

*[Publisher's note: When we commissioned four top masters coaches to list the four mistakes they see adult swimmers make, with their suggested remedies, we had in our mind technical mistakes. But we did not specify this. One of our chosen coaches, Tim Sheeper—though he knew exactly what we had intended—took a different route. We were surprised, but pleased, with the result, and decided to publish his submission first. "Team Sheeper" and "Menlo Masters" are San Francisco Bay Area fixtures. Tim built from the ground up one of the largest masters swim programs in the U.S., populated largely by triathletes. He is not simply a coach, but is a former pro triathlete (with a top-20 overall Kona finish) and still routinely wins in the 40+ age category.]*

Late-in-life swimmers ought to develop four behaviors in order to achieve full personal potential:

## PERSEVERANCE

**Problem:** Late-in-life swimmers skip a myriad of steps when beginning their swimming careers—steps that youth swimmers do not skip if they develop through a swim school or a swim team. These steps are the fundamentals of swimming, including the ability to kick for propulsion; the ability to establish proper body positioning in the water; and the need to relax and flow in the water. A late in life swimmer is usually strong and fit enough to get back and forth in the pool many times while practicing a flawed technique—one which will never allow the person to reach full potential. He who is willing to start over and learn the basics of propulsion and drag exhibits the perseverance and strength of mind required to become an accomplished swimmer. This means spending hours in the pool perfecting body positioning, breathing, and timing, and laying down solid fundamentals on which to build a freestyle stroke.

**Remedy:** Water does not give up its secrets without coaxing. **It takes a lot of time to figure out the mystery of water flow and how we use our limbs to leverage ourselves through that medium. Accept the fact that significant improvement comes from consistent work over months and years, and not days or weeks. Then commit to making it happen.**

## CONFIDENCE

**Problem:** Late-in-life swimmers often lack the confidence in the water to challenge their speed and endurance limits. They feel "true" swimmers are judging them, which makes them self-conscious of their lack of experience.

**Remedy:** Build power and endurance. Go out too hard and blow up. Do too much and get tired. Push the envelop. A swimmer really has to be strong enough in the water to hold good technique, or to be able to change from poor technique to good technique. Many swimmers are just too weak in the water to hold the basics together. So develop the confidence to get in the pool and begin the long learning-curve process. Be secure enough to be the slowest kicker or the slowest backstroker in the pool, as both kicking and alternative stroke work aid in increasing one's overall swimming ability.

## PASSION

**Problem:** Wanting to improve speed in the absence of a developed passion for swimming.

**Remedy:** Yes, one has to really want to get better. But he has to be more than simply willing to spend the time working on improving. It can't just be for one race, and it can't be just as a means to an end. It has to come from a passion to improve one's skills, and, *as the skills improve so does the passion*. Set up a support system in your aquatic community, or create an aquatic community. Swim with friends or get involved with a team. Set goals and achieve them. Ask for help, take a swim lesson, or view an elite level swim meet.

## PLAY

**Problem:** We spend most of our life in the vertical plane, and with the resistance of air surrounding us. We don't spend enough waking time in the horizontal, in the water, having fun.

**Remedy:** Get in the water to play and relax. Splash, dive, surf, kayak, **move around for fun and learn the dynamics of the water. The more frequent "touch" someone has with the water the more "feel" one has—and the more a person senses or develops the skills enabling one to "grab onto" and "slip through" the water.**