

How to Be a More Coachable Swimmer

By [Olivier Poirier-Leroy](#) who is a former national level swimmer based out of Victoria, BC. In feeding his passion for swimming, he has developed [YourSwimBook](#), a powerful log book and goal setting guide made specifically for swimmers.

We've all had that swimmer on our team or in our training group. The one that argues with coach every time she writes up a workout on the board. That rolls his eyes when the group is asked to do something challenging. That argues, whines and resists. You swim long enough it is inevitable that you are going to get paired up with this athlete at some point.

Some of them are more guerilla-like in their resistance. Eye-rolling, grumbling, and passive resistance in the form of not doing the sets right and ignoring instructions. Others are far more vocal, and cause practice-freezing moments where they are locked in a practice-paralyzing screaming match with coach.

We're human. There are times where we roll our eyes, or become ungrateful to the assistance that those closest to us provide. We take things too personally, let our emotions get the best of us, and become quietly uncooperative at best, or at worst bursting like a negative solar blast.

On the other end of the spectrum is the coachable athlete. Generally speaking this swimmer has the following characteristics:

- Listens to criticism without taking it personally.
- Is committed to the team. Doesn't possess a "me first, team last" mentality.
- Is accountable for their performances.
- Demonstrates self-control in times of difficulty and struggle, both in practice and competition.

Here are 5 tips for being a coachable swimmer:

1. Be humble.

Your swim coach is your guide along the landscape of competitive swimming. Be humble enough to realize that there is still a lot to learn, and that the journey to your goals, regardless of how exceptional they may be, cannot be completed on your own. To say that we know it all, that we know best, is to close ourselves off to learning.

2. Be attentive.

Making eye contact and listening to your coach, and not just necessarily listening to what she is saying is the way to focus. If you're looking at your feet, fiddling with your goggle straps, or staring at the weird growth on the back of your teammate's neck instead of paying attention, you're missing the context with which the practice is being delivered.

3. Be Open.

For swimmers who tend to wear their hearts on their sleeve constructive criticism can be difficult to absorb. If your coach is giving you tips and suggestions for things to work on or improve, don't receive them as a personal affront. If your coach cannot give you instruction without the message being lost in a cloud of indignant rage, than the cues and prompts are lost.

Have a willingness to listen without judging, because the moment you judge, is the moment you've already discounted whatever counsel coach is providing. Listening to what they say, and not how they say it can be helpful in this context.

4. Be courageous.

Have the capacity to embrace change. To try new things. To branch out outside of your comfort zone. And to let go. Many athletes feel that by not being coachable they are retaining control of their athletic journey. That they are the ones calling the shots.

While I understand the trepidation a swimmer might have about working with an unproven coach, insisting on certainty is just another way to avoid taking responsibility. To let go of control and to dive into the breach of the unknown requires faith and courage.

5. Be communicative.

If something is bothering you, by all means bring it up with your coach. When you feel you aren't getting what you need from coach and you harbor it, you find yourself rolling your eyes, tuning him or her out, and complaining.

Not only is this not helping you as an athlete, it's detrimental to team culture, and reduces your ability to be coached. Sit down with your coach and calmly outline your concerns.