Seven Fixable Reasons You Aren’t Achieving Success In the Pool…

From untimely disqualifications, to injury, to the competition outpacing them, top performing swimmers—and anyone who has attempted at fulfilling their potential in the water— have had to battle at length in order to become successful.

Ultimately, the biggest impediment to our success is almost always the resistance we create for ourselves.

Here are seven common stumbling blocks that hold swimmers back from realizing their full potential in the water, and some additional tips to help swim through them:

**1. LACKING SELF-AWARENESS.**

It’s amazing how few swimmers lack the ability to properly diagnose and assess their swimming and training.

Either they over-estimate the work they have done and are surprised when they perform poorly, or they under-estimate the work they have done and perform according to expectations instead of swimming according to how they trained.

Expectations that are out of line with our results are a symptom of an athlete having low or distorted self-awareness.

Here’s how to become a more self-aware swimmer so that you can create more realistic expectations for your swimming:

* **Record and monitor your performances in practice.** The way you race isn’t a surprise when you can look back with an air of objectivity at the work you have done. This means knowing your in-practice bests, your average effort given at practice, and your attendance.
* **Review moments where your goals were in line with your training.** There have been times where you have been close to predicting your performance. Take a second look at those moments in order to build a more informed expectation of how fast you can reasonably hope to improve.

**2. YOU THINK YOU ARE THE EXCEPTION.**

Success in the pool, is well, hard.

What makes it even tougher is when a swimmer is loaded up on the “you have so much talent” praise.

It’s dangerous because it indicates a sense of exceptionalism that tends to remove the impetus to train hard. If a swimmer thinks they are more talented than the next, than it’s natural they’ll come to think they can get by with less work than the “less talented” swimmers in the next lane.

**You can’t control talent.**

But you can control your work ethic. Your commitment to your training schedule. The focus you place on your technique.

* **Make your work ethic your talent.** Talent comes with the burden of expectation, so instead of thinking yourself as talented or gifted, focus on making yourself the athlete who is the hardest worker.
* **Remember there will always be someone more talented.** No matter how gifted you are, or how gifted your coach and parents tell you that you are, there will *always* be another swimmer out there who is more gifted. On top of that, there will always be someone more talented who is also willing to work harder than you.

**3. YOU DON’T HAVE YARD-STICKS FOR PROGRESS.**

Most swimmers when throwing together goals tend to emphasize the big, year-end objectives.

*I want to win provincials! Break the NAG for the 100 fly! Make the Olympic team!*

It’s great to have these big, booming goals, but without attention paid to the process, to the thousands of little steps between now and that goal it can be easy to become distracted and get side-tracked.

By not having the steps and measurable targets in training and the “off” meets it becomes really tough to keep yourself accountable to the program.

* **Set weekly goals.** Every Sunday sit down with a piece of loose-leaf and write out what you want to achieve in the water that week. Attendance levels, extras you want to complete before or after practice, habits you want to instill in the water.
* **Set daily goals**. You should be walking on deck every single practice with purpose and intent. This means having standards and benchmarks for your practice. Breathing patterns you want to hold, [a number of dolphin kicks you want to belt](http://www.yourswimlog.com/develop-awesome-underwater-dolphin-kick/) out off each wall, intervals you want to stay under.
* **Again, record your progress.** Seeing how you are progressing over the course of your training reaffirms the work you are doing, while shining a light on the areas of your swimming that need attention.

**4. YOU ARE A FLASH-IN-THE-PAN SWIMMER IN PRACTICE.**

This treads a little bit upon point number one and the need to be more self-aware, but it is worth repeating.

There are a few different reasons that you lack consistency in the pool.

Perhaps you have an impossible juggling act of other sports, school, work and Netflix to maintain. Or maybe the thought of fully committing to yourself to your swimming is a little frightening.

**Whatever the reason, it is ludicrous to expect full time results when you only ever apply yourself with part-time effort in practice.**

* **Keep the chain alive**. The easiest way to keep yourself accountable to your effort in the water is to write down your effort level at the end of each practice. Slap a calendar up on the wall and give yourself a score after workout. It’ll show you how consistently inconsistent you were, while also giving you a jolt of motivational fuel to encourage more solid workouts more often.
* **Remember that anything less than your best will lead to regret.** Looking back on your swimming and wondering “what if?” stings something nasty. It is all upside when you give your best on a consistent effort—not only do you swim faster (which you think would be enough) but the steadiness means not having to wonder how much quicker you could have gone.

**5. YOU REFUSE TO PUT YOUR ENVIRONMENT IN LINE WITH YOUR GOALS.**

Achieving wild and unending glory in the water is tough. Real tough.

So why do we make it harder on ourselves by creating an environment that acts directly in opposition of our goals?

The people we hang out with most regularly have an impact on our swimming, whether we care to admit it or not. If your friends refuse to understand that your sport is a priority, and are unyielding in trying to get you to skip a few workouts to hang out, eventually you will cave, no matter how much willpower you have at the outset.

Similarly, if you are having a hard time eating well, but have cupboards and a fridge stocked with crap food, than you are making it exponentially more difficult on yourself to fuel yourself properly for your training.

The fastest and most simple way to create an environment that fosters success is to make the right thing the default option. Paint yourself into a corner so that you have no option but to do the thing that promotes excellence.

* **Seek out the positive people in your life and in your lane**. There are those in your life who genuinely have your best interests at heart. Who will support you in your goals, and not deride and talk snidely of them or push you to act in a manner that contradicts what you need to do. There are swimmers on your team who are doing big things; watch and learn from them.
* **Remove the obstacles to your success**. Having a hard time getting to sleep cause you are playing around on Pinterest till the wee hours? Remove the phone from the bedroom. Want to eat better? Get rid of the crap in your cupboards so that it’s not even an option. There are things holding you back that you have control over. Remove them with prejudice.
* **Create boundaries.** The death blow for any commitment is when exceptions come around. “Just this one time,” always leads to “just one more time” and so on. Have clear boundaries in your life and in the pool and let the people in your life know about them.

**6. YOU THINK YOU ARE WORKING HARD, BUT YOU AREN’T.**

“Hard work” is a floating term.

It’s something that is constantly in flux, and (ideally) always trending upwards in to new, uncharted territory (for you).

Michael Phelps, in his pre-Beijing training extravaganza was regularly clocking two and three-a-days along with around 80,000 meters per week. His definition of hard work is certainly different from the rest of us mere mortals.

The point is that what “hard work” means to you now is nor your limit, nor what it will represent as you continue to improve.

**In other words, continually seek to elevate your definition of what hard work means to you.**

* **Hard work goes beyond effort.** Yes, getting in the pool and swimming your brains out until you drop makes for a great workout. But if you are swimming with lousy technique, beachball streamlines, and other training habits that only promote poor swimming, than the benefit is negligible. There shouldn’t be a distinction between training hard and training smart—the top swimmers excel at both.
* **Challenge yourself frequently**. The only way to bust through plateaus and expect more from yourself is to push your perceived limits often. This means trying harder intervals, doing an extra rep on the main set, and simply doing it faster and better than the last time out.

**7. YOU LACK THE PATIENCE TO PLAY THE LONG GAME.**

Having those moments where you work hard for a little bit, and then immediately see results are fantastic. Intoxicating, even.

Those overnight improvements tend to come after some bouts of hard work followed by recovery, or more immediately, as a result of a technical correction.

But every big-time swimmer knows that as you get faster, as you progress up the ranks, the improvements come more rarely and require exponentially more work. While it would be amazing to instantly see the fruits of your hard work, often times you will have to wait months, and possibly even years, to see the results.

* **Have a list of training goals.** You don’t need to wait until the end of the season to crush a personal best time. Keep a list of training bests so that you can have measures of improvement that don’t require a shave and a tech suit. Start with the essentials: 50 kick, 50 pull, 200 kick, and distances of your off strokes.
* **Patience is not the same thing as waiting.** Waiting for the perfect moment to swim with purpose isn’t patience, it’s procrastination. The difference might be a little more subtle for some, but there is a massive chasm between the two. Patience is being willing to work hard today for results that will not come until some point into the future. Waiting is sitting around waiting for a suitable time to work hard.

**IN SUMMARY**

Swimming awesomeness– whatever that entails in your dreams and in your particular case– is within you.

But it requires you to be perpetually challenging yourself and your self-perceived limits. It takes some brutal honesty and self-awareness. And it requires a near Herculean sense of patience and focus.

**Will you step over the self-imposed barriers of resistance that you have placed in front of yourself and chase greatness?**