

Learning To Love Yourself

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The sport of swimming has a tendency to expose your flaws. It's a brutal and at times agonizing sport that can really take its toll on a person. Every failure to hold a pace in training and every bad race-time in a meet can often result in a swimmer losing a bit of their own self-worth. The more these failures and short-comings start to pile up, the more they start to value themselves less and less and the more their self-worth becomes depleted.

I have this one memory from my time working in swimming that's always stuck with me to this day. I was working with the Florida Gulf Coast University Swimming & Diving team at their conference championships in February of 2017. After we won the title, we went out to a pizza place for dinner, celebrated our win, and listened to seniors give their speeches. The assistant coach at the time, Amanda Smith, was leaving the team to become a teacher. She spoke to the team and she said something that I think is so crucial for every swimmer to hear and take to their heart:

"It's not about the times. You're all worth so much more than a time that shows up on a board."

Swimming's brutal nature can make it very easy to forget this simple truth. Swimmers are so often defining themselves by the times they see on the board. When their times are good, they value themselves highly and have a high sense of self-worth. When their times are bad, they value themselves less and they allow their sense of self-worth to become damaged.

Personally, I don't think anyone can ever truly develop real, lasting, internal confidence and become the best version of themselves as a swimmer unless they develop a high sense of self-esteem and self-worth. In other words, ***you have to learn to love yourself***. You have to reach a point where you can accept who you are and the attributes you have, and that includes everything – Strengths, weaknesses, admirable traits, embarrassing flaws, everything. ***You have to be able to be at peace with your own imperfection.***

Unfortunately, this is something that society and sport certainly doesn't help with. Growing up, and even today as adults, imperfection is demonized. The idea of embracing and accepting one's flaws and weaknesses is looked down upon. To make matters worse, the reverse is also true. We're told not to think too highly of ourselves. We're told that, if we think we're amazing and

that if we love who we are, that means we're arrogant. We're told that means that we're narcissistic.

There's a very real difference between acknowledging your own worth and loving who you are versus being arrogant and narcissistic. Acknowledging your worth and loving yourself means that you value who you are and you're comfortable within your own skin. It means you respect yourself and care about your own well-being. Being arrogant or narcissistic means that you think you're a better human being than someone else. It means you think that you're more valuable and worth more than others. Acknowledging your worth and loving yourself doesn't require you to think those things.

Valuing yourself and loving who you are also doesn't mean permanently settling for or blatantly ignoring any weaknesses, faults, and shortcomings you may have. As always, your weaknesses, fault, and shortcomings are things you continuously want to look to work on, change, and improve. Having said that, knowing your worth and loving yourself means that you understand that, like all human beings, you're born with imperfection woven into your being. You accept that and don't resist it.

You have always been imperfect. You have always had weaknesses, faults, and short-comings as a swimmer. And, no matter how much you don't want to be imperfect or have weaknesses, the simple fact of the matter is that, whether you like it or not, ***you're always going to be imperfect.*** In fact, to be human means to be imperfect. If you were perfect and flawless in every way, you wouldn't be human. That would mean that you're some kind of machine or some kind of organism grown in a test tube. Having imperfections and flaws is part and parcel of the human experience.

The problem isn't having weaknesses. Every single swimmer has those. ***The problem is when you ignore your strengths and don't acknowledge them because you're constantly focusing on your flaws.*** Again, it goes without saying that you need to admit what your faults and shortcomings are as a swimmer. There's no way to continuously improve if you don't. ***However, you need to make sure you balance that out by acknowledging and feeling good about your strengths and the great things about yourself.***

If you don't do that, if you always just focus on the things that you do wrong, that you fall short on, and that aren't good about you, and if you never allow yourself to acknowledge and feel good about your strengths and what makes you great, then you'll plunge yourself into the emotional abyss. You'll never value yourself and never feel like you're worth anything. You have to keep things balanced. You have to allow yourself to acknowledge and feel good about your traits, features, and qualities.

You can't love who you are and value yourself if you think your weaknesses and faults are something to be disgusted with. You have to embrace them and accept them. Imperfection is not something to be ashamed of or sickened by. It's a perfectly normal and natural part of the human condition. To be imperfect is to be human. To deny your imperfection is to deny your own humanity. To resist being imperfect is to resist your own self. It's always great to strive for

perfection and to try and achieve it, but that must always be done with the understanding that you can never get there.

You have flaws. You have debilitating weaknesses. You have strange quirks and weird things about you. ***However, you also have wonderful traits. You have amazing features. You have fantastic strengths and admirable qualities.*** Acknowledge all of those things and let yourself feel good about them. Think about where you started. Think about how you were when you first started swimming. Now, think about how far you've come. Think about the tremendous improvements you've made and how much you've grown in that time.

I'd like you to do a simple exercise. Grab yourself another piece of paper and, in as much detail as you possibly can, answer the following 8 questions. Don't feel shy or awkward about writing great things about yourself and acknowledging your best qualities.

1. ***One of my best traits as a swimmer are:***
2. ***Some of the things I'm really good at are:***
3. ***I feel very good about my:***
4. ***My friends would tell you I am:***
5. ***The area of swimming that I have made the most improvement in is:***
6. ***I'm proud of myself for having:***
7. ***I know that I will succeed in the sport of swimming because:***
8. ***One of the things I love most about myself is:***

You're a human being first and a swimmer second. You're someone's son or daughter whom they love. You're someone's best friend and closest ally whom they trust unconditionally. You're someone's inspiration and source of motivation that they look up to. You are worth more than a time on a board. You're more valuable to the world and those in your life than whatever results you produce in the pool. Embrace who you are, accept that person, and love that person. Internal confidence blossoms once you do.

Thanks for reading, and all the best!

About [Will Jonathan](#)

[Will Jonathan](#) is a sports Mental Coach from Fort Myers, Florida. His clients include athletes on the PGA Tour, the Web.com Tour, Major League Baseball, the UFC, the Primera Liga, the Olympics, and the NCAA, as well as providing numerous talks and presentations on the mental aspect of sport and peak performance to various sports programs and organizations across the country. He also works as the official Mental Coach for the Florida Gulf Coast University Swimming & Diving Team.

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