

## What Does it Mean to be Part of a Team? *by John Leonard*

**To become a part of a team is a privilege.** Few people ever get the wonderful opportunity to experience the support of teammates and friends in the crucible of the competitive arena. **A team lifts and elevates the performance of an individual to heights never before achieved.** Each individual must also recognize his responsibility to the team.

A team is a collection of individuals who have chosen to pursue one or more common goals. One of these goals, by tacit agreement of all concerned, is **the improvement of each individual which can result in improvement of the team performance.** This is true in swimming. We compete individually, but preparation for competition is best accomplished in a team environment. No individual can create this environment for excellence on his own. It takes a team. There is no such thing as a free lunch. If an individual wishes to benefit from the team, he must give to the team. **Successful teams nurture the individual and expect the individual to respond by also nurturing the team.** Individual sacrifices on behalf of the team are just as much a part of the team environment as team accommodation of the individual.

The most successful teams have some characteristics in common in terms of accommodating the needs of individuals:

- 1) They **demand adherence to the core values of the team.** Outside these core values, they allow freedom of individual expression. But the core values are absolute and not to be modified or bent for the individual.
- 2) They recognize that not every individual's every need can be met, but they bend over backwards to accommodate the MOST IMPORTANT needs of each individual.
- 3) They react positively to the idea in action that each individual first takes care of his own responsibilities, then assists others in their needs.

Individuals on successful teams also have some common characteristics:

- 1) **They give back.** If they want to be cheered for, they cheer for teammates. If they need special attention, they provide special attention to others.
- 2) **They recognize that the fastest swimmer and the slowest swimmer on any team have unique responsibilities.** The team will go no higher than the fastest and will be limited by the efforts of the slowest. The individuals put special effort into assisting each to maximize their potential.

- 3) They know that **Rules do not make teams, but traditions based on what it takes to achieve group goals do make a team.** The individual recognizes the power of peer pressure when the object is right behavior.
- 4) Individuals recognize that a rising tide lifts all the boats, and that it is better to make the pie bigger than to fight for their small piece of the pie.

**TEAM has been described as "Together Everyone Achieves More."** Anyone who has been on a good team will agree with that acronym. If you are on a good team, be thankful. If you are not, what are you doing to CREATE a good team from the one you are on today?

"The Team Takes Care of Me, and I Take Care of the Team." **"Each member of a team has a responsibility to be better today than they were yesterday, as an athlete, and as a person. That's how teams get better."**

"On our team, the fastest guys help the slower guys every day. Then, when the meet comes around, the slower guys do better, but they also cheer so hard for the fast guys that they'd bust a gut."

"**Team means together.** We do a lot of things outside the pool together. When you know your teammates as people, it makes it a lot easier to support them when it counts."

"A team is knowing other people care about you."

"**We all commit easier to group goals than we do to our own.** We want to not let anyone else down . . . why else do we swim faster on relays than in individual events?"

"I love my team because they give me so much. I get to follow five other fast swimmers in practice each day, and that makes me faster. I get to spend time with five other fine athletes outside of practice, and that shows me how to solve problems and be a better person than I could ever manage on my own. What's not to love? I gotta give it back and repay my debts."

"Teams double the pleasure and half the pain."

"I know people who think swimming is an individual sport. They've never tried practicing alone."

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