

Understanding Swimmers Mindset

You may have heard the term “Mindset” used in many different places including within schools, clubs or the District Regional Programme but what does it actually mean within sport?

To help answer this question, first of all ask yourself;

“Are champions born or made?”

and

“What does an athlete need to reach their full potential in sport?”

Answered the questions? Please read on to find out more!

Scottish Swimming believes that champions can be made and therefore in addition to physical, technical and psychological skills, your **mindset** towards sport is vital to your success.

What is mindset?

Mindset is a belief about a swimmers ability and where it comes from. The key to achieving full potential is not ability level or talent: **it is a swimmers belief about ability.**

“People say I have a great talent, but in my opinion excellence has nothing to do with talent. It is about what you choose to believe and how determined you are to get there. The mind is more powerful than anything else”

Michael Phelps. 2009

There are 2 types of Mindset:

GROWTH: swimmers abilities can be developed through learning and hard work.

FIXED: swimmers abilities are natural (perhaps inherited)

With a **growth** mindset, failures are seen by swimmers as learning opportunities believing that maximising potential requires a lot of consistent hard work.

“I’ve missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I’ve been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed”.

Michael Jordan

If a swimmer approaches the sport with a **growth** mindset, he/she are more likely to be focussed on being the best that they can be, training hard and learning as much as they can. Swimmers seek to learn from everyone: coaches, other athletes, different sports. Swimmers set down their own goals and control their programme (coaches or others will help). Swimmers know that they cannot predict what they will achieve with years of dedicated and purposeful training. Their challenge is to understand where they are now and **HOW** they can improve.

The table below summarises some of differences in behaviour that you might recognise in more **growth** or **fixed** mindset athletes;

	Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
Leads to...	...a desire to show off talent and therefore a tendency to...	...a desire to learn and therefore a tendency to...
Challenges	...avoid challenges	...embrace challenges
Setbacks	...give up easily	...persist in the face of setbacks
Effort	...see effort as fruitless or worse	...see effort as the path to mastery
Criticism	...ignore useful negative feedback	...learn from criticism
Failure	...reflects a lack of talent	...is a learning opportunity
Potential	...is measured by current performance (e.g. PB or current skills)	...cannot be measured
Success of others	...feel threatened by the success of others	...find lessons and inspiration from the success of others
As a result...	May plateau early and “under achieve”	Reach ever higher levels of achievement

Can mindset be changed?

Yes it can!

In the first instance knowing about **growth** and **fixed** mindset can challenge a swimmer’s beliefs to help improve performance.

Scottish Swimming has, over the past 2 – 3 years integrated the “mindset” concept within the National Programme (including District Regional Programme) and the National Squads Selection Policy. Over the coming years Scottish Swimming is looking to widen the approach across the sport through coach, swimmer and parental education.

What can you do in the meantime?

If you want to know more about “Mindset” and Talent Development, why don’t you visit the sportscotland institute of sport website for more information;

Search for “**sportscotland learning talent**” in your browser.

“Success is a long term journey, filled with many experiences. More often than not, swimmers that complete their personal journey are those that have persevered, enjoying the challenge of overcoming the ups and downs of swimming, learning how best to improve their own performance.”

Alan Lynn, Scottish Swimming National Coach, 2016



Nobody has a fully growth or fixed mindset; everyone has elements of both and there are athletes at the top of their sport who have a fully fixed mindset. However, it is believed that the more growth-mindset elements you have, the more likely you are to progress over the long term. We as a club will be promoting a growth mindset in our swimmers over the coming months/years and they will need to be aware that this is happening for it to work.

As coaches, we often hear swimmers say, “*I can’t do that*”. To coaches, ‘*can’t*’ means ‘*won’t*’ and they are unwilling to attempt it. This word should be *banned* from poolside... alongside any variations of the word! However, the above sentence can only be saved by adding the word, “*yet*” at the end.

We are aware that swimmers may not be as good at doing certain skills. The only way to improve is by practice, practice, practice – coaches do not mind if a swimmer is unable to properly complete something, as long as we can see the required effort and application from the swimmer at trying to get better then we will be happy.

Swimmers responsibility – in and out of the pool – will also be key to this. They need ownership of their swimming development in ALL areas.

Coaches can only influence swimmers mindsets when we are with the swimmers. Therefore, parents will be key in this process. Any reinforcement at home will significantly help the coaches. Thanks!

Recommended reading:

The Chimp Paradox by Steve Peters

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Chimp-Paradox-Acclaimed-Management-Confidence-ebook/dp/B006K26BEQ/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1489394494&sr=8-1&keywords=the+chimp+paradox