

Losing Fear

This week's Speedo Tip of the Week comes from Pike Hightower, a coach at the Stingrays swim club in Marietta, Ga. Hightower, who was recently named Georgia's age group coach of the year, offers some advice on getting rid of some baggage that might be keeping you from swimming fast.

Hightower's Tip:

You spend an enormous amount of your time in the water learning how to reduce friction and resistance while you swim. That is why streamline, head/ body position and stroke technique are so important. There is another way to reduce resistance. This may be the most important of all. (**Remember:** *resistance is anything real or perceived that is in the way of what you can do.*)

Imagine right now that you are carrying a 50-pound backpack full of mud. It is very heavy and in the way. It prevents you from moving easily. It makes it difficult to do the things you like to do. Now, you are not carrying this backpack for any reason – what good is a backpack full of mud anyway? But, you still have it.

In fact, you're not sure where you got it, but you still have it. It serves no real purpose but to burden you and get in the way.

You can imagine, however, that over time you would get used having the backpack on, maybe even to the point that you didn't notice it anymore. You could still function and go about your day even though you carried the 50-pound pack. It sometimes makes things difficult, like getting through certain doors or allowing you to concentrate on certain things, but in general, you are used to it.

Now, one day a friend asks you, "Why are you carrying that silly backpack around? It must weigh a ton."

You say, a little embarrassed, "Oh, this is my backpack full of mud." (Not noticing until now how silly that sounds.)

"Why do you have it? Just take it off. It's always in the way."

You say, "No, I'm used to it now. It's not so bad."

"But won't it be a relief to be free of that burden, weighing you down, not letting you do what you can and want to do? How do you know how strong you are if you constantly carrying a useless burden?"

I am no longer talking about swimming and reducing the resistance in the water. This burden, this 50-pound backpack of mud is the heaviest, most intrusive (AND POINTLESS) baggage we carry: Fear. Fear is the nastiest of all human constructions. It is so powerful that we don't even notice when it is in there. It is so sneaky that we get used to functioning everyday with our fear and yet it can, if we allow it, eventually dominate our lives. This backpack full of mud is of our own making. We carry this burden voluntarily.

Anytime we want to be free of this weight, we must first acknowledge that we carry it. For example, when you have a race that is very important to you and you wish to do well, do you agonize over what will happen if you don't do well? Do you dwell on messing up? Do you worry about the outcome? This is all fear and has no place in your swimming. Someone once said that *any fear* you have right now about *anything* in the future is an illusion that will steal the present. If you do this type of agonizing and worrying, acknowledge it so that now you can get rid of it.

How do you get rid of it? Once you believe and then **know** that fear has no place in your swimming (in other words, you do not have to perform a certain way or get a certain time, you do not have to reach a certain mark, you do not have to make anyone else happy with your swimming), your sport will become really fun. This game you have chosen to master will no longer be a source of your anxiety and worry.

Ask yourself, "What is the worst thing that can happen if I don't get my goal time?" If the answer is: "Well, I won't get my goal time"...WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE YOU SCARED OF? I mean, be scared if you are about to be eaten by a lion, not of your performances in your sport, which, I remind you, is supposed to be fun.

There is something very interesting about someone who says, "I can," and someone who says, "I can't." They are both correct. If you stand on the block and say to yourself, "There is no way I am going to get my state cut in this," you will be right.

To get that 50lb sack of mud off your back, simply take it off and go have fun. Your races are yours to have and only you can swim them.