

WHY DO WE COACH?

By

Bill Sweetenham

The following are quotes from messages sent to me recently from various people I have worked with. This is the reason I coach – to know that I have helped others achieve their optimal performance and ultimate dream, and to help head coaches build superior teams. There is an “I” in the word “TEAMS”. **T**ogether **E**ach **I**ndividual **A**chieves **M**ore **S**uccess - **TE(I)AMS**.

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“Bill, thank you so much for your contribution. Michael and I will treasure your kind words. Let me take a moment to thank you for all the inspiration and guidance over the years. You have certainly been a role model for me and, in my opinion, you have done more creative and productive thinking about the coaching profession than any other. Seldom in our sport do we get someone with the intellect, the enthusiasm and the personality that you possess” Bob Bowman, USA (coach of Michael Phelps)

“Bill, thanks for ringing. You have been such a massive influence on my coaching, something I will never forget and for which I will be eternally grateful” Jon Rudd, GB (coach of 100m Breaststroke Olympic Gold Medalist)

“Part of my improvement as a coach is your constant support, whatever type of support it is, and the inspiration that you give me as a role model. This medal is also yours, you've been such an inspiration and role model, thanks for sharing so much” Fred Vergnoux, Spain/France (coach of Mireia Belmonte, 200m Butterfly and 800m Freestyle Olympic Silver Medalist)

“Thanks for the kind words, they always mean so much from you. You know you had such an impact into the coach and person I am today. All the very best and thanks for everything” Dave McNulty, GB (coach of Olympic Silver Medalist Mens 200m Breaststroke)

“Bill, your international experience is extensive and I believe it has created your vision for success that characterizes you. Your knowledge is great and your communication skills are excellent. Your contribution to swimming in Australia has been greatly appreciated over the years. Personally, I have benefited from your influence and by association my swimmers over the years have also been the beneficiaries of this wisdom and your input into our programme. Bill, you are always seeking a better way of doing things and this is why I think you continue to develop into a leader in the sport of swimming.” Michael Bohl (ex Olympic-swimmer coached by Bill and present Australian Olympic team coach)

“I would like to thank you personally for the talks we have had over the many years that we have been friends in both the early days as a swimmer, thru my AIS days and early coaching years in WA, especially to the last 12 months leading into and post Olympics. You have always challenged me to think outside the box and made me think about solutions to

problems - i appreciate that greatly.” Matthew Brown (Australian Olympic Coach of Olympic Gold and Silver medalists, London 2012)

I would like to thank the above international coaches for the recognition they have afforded me for the support I have given them.

Building Invincible and Superior Teams

(I work with many and varied teams, both corporate and sporting)

The paragraph below is taken from a recent London newspaper.

“I refer to the time when Bill Sweetenham joined British Swimming as the National Performance Director. The first thing that struck me was the level of involvement he had with grass roots coaches. A ‘shock wave’ ran through the Amateur Swimming Association’s coaching staff when he demanded a more professional team based approach. He gave unity of direction, a sense of purpose, a compelling vision of the future, and became personally involved in coach and swimmer education. This culminated in the rejuvenation of our sport and some serious debate within the education fraternity regarding their coach development processes. Leadership was about, it was tangible, visible and despite a few reluctant followers British Swimming emerged as a major player on the international scene. Following London 2012 and four years since Bill Sweetenham left British Swimming, serious questions are now being asked about what went wrong in the aquatics disciplines. Eyes have turned towards the rejuvenation of British Cycling led by David Brailsford, and this has prompted a search for effective leadership within swimming.”

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Guidelines for Building Invincible and Superior Teams

- Man for man, be the best prepared team in the world ahead of your opposition and the competition.’
- Be the most professional swim team in the world.
- Be the most professional sporting team in the country.
- Build the individual ahead of the team.
- Build the team around the most improved athlete.

Why Do You Coach or Compete?

This is the question that comes into a lot of coaches’ thoughts after each Olympic Games. It is normal for coaches who are focused on the most challenging and most competitive competition on the world stage and one which only comes around every four years; just as athletes will ask “will I continue and commit to four more years, or will I ease off and retire or focus on the less challenging and less important (stressful) competitions?” Whilst there is no right or wrong answer, the question for the athlete and similarly for the coach really is “why do I compete and train for the next Olympic cycle?” The desire/reason must be strong and uncompromised. While this is an extremely career rewarding experience in most cases, it is not the same in terms of financial reward.

I am always asked to assist athletes and coaches with this challenge. I have been extremely fortunate in my coaching career in that I have enjoyed being part of an athlete achieving podium level performance at every Olympic Games since 1976. It does not get easier or less or more challenging and difficult. However, the reward of the challenge and the experience always makes it worthwhile – note the various comments in the quotes above in “Why Do We Coach?”.

Asking and answering this question I have found makes the decision more accurate as it will determine the level of commitment and more importantly the intensity of your commitment. It is not the extended hours that the journey from one Olympics to the next involves. However, more important is the intent of each and every hour of the process that delivers the reward and outcome. Many do the hours without the real intent being recognised or applied.

The answer to this question has changed significantly for me after each Olympic cycle. Ask yourself “Why do I coach?” It is certainly not for the money. More, it is:

- A passion for excellence
- A passion and drive for the Olympic podium experience
- A passion for the field of endeavour
- A drive to achieve perfection
- A passion for coaching
- A passion for working with athletes
- Your ego
- A desperate and obsessive desire for winning
- A life of learning (pursuit of knowledge)
- A passion for teaching

Once this question has been answered and answered truthfully, there is one certainty. It will take dedicated time at task where compromise cannot be a consideration. If there is not the will or a real intent to prepare to win that is backed up by dedicated and committed time at task, the outcome will be at risk.

Whilst this list should cover most of the reasons why we coach/compete, it is important to identify the key reason for your commitment to the next four year cycle. I have experienced all of these motivational influences however at my current stage of life, the last three are those that are most important to me.

How many of us have made a commitment to an identifiable and winnable strategy, athletes and events for 2016? This is what Olympic preparation is about. The inclusion at the introduction of this Newsletter about “Why Do We Coach?” is why I coach and that is to enjoy a life of learning and in assisting individual coaches achieve their potential and in building superior and invincible teams.

Let me know if and how I might help in your quest for the Olympic podium in 2016, and in how you can build the best team possible from your programme.

Best wishes for your 2016 Olympic journey.