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“Ability is what you are capable of doing. Motivation determines what you do. Attitude determines how well you do it.”

Dr. Jon Rudd

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COME JOIN US!

**Guest Speaker, WSCA Vice
President, Dr. Jon Rudd**

Jon is a former physical education teacher, with a Masters in Physiology, and a PhD in Psychology, as well as an Olympic Gold medal coach. A longtime club coach, he is currently Swim Ireland's National Performance Director. In addition to his decades as a club coach, Jon has directly coached three World Records and several European and Commonwealth Records.

Coach Rudd developed the Plymouth Leander and Plymouth College swimming programs into one of the leading forces in European swimming. Jon's directly coached one or more gold medalist at every level of international meet on the international calendar, at senior, youth and junior levels – including Commonwealth, European, World and Olympic golds.

Jon has served as a senior International Head Coach at Olympic, World, European and Commonwealth levels for Great Britain, England, Lithuania, Ireland and Turkey and as a Senior International Coach for the Netherlands and Kenya.



WSCA COACH WEBCASTS

02/18/2021 • 16:00 GMT – 10:00 AM CT •
Q&A Live on Zoom

*From Learn-to-Swim to the Olympic Podium.
How to take your club from beginners to Olympic medalists.*



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Strength Training Across Ages and Specialties

By Deniz Hekmati

Deniz Hekmati's book: https://www.amazon.com/Foundations-Strength-Training-Swimmers-complete-ebook/dp/B08M5QVYRV/ref=tmm_kin_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1604169751&sr=8-3

For a long time, I was under the impression that all swimmers need vastly different training programs. Fortunately, it does not have to be that complicated. You can generally use fairly uniform training regimens. The key differentiators are a swimmer's age, gender, physical development and, to some extent, their mental maturity.

The Problem: Age; Gender; Sprint v. Distance; Strokes

There is a common misconception that haunts strength training: That swimmers who start lifting weights too early simply will stop growing or will not grow as much. This is entirely false⁽³⁾. The same thing goes for the idea that strength and dryland training inevitably end up injuring swimmers.

The issue is simply that **many adolescents who begin lifting weights or doing strenuous dryland workouts progress too quickly**. They usually have not taken the time to understand how the body works or been taught the right technique before loading up the barbell with weights. **They may also not yet have a fully developed core that can counter the forces put on the body during heavy lifting and efficiently transfer energy to the joints**. A weak core cannot do this. Research also suggests that female swimmers get injured at a higher rate than their male peers⁽¹⁰⁾. And each of the different strokes require different mechanics, which adds to the challenge of adapting training for each swimmer.

A weak core or poor lifting technique are detrimental regardless of how old or fast a swimmer is. But they usually are particularly damaging for swimmers who are in the latter years of their careers. Swimmers in their early teens can go through rehab and recovery, learn from their mistakes, correct their behavior, and still have time to catch up to their peers. For someone in their 20s, however, an injury may cost them that last shot at standing atop the podium.



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The Background

Distance swimmers and sprinters do not need vastly different strength workouts. Even milers need to develop a certain level of strength and power, not only lifting light loads and emphasizing muscle endurance. **The longer the event is, the more turns the swimmer is exposed to. Each turn is a jump. To jump well, the core must be strong, legs and hips must have appropriate range of motion, the technique must be sound,** and more available muscle mass will yield more force in each contraction, resulting in higher jumps. And it is foolish for sprinters to completely avoid the parts of lifting that are devoted to conditioning.

When I ran the strength program for the team at the University of Utah, I coached a senior named Bence Kiraly from Hungary. Bence had mostly hypermobile joints but also well-developed stability. He could take on serious strength and power challenges in the weight room. He is the only athlete I have ever coached who could do a flawless full-range 20 kg Barbell Overhead Pistol Squat, with his rear end almost touching the ground, on both legs, and would beat most if not all sprinters at box jumps. That year he swam the mile in 14:41.86, dropping a staggering 16 seconds – a 1.78% improvement – from the prior year and finished fourth at his last NCAA Championship.

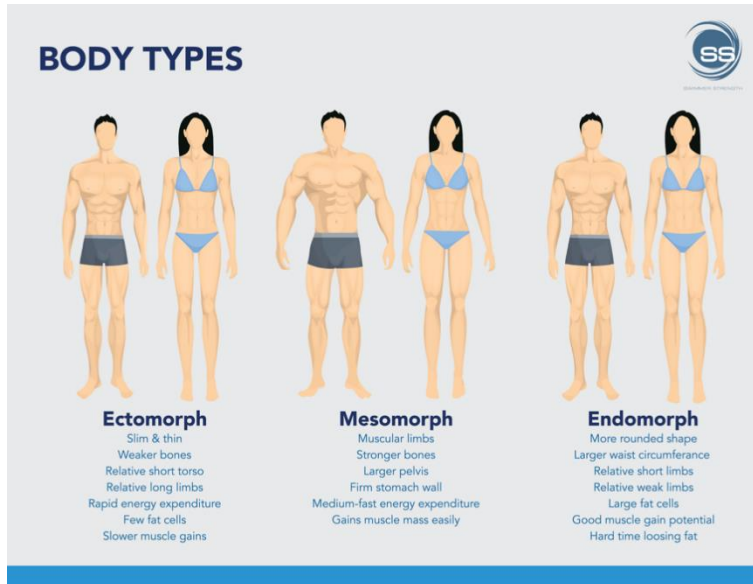
Some coaches use strength and dryland training for conditioning purposes, even though the swimmers are already well-conditioned. Some introduce workout regimens that resemble CrossFit. If the swimmers have not properly developed their joints and muscles to master the technical aspects of each lift, it is perilous to throw in that kind of training, especially since it tends to prioritize speed over proper form. **Developing the energy systems should be predominantly done in the water. Muscles and movement quality should be developed mainly in the weight room.** This distinction should be clear to everyone.

All bodies come in different shapes and sizes. Three distinct versions – called somatotypes – have been identified: ectomorphs, mesomorphs, and endomorphs ⁽⁹⁾. Each person typically is a mix of all three with a general tendency towards one. The picture below illustrates the differences. Over the course of a season, the body should approach the ectomorphic shape as they gain more muscle and get leaner. In collegiate swimmers, fat-free mass and height are the two strongest correlations with sprint performance ⁽⁸⁾. Having an idea of where a swimmer falls on this spectrum helps both them and the coach become more aware of the impact of the



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training and can tweak things as necessary, because not all swimmers respond the same to training. Their somatotypes are partly the reason.



The Fix: Age

As previously said, **there is no scientific evidence that lifting weights is harmful for a swimmer in their early teens.** Poor technique is the key culprit, and that holds true both for adolescents and adult high-performers. However, young swimmers cannot handle the same volume or weight because their muscles, tendons and joints are not yet fully developed. As a result, they should never attempt to do a 1RM lift. Instead, **the focus should be on developing maximum relative strength. That is a measure of how strong a person is relative to their body weight. For instance, the more flawless push-ups a swimmer can do, the higher their relative strength.**

Swimmers who have never done dryland or strength training must be briefed on etiquette and policies. All equipment must be respected and treated with care. Barbells, dumbbells, and plates should not be taken for granted. If swimmers lose focus, weights can drop on feet or hands or hit someone in the face. Unmindful movements and practices – a nice way of describing **sloppiness and carelessness – tend to be one of the root causes of injuries.**

It is necessary for any athlete to master stability before emphasizing strength and power. This does not mean swimmers should not be introduced to strength and power components,



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such as push-ups and jumping technique. A sound balance must exist and stability training should take precedence.

Submaximal Training Loads

Swimmers come in all shapes and sizes. The differences can be particularly stark for pre-teens and early teens, where some inevitably will have gone through growth spurts and have relatively well-developed musculature while others are late bloomers. That can make it tricky to determine which weight loads they should use for training, especially since coaches cannot put them through a 1RM session.

Here is my solution: The rate of perceived exertion (RPE). It is a highly effective method to determine training intensity ^(4, 6). I have modified the scale to use a range of 1 to 10, with 10 being maximal effort for given sets and exercises. A relatively safe way of using this scale is to first determine the intensity goal of the workout. Is it meant to be a more challenging workout or a session that focuses on recovery and movement awareness?

Challenging workouts may gradually increase the RPE from 6 towards 8 or higher. If the swimmer cannot maintain proper technique at higher RPEs, back off and correct the form. Lighter workouts may stay at or under 5 RPE and should not be strenuous for the swimmers. This is a more appropriate option for a dryland workout that precedes a hard session in the pool. This method can be used to determine either repetitions, static hold times using body weight, or weight for any given number of repetitions.

10 and under

The priority for these swimmers should be to have fun, maintain range of motion, explore how their bodies move, start to **develop core stability and work on coordination and balance**. Exercises and movement patterns that challenge both their coordination and core are usually very good. And make sure to add versatility early on. Do not be afraid to introduce them to anything and everything they can do with their bodies, like skipping, tumbling, burpees and hip hinges, as long as they are not at risk of injuring themselves.

Also, introduce movements that improve the range of motion, such as pass throughs and the couch stretch. And they should be encouraged to also explore other sports. Games are underestimated – these children love playing games that involve physical activity, such as dodgeball or any form of tag. **Testing these children is not necessary, but making sure that they are moving in all planes of movement and getting a versatile dryland experience is.**



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Pass Throughs



Position the body on the ground facing down. Grab a superband, towel, or a stick firmly and place the arms over the head with the forehead hovering on the ground. Lift the arms up by engaging the back and shoulder blades while maintaining tension on the band. Move the arm back to the hips symmetrically with only a mild discomfort. Control the motion back – stay symmetric and maintain tension in back and on band.

11-13 years

At this age, the body starts to lose some of its range of motion because of swimming demands and of how quickly the body grows, affecting hamstrings, hip flexors, quads, lats, chest, and biceps tendons. Swimmers at this age tend to ramp up training intensity. They kick more intensely with straight legs and flail their arms excessively both in and out of the water. **Be on the lookout for the swimmers who develop quickly and become immobile in vital joints, because most do not notice when their range of motion shrinks.** (This holds true for swimmers of all ages, not just those near or in puberty.) The movements and exercises they do, and how they do them, also play a role.

To regain loss of mobility, swimmers need to spend more time outside the pool working on stability, strength and recovery. Stability and core training remain cornerstones. These swimmers can also be introduced to lighter weightlifting techniques with sticks to learn movements like the Clean and Overhead Jerk and Snatch, if the coach is qualified to teach them.

The benefits are twofold. Most of those movements require good mobility, so it will push the swimmers into uncomfortable positions that require active muscle tension. Moving slowly and learning the technique will later teach them to do the movements quickly and explosively, which will be useful as they eventually move on to lifting with weights. These exercises engage the entire body, just like swimming does. Training must still remain fun and engaging. Five to



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ten minutes of basic drills a few times per month is plenty and a great complement to their training in the water. It is also important to **increase training that improves their relative strength during these years, such as Pull-Ups, Push-Ups and Split Squat Holds**. They should be introduced to exercises using submaximal weights below RPE 8. Reminder: Swimmers at this age should not test for max loads or repetitions.

14-18 years

During this period, coaches must help swimmers build a strong foundation of movements that are functional for swimming and require advanced coordination, meaning they have a greater transfer to swimming speed. The swimmers are able to absorb and implement technical instructions on how to perform a wide array of weightlifting and traditional strength training exercises. As always, **the core must be the cornerstone of training**. And **if the range of motion is neglected, immobile swimmers will suffer greatly**. At times, big physical changes that result in gains in the weight room may not immediately translate into speed in the water. This holds true both for boys and girls. The reason may be that the training loads have been too high, or the exercises are performed poorly. If swimmers opt for heavier weights, the movement speed drops, making it less swim-specific. Improper technique leads to poor habits that result in the body compensating for movement quality.

On the contrary, **hypermobile swimmers who are not given appropriate stability training may suffer from injuries later on because it takes time for joints, muscles and tendons to develop and be able to withstand higher forces than they are used to in the water**. Maximal strength training and testing should not be a priority.

At ages 16-18, swimmers are increasingly equipped to test for 3RM or 5RM once or twice per year. Swimmers aged 14-15 may test for 5RM or 10RM once per year for any exercise where they can master the technique for the given number of repetitions. Reminder: 1RM are not recommended also for swimmers at this age. It's simply too much risk over the reward and it's not cyclic.

19 and over

These are years during which swimmers generally try to reach **peak performance**. **Training** at that level **always comes with increased risk**. Developing maximal strength and power is exceptionally taxing on the muscles and joints. This type of training tends to make swimmers feel heavier and slower in the water. But it is a necessary component of success. As a result, the training regimens in the water and the weight room must be closely coordinated to ensure



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optimal results ⁽²⁾. Typically, easier weeks in the water give room to push harder in the weight room. If training in the water is important, then back off the weights a bit.

Now, there is a wide range of athletes found from 19 and over. Surely, a 25-year-old swimmer will be more advanced and better equipped to handle the demands of more strenuous lifting sessions than a 19-year-old. Depending on their past training exposure, **hypermobile swimmers still need a heavy emphasis on stability training, and immobile swimmer will need to continually develop their mobility.** Since swimming is a cyclic sport with repetitive contractions, I recommend that swimmers test for 2RM or 3RM instead of just one rep.

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE RECOMMENDATION GUIDE

| | 10 and Unders | 11 - 13 years | 14 - 18 years | 19 and over |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| Games | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Coordination | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Mobility | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Stability | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Strength | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Power | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| 2-3RM Testing | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 3-5RM Testing | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| 5-10RM Testing | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |

Scale of importance
 1 not important
 2 moderately important
 3 very important



The Fix: Sprint vs. Distance

Strength training aims to develop strength and power to help the body withstand forces in the water and achieve top speed. Starting with a foundation of stability, **the goal is to develop the musculature to help propel the body forward as fast as possible by increasing the amount and muscle fibers and improving their ability to contract.**



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Lots of research detail the benefits of lifting for sprinters, but lifting for distance swimmers has been studied far less. **The faster the body moves in the water, the more forces it must overcome to maintain functional stability, or technique. This means sprinters must be stronger and more powerful than mid-distance and distance swimmers.** Everyone must develop maximal strength and power, but sprinters need more of that type of training than a distance swimmer, who lives at submaximal training levels for far longer stretches of time.

The biggest difference in their training is in the water. **Distance swimmers must maintain higher volumes and spend more hours in the water than sprinters. That means that they may need less time in the weight room – perhaps 2 or 3 sessions a week – to develop their horsepower, compared to 3 or 4 sessions for sprinters.** As for the middle-distance swimmers, they tend to be either “sprintier” or more “distancy.” Those that share racing strategies and body types with sprinters should lift more. Those whose swimming technique resembles distance swimmers and who hold up well at the end of races should lift less.

Regardless, their movements in the weight room need to be technically sound. Once the swimmers are familiar with the exercises and can execute them flawlessly, then designing workouts or circuits that resemble CrossFit is just fine. I have myself employed this strategy with successful results.

How?

By **designing sets with a duration that matches the swimmer’s best time or goal time in their No. 1 event. The exercises should only be fundamental ones, such as Hang Cleans, Squats, Jumps, Sprints, Pull-Ups and Push-Ups, and not be mimicking swimming.**

For example: A sprinter has a goal of swimming below, say, one minute in the 100 LCM freestyle. First, pick one exercise and do it for 59 seconds at a submaximal weight of no more than 60% of 1RM. Count the number of repetitions and make sure the execution is flawless. Repeat that cycle 2-4 times, and keep track of the number of reps, for 3-4 weeks before mixing it up.

Another other option is to create a training block of 3-4 exercises the swimmer must complete: Hang Power Clean, Front Squat, Pull-Up, and a Sprint. The coach sets the number of repetitions and the swimmer adjusts weight and tempo to complete them in as close to 59 seconds as possible. The RPE at the end should fall between 8-10. These are examples of developing power endurance.



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For mid-distance and distance swimmers, these blocks can be manipulated in length by adding repetitions or exercises. I have personally never made up a circuit that simulates the mile. But can it be done? Absolutely. However, **I do not recommend going past the 5-minute mark, at the very most.** Why? **Because maintaining that level of an intensity for that long may result in poor technique, leading the swimmer to compensate movements, which in turn can lead to injuries.** So be wise with the length of these sets.

The last distinction between sprinters and distance swimmers is the volume. In general, I prescribe fewer repetitions than strength-training literature recommends for swimmers. This holds true for sprinters too. **I value movement execution and slower tempos, which are more strenuous than exercises executed in the traditional way.** It is okay to add a few more reps for mid-distance and distance swimmers early in the season using submaximal loads. **If a swimmer commits to strength training, eventually they will be training at loads above 90% of 1RM, regardless of whether they are a sprinter or not.** At these loads, repetitions will not exceed 2. **Prescribing more repetitions at heavy loads solely because they are distance swimmers will increase their chances of getting injured and compensating for technique.**

The Fix: Genders

Several studies have shown that **female swimmers report frequently more significant rates of injuries than male swimmers** ^(1, 5, 7). One reason may be because they often undergo the same training volume and intensity as men do, even though they have lower muscle mass and fewer fast-twitch muscle fibers.

Because of this, it makes sense to take a more measured approach to progressing their training in terms of the number of sets, reps and weights, and add plenty of exercises meant to reduce the risk of injury, such as stability and mobility training. This will require a thoughtful selection of exercises and management of workloads. Experience tells me that female swimmers tend to be a bit less keen on exercises with advanced movements than male swimmers. In those situations, just choose another movement that still is beneficial and will make the swimmers stronger and more powerful. **Not all swimmers must do a Hang Clean or Box Jump. Find the right one for the swimmer.**



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The Fix: Strokes

The different strokes put different strain on joints and muscles. Breaststroke especially stands out relative to the other three given the complex combinations of movements in feet and hips. **Swimmers specializing in breaststroke and IM will need to build more mobility in their hips and feet while strengthening and stabilizing their inner thighs and knees.**

Compared to the other strokes, **breaststroke utilizes more upper body strength from the biceps and chest. Substituting a few exercises for these swimmers to target these areas will make it more specific and personalized.** Swimmers must also be made aware of how much strain is put on the lower back each time the upper body is raised up for the breath, which puts lots of stress on the lower spine. **They can even this out by learning to engage the lower abs.**

Freestyle and backstroke involve rhythmic, cyclic and powerful rotations coming from the trunk. Those swimmers must develop full rotational mobility and add exercises to ensure that the arms can move smoothly through the recovery and into a more powerful catch. **These swimmers must also develop mobility in their ankles and hips.** The difference from breaststroke is that the toes are pointed down – plantar flexion – and the legs remain fairly straight and must be able to maximally extend with the help of hamstrings and glutes.

The butterfly is the freakiest of all strokes. It requires the chest to press down once the arms start the catch phase of the stroke – hyperextending the upper spine – although the swimmer is actually also pushing forward. It is no secret that very young swimmers lack smoothness in their fly. **The answer is to build overall upper body strength, stability and mobility. Some swimmers will need to emphasize mobility and others stability based on where they fall on the movement quality screen.**

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For more on swim-specific strength and dryland training, please visit <http://swimmerstrength.com>

The book *Foundations of Strength Training for Swimmers* is available today and currently the #1 release on Amazon in swimming.



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Coaching Novice Swimmers Recommendations and Reminders

By John Leonard

One of my fascinations in life has always been how to most effectively teach new swimmers basic competitive swimming skills. After a 50-year coaching career, here is “peeling off the first layer of the onion.” (There are a lot more levels to peel off!)

I recommend the following things when working with any group of 6-12 year-olds. Many of these also apply to “new to the sport” teenagers.

1. **It’s all about teaching great strokes.** Nothing can “fix” “damaged” swimmers. You **HAVE** to **get it right** as much as possible **from the absolute beginning**. Why? Google “Myelin Sheath and Physical Learning.” Study it. You can’t overcome this basic physical/neurological science.
2. Training the Myelin Sheath can simply be described as **doing as many physical movements CORRECTLY and as few as possible INCORRECTLY**, as possible, **EVERY SINGLE DAY**.
3. **Teach in a short pool.** Start with 5 meters. Move to 12 meters. Most great basic skill teaching can be taught in the smallest possible space.
4. **DO NOT** do 25s for a long time. When you do 25s with a novice swimmer, they do 5-12 meters **WELL**, then they struggle in awful form to get to the wall. Net effect on Myelin? **ZERO**. Productive coaching? **ZERO**.

The rest is going to be **WHAT** to do, not what to avoid.

5. In my experience, these are the critical skills of learning good swimming, in order of importance.
 - A. **Bubble blowing.** Get perfect air exchange comfort. Do **TONS** of bubble blowing. Hold the wall with both hands. Go **UP AND DOWN** with regular timing and rhythm.
 - B. **Kicking on their side.** Face looking down for free, up for backstroke. **STRAIGHT BODY LINE**. The big muscles are in terrible shape in most kids today. Kick short and fast. Kicking slowly is worthless.
 - C. **Long Arm Strokes.** To the front, to the back. Elbow **UP**.

FOCUS on teaching those things well.

Corollary – **Teach** the “**FRONT READY POSITION**” and **how to leave the wall properly and streamline** at the very **BEGINNING**. **INSIST THAT IT IS DONE CORRECTLY EVERY TIME**. Same with “back ready position.” **NO EXCEPTIONS**.



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6. The **Rhythm and Structure of Practice**. Novices thrive when they “know what to expect.” Ladies, especially from age 5 on, want to master something and know how to “do it right.” They can’t do that if everything is a “surprise.” **Have the same practice pattern every day.**
7. Instruction example: Bobs, kicks, practice leaving the wall. Repeat. Then substitute arm work for leaving the wall. Repeat. Recycle and do it all again. Mix those two. That’s how you emphasize what is important.
8. WHEN you go from 5 meters to 12 meters.....do the same thing. Bobs, kicks, “teach a new skill/drill.” Repeat. Repeat. Repeat. **VARIETY is completely unhelpful** in teaching novices to swim. **Drill the basics until they are perfect.** Review your understanding of the effects of the Myelin Sheath.
9. Learning and Peer Pressure. **One of the most effective teaching techniques is to work in two groups.** How? Have the children line up by the wall and count off by two’s. “One, Two,” repeat. Everyone is a one or a two. Then they work by One’s or Two’s.

If you are not working, you are WATCHING. (Do not allow inattention. This is hard in today’s child. **“Work” should be 5-10 seconds max,** then “OK, two’s GO!”

HAVE THEM COUNT OFF BY 2’s. DON’T DO IT FOR THEM. Independence and self-regulation is important.

10. Instruction example: “OK, ten bobs. One’s – ready, GO!” (ten seconds later) “Two’s- ready, go!” Then, “right side kick, ear inside the shoulder, one’s, ready, go!” (five seconds later) “Two’s, ready, go!”
11. Etc. for EVERYTHING.
Why? Each group has 5-10 seconds to rest and WATCH. (Not talk to each other). **PEER PRESSURE comes into play as they watch.** (“If Susie can do it, I can do it.”)
and...

You have to have people see other people do what you want, so make sure you **point out and have everyone watch whomever is “doing it best.”** TALK VERY LITTLE AND HAVE THEM WATCH A LOT!

Instruction example: “Right side kick. Susie does this well, watch Susie.” Susie, ready, go!” Then, five seconds later....”1’s, ready, go!” Etc.

USE A DEMONSTRATOR ALMOST ALL THE TIME AND MAKE SURE THEY ARE WATCHING. INSIST ON THEIR ATTENTION. **BE DEMANDING.** You are not their friend. You are their teacher. **INSIST on the best possible learning version of themselves.**



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Repeat...**BE DEMANDING.** It's the only way they get it and it is showing the utmost in respect to the small person. They are capable of learning and you **EXPECT** them to do so.

All children today are visual learners. Talk as little as possible. Show as much as possible.

Happy Teaching. More soon. All the Best,

John Leonard



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Chop wood – Carry water

by Coach Don Swartz

Zen is a branch of Buddhism that came about in China during the 6th century. So, it has been around for a little while. Many of the teachings and quotes find their way into things, but they sometimes come across as nonsensical phrases meant to sound obscure. There is meaning behind the quotes, however, and many of the lessons are still useful today.

"Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water."

Many of us get caught up in the end results of what we're working toward or the way things will be when we finally achieve something. But the truth is that getting to where you want to go or being successful doesn't mean that the work that leads you there goes away. Achieving your version of "enlightenment" is not an endpoint in and of itself.

You'll need to do the same things after in order to keep moving forward. There's a Zen philosophy that says **the way a person does one thing is the way they do everything**, and whether you agree with it or not, the message is clear. **If you can't take on the simple tasks as best as you can, how could you conquer the big things?** As Tom Barrett explains on his blog Interlude Retreat, it's all about **being in the moment**:

"When we are able to be in the moment, we no longer feel compelled to watch the clock. **Whatever your work might be, bring all of yourself to it.** When you are fully present, you may find that your labor is no longer a burden. Wood is chopped. Water is carried. Life happens."

No matter how menial the task may seem, practicing mindfulness and **focusing on the present work at hand will help you develop a habit of always doing your best.** And once you finally achieve "enlightenment" you still must chop wood and carry water. **Do your work, do it well, and when you find success, do it again.**