

Taking the Next Step: **Be Tomorrow's Swimmer Today**

By **Wayne Goldsmith**

At every stage of their swimming development, swimmers come to hurdles or obstacles. These hurdles and obstacles become goals to overcome and targets for swimmers to achieve.

For example, an obstacle that a swimmer may face early in their career could be the challenge to swim fast enough to qualify to swim at their school, club or regional championships. Once that has been achieved the next goal might be to qualify for Regional championships.

The next target might be State Championships, then National Championships then finally their ultimate goal might be to swim internationally for their country.

This ongoing process of setting, achieving and then resetting goals is fundamental to success in most areas of life.

At each step along the way, **hurdles and obstacles need to be overcome by training and racing smarter**, more frequently, faster, with better skills and with more commitment than ever before.

To make the breakthroughs and achieve the important goals, (and to take the next step at each level), swimmers need to **think and train like swimmers who are already at the next level**.

In other words **to be successful at the next level, swimmers must act as if they are already there!**

Look at a practical example. The **six (6) factors essential to swimming success** are:

1. Swim with excellent technique
2. Swim with excellent skills
3. Swim with Fast strokes
4. Swim with Long strokes
5. Do all the above when tired
6. Do all the above when under pressure

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These six factors can be used to progress training sets and training routines as swimmers aim for higher and higher goals.

A training set like 16 x 25m butterfly might be completed on a one minute cycle by a young swimmer training for his or her local competition. The importance would be placed on the stroke technique and skills elements rather than speed at this early stage.

However, we know that as the swimmer develops and aims for higher, more challenging and more difficult goals, three things are crucial to good butterfly at senior levels:

- Swim great technique with maximum speed
- Swim great technique with minimum breaths
- Swim great technique with minimum strokes

When training for **the next step**, (e.g. **Regional Championships**) it could be expected that the swimmer would complete the 16 x 25 fly set with less rest and perhaps at a faster speed.

Targeting **the next step**, (e.g. **State Age Championships**), the swimmer would aim to maintain good speed with less rest and with a minimum breath count (perhaps breathing every two or three strokes).

At **the next step**, (e.g. **National Age Championships**), the swimmer would aim to hold good speed, with limited rest, with the minimum number of breaths and hold a stroke count of 8-10 strokes per 25.

Training sets need to progress in terms of **faster speeds, shorter rest (or longer rest), breathing control, skill level and stroke efficiency** as the swimmer progresses to the next level of excellence and takes the next step in their competitive career.

A key part of progressing to the next step is to **think like a swimmer who is already there!** This is a difficult concept to understand because it requires you to "know" what you "don't know".

This change in mind set and change to approach applies particularly to training.

It comes with a change in the swimmer's level of commitment to the program. **It comes with** a change in attitude to workouts. **It comes with** a change to the effort put into doing the little things right in training. **It comes with** a change in attention to detail with starts, turns, dives and finishes. **It comes with** a change in time management and a better approach to making priorities with your time, school, swimming and life.

Potential: is what you may be capable of doing .. **Motivation:** directs what you do

Attitude: determines how well you do

To get to the next level, you must think like you are already there.

To compete like a State Level Swimmer, Regional Level swimmers need to train like a State Level swimmer, warm up like a State Level swimmer, eat and rest like a State Level Swimmer and so on.

This is where your coach can be the greatest help. It has been said that a coach's main job is **to convince the unwilling to do the unwanted to achieve the unknown.**

Your coach knows what is expected and what is needed to be successful at the next level.

Your training program is designed to help you break through barriers and obstacles and to help you understand what it is like to be a "next level" swimmer.

The little challenges that your coach sets before you at training are designed to help you take the next step by demanding more of you than ever before and in the process teaching you to expect more of yourself than you ever thought possible.

The **"I can, I will, I did"** philosophy is an important part of taking any step forward. Believing you can, leads to the confidence to say **"I will"** which is only a short step away from **"I did"**.

Confidence is the **key element in all successful sporting achievements.** Achieving success at each step along the way gives you the confidence and self belief to take the next step.

In many ways you are already "there" (at the next level) before you actually get the opportunity to prove it at a meet. The swim meet just confirms what you and your coach already know – that you have, by your thoughts and actions, taken the next step.

"The significant problems we face cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them."
(Einstein)

