

5 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BEING A RESILIENT SWIMMER

What's the difference between us and the swimmer who seems to shrug off the difficult moments along the course of a season in the pool?

The truth about having powerful levels of resilience is surprisingly simple.

And perhaps most notably, that it is a skill, something that we can all work on and improve so that we can face resilience with a brave face and the tools necessary to battle our way through.

Here are 5 things you need to know about becoming a resilient athlete in the pool:

1. WE NATURALLY FOCUS ON THE NEGATIVE STUFF.

On numerous occasions I have heard a coach bemoan the fact that an athlete will forget the 9 positive things they do when 1 negative thing happens to them in the water.

And it's true.

We can't help but zero in our attention on that one bad race, even though the other 7 went well.

It's no different when complimenting someone; you can give them 99 kind words but they will only remember the 100th unkind word.

It's actually natural for us to spend an inordinate amount of our focus on the bad stuff that happens in the pool (and in life). From an evolutionary perspective our species has benefited from being able to not underestimate risk or danger, and as a result, negative information and experiences carry a heavier shock than their positive brethren.

Understanding this point is critical.

We are hard-wired to get bent out of shape when things don't go our way.

Being resilient means being able to see past the struggles and disappointments that come along over the course of the swim season.

And it means being able to understand that you are always going to feel the negative stuff more deeply than the positive stuff.

2. OPEN YOURSELF TO THE FACT THAT THERE WILL BE TOUGH TIMES.

Gazing at all of the opportunity and awesomeness to come over the course of the season is easy in September. All we see are the big meets, the best times, and the glory and radness to come from swimming like a monster.

While it's great to imagine the season going swimmingly (boom!), in reality you know this won't always be the case.

Although the exceptionally trying moments will be heavily outnumbered by the positive ones, as discussed in the point above it is the tough spots that will be remembered most.

This season embrace a willingness to meet resilience.

Does this mean you should you be actively seeking failure or going out of your way to find disappointment?

No, of course not.

But you should rid yourself of the perfectionist outlook that dictates that everything has to go perfectly all of the time or else it is all for naught.

3. THERE'S ALWAYS A REASON TO FEEL SOME GRATITUDE.

In the midst of tough moments it can be hard for us to look for the good stuff.

Or to feel grateful.

Or to see the silver lining.

But that is exactly what you should be doing.

When things don't go their way, non-resilient participants in a study were shown to go fully negative. When things are going well, they feel great, but the moment that things go south they go completely and full-blown negative.

On the other hand, those who demonstrated resilience were shown to exhibit signs of positivity and optimism even in the midst of tough situations. While they are certainly in the thick of it, and feeling the sensations of frustration, they are also able to see some good in the situation.

It's not blind optimism in the sense that they think everything is honky-dory, but **rather that they can experience both frustration while also experiencing gratitude in the same moment:**

"Yeah, things suck right now, but at least I don't have this other problem."

Cause, literally, it could *always* be worse.

4. ESCAPE THE GRAVITY OF NEGATIVITY BY TAKING ACTION.

Use challenges as opportunities to develop confidence by taking action.

Resilient athletes in the pool build and develop resilience by **focusing on the things that they can do in order to solve a problem**, rather than let themselves get caught up in the powerful gravity of negativity.

- Shoulder injured? Use it as an opportunity to develop a thunderous underwater dolphin kick.
- Pool closed for repairs/maintenance? Use it as an opportunity to kill it on the stretch cords and stairs.
- Your first race at the big meet go unexpectedly? Use it as fuel to get you amped up for your next race.

If you are feeling a little stuck with trying to find your way out, here are some starter questions designed to get you thinking in terms of finding a way forward:

- *Where can I do right now that will help me out of this pile of molasses?*
- *How can I make this situation the best thing to happen to me?*
- *What are the choices in front of me?*
- *What can I learn from this?*

5. TAKE A SMALL POSITIVE STEP FORWARD.

If the quickest way out of a tough spot is taking meaningful, constructive action, does that mean we need to hammer out a mega-best time the next time we swim?

Not at all.

In fact, the smaller the first step or action you take to get your way out the better.

(Small means the barrier to entry is low. In other words, you are more likely to do it because it is tiny.)

- Having a rough workout? Focus on one tiny aspect of your technique and nothing else.
- Blown first race at the big meet? Go back to your race plan and pre-race routine for your next event.

Don't get caught up in the belief that you need to take huge, meaningful steps out of a tough spot.

Those big changes come about as the result of many, many small steps, so focus on the first little step, and then the next, and things will seem to take care of themselves from there.

IN SUMMARY

Being resilient in the water (and in life) doesn't have to be a mystery, or something that is only gifted to the superstars of our sport.

All it takes is a **little gratitude, an open mind about what is next, and the willingness to try something positive and small to get your way out of it.**