great advice for anyone trying to attract a date or land a job. But light on the cologne and perfume - too much can cause headaches and allergies in others. Like I always told my choir for performances, "DO take a shower, so you're not offending anyone, but DON'T use anything with a scent!"



Photo credit: Rose Bowl Masters swim team webpage

6. "Following the crowd" isn't always bad.

To be honest, I have very little discipline in the pool for swimming outside of Masters workouts. I play around half-heartedly, do less than half a normal workout, and stay in the Jacuzzi too long. I go to Masters precisely to "get in the zone", to let someone else do the thinking, planning, and ordering of the sets, and to follow what everyone else is doing. And it works; I feel great after a Masters workout!

We have all been told not to follow the crowd but to always be the one in control, leading the crowd. Being a "sheep" is bad. But for many of us, we spend our working and daily lives being the boss; being the one who coordinates, orders, and delegates. Let go of control of some things, especially when we find folks that are better at it than we are.



7. No matter what, keep a sense of humor.

Humor loosens folks up, makes them friendlier, and builds up the team. And who doesn't like a Chad chuckle during a hard workout?

Don't you ever wish your boss, or your parent, or even the nations gathering at the G-7 summits would lighten up and tell a joke? Humor shows shared humanity, forms relationships, and makes problem-solving easier. A shared joke is shared community.



8. Most things are "not about me."

Very occasionally, at practice, a word is spoken inappropriately. A lane mate might be in a bad mood, or a communal directive from the coach is taking the wrong way. Don't take it personally. I've finally learned that most of what people are angry about has more to do with them personally than the object of their anger.

So, in life, when someone is yelling at you, stating everything you do wrong, what they are venting about is 95% about them and 5% about you. Don't get mad; just listen; try to parse out what the person is truly saying, and use that as a basis of conversation (after they calm down!)



9. Make friends and hold on to your social circles; your life will be richer.

Masters swimming is about a lot more than the pool. Friendships - sometimes life-long - form. Conversation, laughter, and relationships thrive at summer and holiday parties, birthday celebrations and swim meets. But let's face it. Life is tough sometimes. When we're hit with a roadblock, it's easy to assume that we're the only one among our family and friends experiencing difficulties. The good times with friends and social circles seem far away - separate from our current situation - and we may even withdraw from those we love.

Ironically, it is in life's most challenging circumstances that you need your friends the most. There is a great deal of wisdom from lived experience within a group of people. Not only can your friends provide much needed support, they can give you valuable input on any number of topics: dating, raising kids, dealing with a difficult boss, health concerns, and caring for an older parent. Heck, even where to find the best bakery goods in town (this is one for Sally and Jon!) Plus, everyone wants to help their friends; assisting others is one thing that brings a sense of purpose to life.



Photo provided by Cheryl Simmons



Photo credit: Rose Bowl Masters swim team webpage

10. Go to practice, especially when you “don’t feel like it.”



When you don’t feel like swimming, that’s the time you need it the most. Guess what? The feeling of not wanting to get our booties in the pool is not uncommon. If we all went by our feelings, practices would be half empty all the time. It just takes that few minutes to get your suit, goggles and cap on and dive into the pool. You will be glad you did!

Often times, we resist doing things that are good for us. (I’ll let the psychologists parse out the “why.”) Eating healthy, exercising, staying in touch with family and friends (yes, even that annoying brother-in-law) enriches our lives. In fact, I have noticed that, just when I’m about to start a really important project or an activity that means a lot, I am hit with a wave of lack of motivation. (Again, we’ll let the psychologists figure this one out.) But when I persist and start the action, the motivation and energy returns. "Feelings" do not always reflect the best reality; stick to your plans and you will be the better for it!

11. Learn to adapt to life's changing circumstances.

You’ve heard the old saying, “the only constant thing in life is change.” It applies to Masters swimming too. Most swimmers (even the kick-a _ _ guys and gals in the fastest lanes that I hardly ever see) go through ups and downs with swimming. Life challenges, aging, injuries, illnesses, jobs, moving – they all play a part in how we relate to the world. Some seasons we’re in the zone and swimming at the top of our age group; some seasons, we’re adjusting to a new life situation and don’t make it to the pool much. One thing CAN remain constant – keeping a healthy and open perspective to what comes your way and knowing you have what it takes to get through.

An excellent example of this comes from our very own Rose Bowl swimming coaches and staff. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our skilled leaders have constantly pivoted according to the changing circumstances. Determined to keep us in the pool and healthy, they have offered us beaucoup resources – articles, videos, exercises, and ways to swim in a safe and physically-distanced way. Now that’s adaptation for the good of community!

