

Habits of a Champion

In this month's article I am going to write about what I call the Habits of a Champion. **To me these are habits of champions in all areas of life, not just water polo.** No matter what you do, good habits will make you successful while bad habits will lead you down a path of failure and destruction. Habits are either your best of servants or worst of masters.

What exactly is a habit?

Webster's Dictionary defines a "habit" as *a tendency to perform a certain action or behave in a certain way.* **The usual way of doing things.**

Habits make up our life. If we choose to develop good habits, I believe that we can be successful in any arena. If we develop bad habits then we will be burdened by the ball and chain that drags us down and keeps us from becoming a champion. It really is a choice and each of us needs to look carefully at their own life and decide which habits they want to nourish and which habits should be replaced. First you make your habits and then they make you. Each of us has tremendous potential and it really is sad how many fall short of who they might become. Abraham Maslow once wrote "The story of the human race is the story of men and women selling themselves short." The average person settles for far less than he or she is capable of achieving. **I am convinced that creating good habits is the way to bring out the best in each one of us.** I hope that this list of habits helps inspire you to reach new heights in your life.

Here is my list of habits that I feel will help you become a champion.

- 1. Self Discipline** – this is the mother of all habits. Self discipline is the ability to make yourself do what should be done, when it should be done, whether you feel like it or not. It is very difficult to build any good habits without self discipline. Self discipline is the key to self mastery. Every act of self discipline strengthens every other discipline and will help you to build the other habits that are important for becoming a champion.
- 2. Positive Self Talk** – the things that you say to yourself will direct your life. If you wake up and say to yourself "I don't feel well" or something like this you are probably not going to have a very good day. If you wake up and tell yourself "it is going to be a great day" then your day will more than likely be much better. Listen to what you are saying to yourself all day long. Are you building yourself up and or are you tearing yourself down. Your inner voice is very powerful. Be positive – tell yourself you are going to become a champion.
- 3. Attitude of Gratitude** – I would highly recommend that you all work on developing this attitude. Be thankful. Here is an exercise for developing this habit. Write down what you are thankful for – Use 3 columns (1) Things (2) People (3) Other. (Other = freedom, opportunity, friendship, love, intelligence, abilities, health, talents, peace, faith, God, experiences, kindness) Read the list over 4 times a day – you will become more appreciative. Being thankful when practiced regularly becomes a habit. Being thankful and saying thanks are two habits of people who have discovered what it means to succeed in life.
- 4. Being Goal Oriented** – Before you make anything happen in your life you have to have direction. Goals give you direction, they will help you develop a vision for your life. Successful people write down their goals and they review that list regularly. Create a vision for your life. When you are constantly thinking about where you want to go and what you want to achieve you will have a much better chance of making that happen.
- 5. A willingness to take action/risk** – dreams and goals are important but without action they are empty. Having vision and taking action on those goals will help you to find success in all you do. Most of us fall short of ever reaching our potential. Coupling goals with proper action will help you to close this gap. Are you afraid of failure? The champions are the ones that are willing to take the risk and put themselves in a position to take that winning shot. They are the ones that are willing to challenge themselves to get out of that comfort zone and see how much better they

can be everyday.

6. **Have a strong desire to learn and to grow** – Recently, I read a story about John Wooden, who is now 97 years old. He admits that he is slowing down and losing some of his physical and mental capabilities, however he says “ I still like to read and I am going to continue to learn and grow for as long as I live. No matter what my capabilities are I want to wake up each day and do the best I can. I can not do that if I don’t continue to grow and learn.” We need to challenge ourselves to grow. If you are not getting better in life you are getting worse. You never just stand still. Champions are always learning and growing.

7. **A willingness to accept responsibility** – being able to accept responsibility for your own mistakes helps you own the mistakes and allows you to grow. Those that play “the blame game” will never rise to the top and become a true champion. Champions don’t blame others – they realize that we all make mistakes and humbly accept their weaknesses and work to overcome them by getting better themselves.

8. **Live by the Golden Rule** – Treat others in the way that you would like to be treated. This really is “golden”. It is a simple secret of life – what you give you will receive. If you are giving love you will receive more love. If you are giving friendship you will have more friends. If you are a better team player you will be on a better team. A true champion understands the importance of living by the golden rule.

9. **Good Time management** – either you master your time or your time becomes your master. Do you use your time wisely? Do you spend too much time with unimportant activities and then run out of time for the real important concerns in your life. Time management is about being able to prioritize and keep the big picture in mind. What is really important in your life? We need to prioritize and make sure that we spend our time first with the activities that will help us reach our goals. Think about how many hours the average American spends watching TV? Spending your time wisely is a critical habit that will help you to improve and reach your true potential in life. .

10. **Live in the Moment** – Karch Kirary the greatest volleyball player who ever lived was once asked by a fan “How did you prepare for the Olympic Gold Medal?” Karch’s answer was beautiful. He simply said, “I did not prepare for the gold medal, I always prepared for the next point.”. To become a champion in whatever you are doing you need to stay in the moment. I once had an athlete that I coached a Pepperdine, who was one of the best pure athletes I have ever worked with. He never really went as far as he could have gone as an athlete. Why? This particular player could not let go of the last play. He would make a mistake and then he would be stuck thinking about the mistake (a bad pass, or a missed shot) and then this would impact the next play. He would usually get worse and worse as the game went on. He could not stay in the moment. Do you carry baggage around from mistakes in the past? Or have you learned to use those mistakes as learning opportunities that you can use in the present. Staying in the moment will help you to become the champion that is inside you.

Together these habits will help you to become more “**Excellence Oriented**”. This is when your usual way of doing things is to wake up and focus on being your best everyday. I truly believe that there is a champion within each of us. In order to become that champion we need to develop strong habits that become a way a life and help us to become the very best that we can become. Success is the ability to live your life the way you want to live it. Good habits will help you accomplish this.

Here is the key - our habits will determine who we become in life. And it is just as easy to develop good habits as it is to develop bad habits. Developing habits is simply a matter of practice and repetition. Become aware of your tendencies to behave or perform in a certain way. If you are not satisfied with these tendencies then make a commitment to change. Work to

change one habit at a time. This takes a little more focus and effort in the beginning but over time it will become your usual way of doing things. Don't cheat yourself out of becoming the person that you can become. I truly believe that there is a champion within each of us. Whether it is an Olympic Gold medal, a higher paying job or simply a better relationship that you want - these habits of a champion will help you get what you want out of life. As always feel free to email me at tshroeder@usawaterpolo.org.

Terry Schroeder D.C.

USA Water Polo – Men's National Team Coach