

FINDING MORNING MOTIVATION

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The alarm clock goes off. It's like a shock to the system. Your bedroom is dark. Other than the ear-cringing beeping, all else is still. You think there's no *possible* reason any human being should ever wake up this early. No human being should wake before dawn to leap into a large body of cold, freezing water and immediately hike the heart rate beyond 140 beats per minute as a coach, arms-crossed, gives you impossibly hard, mentally and physically-exhausting exercises. And yet, lying in bed, staring at the ceiling, you *know*: it's something you must do. Morning practice

begins, once more. But you hit the snooze button. If only for a few precious minutes of sleep. Glorious, glorious sleep. These few minutes between alarms are among your most favorite. For a few seconds, you can trick your body and mind back into Dreamland, when warmth and sleep return, and the cold, harsh, chlorinated pool seems miles and miles away...

The alarm rings again. You hit the snooze. And again. And again. Fighting. Resisting.

When I swam competitively, I utilized no less than three alarm clocks strategically positioned around the corners of my bedroom. "Each of you have a responsibility to wake me up," I told them. "Do not let me down." You'd think after years of waking for morning practice, 5am wake-up calls would become routine. You'd think I'd leap out of bed, ready to go at 5am, ready for morning practice, ready to take on the world. But each morning was its own individual struggle. And that morning struggle, for swimmers everywhere, is very, very real.

Every September, thousands of swimmers venture back into that before-school morning practice wonderland. The sky gets darker. The clouds bring colder air, rain, and snow. School pressures mount. And yet, that alarm clock keeps on a-buzzin'.

Fear not, fellow swimmers. Here is a list, "How To Find Morning Motivation," generated from years of experience, from someone who is defined as definitely *not* a morning person. They work. They're proven. May one of these tricks aid your wake-up experience...

1. When you wake up, drink water.

The easiest way to wake up the body: Just drink a glass of water. You're already dehydrated from sleeping. A glass of water, for me, feels as effective as a cup of coffee. It wakes me up. It hydrates. I feel more alert and ready after gulping down water. Try it.

2. Just sit up.

When that alarm rings, you don't need to leap off the bed already fully dressed, sprinting towards the door, slamming breakfast, muscles fully engaged, mentally ready and prepared for the day, singing a happy tune, skipping towards morning practice. All you need to do: Sit up. Re-direct the blood flow. Open eyes. That's the first step. The rest will come.

3. Put a quote of inspiration on your dashboard.

If you drive to practice, put a little inspiring quote taped to your dashboard or steering wheel (as long as it's not obstructive, of course). Or put one on your cell phone, or alarm clock. Or put these quotes on the ceiling of your bedroom, so they're the first thing you see when you wake up. It's helpful to be reminded just why you're waking up before roosters, nurses, and the sun.

4. The buddy motivational-early-morning-call system.

Just like you're not supposed to venture into bodies of water without employing "the buddy system," don't venture into a season of early morning practices without a buddy to help motivate you. Once, for a small fee, I offered to phone call anyone who wanted a phone call at 5am and happily yell words of inspiration. Peer pressure works, but it also can motivate. "Hey, so if you don't hear from me at 5:30am, call me." And vice-versa. You're all in this early morning battle together.

5. Before you sleep the night before morning practice, remind yourself why you're waking up early.

It's exceedingly difficult, when you're groggy, cold, and tired, to remind yourself why you're waking up early. So remind yourself the night before, lying in bed, eyes closed: Remember those goal times. Remember that feeling at the end of last season, as the championship meet concluded — how motivated you were to start training again. Remember your competitors are waking up tomorrow morning, too. Sometimes, with the right perspective, you can self-motivate yourself the night before morning practice.

And when that alarm goes off, and that *beep beep beep* hits deep inside your tired bones, you'll be excited to begin the chase, one more day...one more morning...