

# Coach Koehr's Swimming Awards Banquet Talk

## March 3, 2024

### 212-Degrees - The Extra Degree

#### A. Excellence Comes at 212-degrees

- Several years ago, my son Kevin sent me a book that hit me.
  - By Sam Parker & Mac Anderson
  - I think he knew I'd like it
  - Maybe because it had big words and lots of pictures
- **212 degrees – the extra degree**
  - **At 211 degrees, water is hot**
  - **At 212 degrees, water boils**
  - **And with boiling water, comes steam**
  - **And steam can power a locomotive**
- Wow! What a great metaphor for a life of excellence
- Seemingly small things can make all the difference
  - Just **one more degree** of
    - Effort
    - Commitment
    - Responsibility
    - Kindness
    - Sacrifice
  - Exponential results
- Countless examples where small things made a difference:
  - In sports
    - **Indy 500**
      - 500 miles
      - Average margin of victory over past 10 years? 1.54 seconds
      - 1<sup>st</sup> place prize: \$1.2 mil.
      - 2<sup>nd</sup> place prize: \$600K
      - Imagine driving from Washington to Boston and losing \$600K for being 1.54 seconds late!
    - **Pro Golf**
      - 4 major tournaments
        - US Open, British Open, PGA Champs, The Masters
      - 4 days, 72 holes,
      - Average margin over last 25 years? 3 strokes

- **Olympics**
  - Athens 2004 Women’s long jump – difference of 11 cm
  - **Beijing 2008 100 Fly**
    - Michael Phelps secured his **seventh gold medal** by defeating Serbia’s Milorad Čavić by a mere **0.01 seconds**.
    - Čavić picked up his head at the finish
  - **Atlanta 1996 Men’s 100 Breaststroke**
    - Our friend Jeremy Linn lost the gold medal by .07 after beating the world record time
    - As he told me, “I hit the turn a foot shorter than normal, and I knew immediately – Silver”
- **Seton Swimming**
  - 2024 **VISAA Division II Invitational** Championship
    - There were **eight (8) races decided by .36 seconds** or less
      - Three (3) of those were by .14 seconds, and
      - One (1) was by .02 seconds.
    - Seton **won all eight (8)**
      - The girls won the meet by just over 100 points and
      - The boys won by just under 100 points
    - **We were boiling!**
  - 2024 **VCAC Conference Championship**
    - **With 600 points scored, we lost by 1-point!**
    - **Girls 50 Free**
      - Girls seeded .02 seconds apart
      - Both dropped exactly .09 seconds
      - Finished .02 seconds apart
      - That could have been the difference between touching with your fingertips or your palm
        - Or breathing out of your turn
        - Or pulling on your breakout with your top hand instead of your bottom hand
        - Or not kicking on the breakout until you reached the surface
        - Or picking up your head into the turn or the finish
        - Or any number of other “1-degree” details

- **Girls 100 Breaststroke**
  - **Madelyn Zadnik**, in her final swim pushed herself just “1 degree more”, dropped 4.73 seconds
    - Jumped from 15<sup>th</sup> seed to score 1-point in 12<sup>th</sup>
    - That could have been the difference!
    - She was boiling!
- **Girls Diving**
  - A Trinity Christian girl named **Laela Lu**
    - Probably came to the meet thinking that she didn’t really matter to the outcome
  - She had the courage to get those two reverses
    - It’s scary to flip back toward the board
  - And just by completing them at all, she scored 4-points.
- How many other small things could have turned only 1-point?
  - Countless chances to get just 1 more degree
- And the results would have powered a locomotive
  - Or in this case, won the Conference Championship
- Mr. Dealey and Mr. Fifield
  - We have incredible examples of this on our own team
  - It’s always scary when Mr. Fifield calls me
    - “I was thinking.....”
    - Yes, he’s always thinking about how to get that “Extra Degree”
    - The result?
      - Our livestreams are not just better than other livestreams
      - They are exponentially better!
      - Mr. Fifield is boiling!
  - Did it ever occur to you how all of those results and text show up on the screen while watching the livestream?
    - Mr. Dealey wrote custom software to do that!
    - And you probably didn’t notice those scoreboard templates we use
      - They didn’t come from the Freedom Center
      - Mr. Dealey did that
    - Have you seen all the tech on the scoring table these days?

- And the dolphin stopwatches we use to send times electronically to the scoring systems rather than handwritten cards?
        - Mr. Dealey did all of that
        - Mr. Dealey has been boiling for a decade!
    - Between Mr. Fifield and Mr. Dealey, we have more tech at our regular season meets than they have at States!
  - **The last time I had a job interview was 1985**
    - Why?
      - Well, since 2000, it was because I've worked for myself
      - But prior to that, it was because I never needed to
      - In fact, I **never even had a resume until a bank asked for it** in 2001.
    - When I was in the corporate world, I always made it a personal policy to **do everything at least one-step beyond what was required**
      - It turns out that bosses like to have employees who anticipate the next issue and deal with it before it even comes up
      - And the best bosses really appreciate employees who make things better than they expected
    - It's why I enjoy working with people like:
      - **Kimberly Dalrymple**
      - **Bill Dealey**
      - **Paul Fifield**
      - **Katie Condon, and**
      - **Anne Judge**
    - It also turns out that people like those five (5)
      - **Don't ASK for a job**
      - **They GET ASKED for a job**
    - I never had to interview for a job because I always tried to follow "**Jim's Rule #1: Make Other People Successful**"
      - And those people **came after me instead of the other way around**
    - Leaders like people on their team who try to find that "Extra Degree"
  - That's not a message that many of you are getting these days though:
    - Here's an example on the other end of the spectrum:
      - I got my MBA from the Darden Graduate School of Business at the University of Virginia
        - So, I get their magazine called "**The Darden Report**".
      - In the Summer of 2023 issue, they had what should have been a **totally embarrassing article** called "**On Quiet Quitting**":

- Darden Professor Jim Detert published an article where he said:
  - *It's generally not a compliment to be called a quitter. It's not neutral. So when we use the term 'quiet quitting', we're essentially putting the blame on employees. We're saying they're lazy, not committed, or behaving selfishly or irrationally.*
- No kidding
  - He was right so far
  - But then he continued to outline his thesis in a book called **“Choosing Courage: The Everyday Guide to Being Brave at Work”**:
  - Detert said that a better way to label that behavior is **“calibrated contributing”**.
  - *“In many instances, though, employees choosing to fulfill their job description – but no more – are behaving quite rationally.....They're simply trying to restore a sense of equity at work – a sense that what they put in matches what they get out”*.
- Is it **“brave”** to do the minimum and keep taking a paycheck?
  - This line of thinking is only **“rational”** if you believe that the whole world is about you.
  - Is this the message to America's future business leaders?
    - **“If the minimum wasn't good enough, it wouldn't be the minimum.”**
    - **Absolutely pathetic**
- Remember a basic principle of life that you will never fully understand until you try it....
  - ....until you go all-in to get that **“Extra Degree”**  
**You get out of it what you put into it**

**Skip these examples for time:**

- Countless examples in history
  - Tell Story of 20<sup>th</sup> Maine on Little Round Top at Gettysburg
  - Tell Antietam story
    - Highlight Union advantages
      - Special Order 191 wrapped in 3 cigars
        - Confederate Army split
      - 80,000 Union troops vs. 50,000 confederates
      - Confederates were falling out by the thousands eating only green apples and green corn
      - 25% of confederates didn't have shoes
    - Highlight where the union didn't get the extra degree
      - Waited 18 extra hours
      - 3 uncoordinated attacks in the north
      - Reserves stayed put after bloody lane
      - Burnside bridge
        - Didn't reconnoiter to see creek was shallow
          - Snavelly Ford was only 3/4s of a mile from the Bridge and would have flanked Robert Toombs and his two (2) Georgia Regiments
        - Stopped for 2 hours before capturing Ford
        - Porter: "I am the last reserves for the last Army of the Republic"
        - Allowed A.P. Hill to get 15 miles from Harper's Ferry
- Noland Bulter at Conference Swim Champs Story
  - Give the "Yankee" lecture before every conference meet
  - Loaded up 50 Free to get record leaving 200 Free open
  - Bulter from Fredericksburg Academy won 200 Free
  - Went over to FA team area, asked for Noland and told her publicly what a great race she had
  - An hour later, her mother came over to me
  - Striking: How easy it was to get that exponential result

## **B. Obstacles to that Extra Degree**

- **212 degrees – it’s a commitment to action**
  - You have to keep the heat up on yourself every day
  - Showing up isn’t enough
  - Because, very often, the difference between excellence and mediocrity
    - Or excellence and failure
    - is often a very small thing.
- So, what keeps us from going all-in to start boiling?
- I thought of four (4) things:
  - **Looking for the quick fix**
    - If you spend a **little time on “that Google thing”**, it’s all over the place:
      - Liposuction
      - CoolSculpting
      - Nutri-Systems
      - Sono Bello One-Day Fat Removal
      - Buy Foreclosures
      - How to Get Rich from Nothing: 12 Proven Strategies
        - Unsurprisingly, that one comes from “The Millennial Money Woman”
      - Invest of Solar for Passive Income
      - Lottery Tickets
      - 6-minute meals for 6 pack abs
      - 6 pack abs in 2 minutes a day without pain
    - **Or at school**
      - Cliff notes
      - Using other people’s review sheets
      - SAT Prep Classes
      - Red Bull
    - **Or for Interpersonal Communication**
      - **Do you text or do you call?**
      - Do you send a **thank you e-mail** or do you **write a thank you note?**
      - I already know the answer
        - It’s so normal for people your age to take these short-cuts
        - That needs to change if you want to boil

- Trinity Meadow View Swim Team
  - This **16-year girls calls my cell phone**
    - **Has a conversation with me**
    - And asks if I will help them start a swim team
  - That girl, Lauren Kelley, is a very unique young woman
    - How do you say “no” to that
  - How do you think I would have responded if she just e-mailed me
    - One a several hundred e-mails I get every day that I’m just trying to rip through
  - The personal connection was that “1 extra degree” that made all the difference.
    - And the result was an inaugural swimming season for Trinity Meadow View that boiled.
- No quick fixes
  - Lose weight – run and control eating
  - Get wealthy – work hard, be excellent and take risks
  - 6 pack abs? – Hard work every day and no body fat – and pain
  - High SAT Score – read a lot and do your math homework reliably for many years
  - Want something from an adult – look them in the eye and talk to them!
- Back in the day, one of the big industrial laundry plants for which was I responsible was in Morgantown, WV
  - The plant manager was an old and wise country-boy named **Rod Rakosi.**
  - I was still in my 30s, but I’ll never forget the day he told me,
    - ***“Everyone wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die”***
- So, the message here is that there are no quick fixes
  - We all need to stop pretending that we are going to lose weight without eating less, running more, and doing a lot of push-ups.



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**Skip this example for time:**

- History is loaded with examples of quick fixes that went awry
  - **Athens in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC**
    - The world's first great democracy and first working free market system
    - Also, one of the first to use coins of equal weight to make trade easier
    - But they liked to
      - Do huge public works programs, like the Parthenon
      - Fight multiple wars
    - So they had a big problem – they were spending far more money than then they were taking in
      - And they couldn't tax any more without hurting their thriving free market system
    - Stroke of genius!
      - Take in 1,000 coins in taxes
      - Melt them down and mix the gold and silver with 50% copper
      - Now you can spend 2,000 coins!
    - The result was a severely devalued currency that weakened the whole city-state
      - Smart people starting running commercials on TV telling Athenians to buy real gold because it was now worth twice as much
      - But it was too late
    - The weakened Athens eventually lost the war to Sparta and ultimately became a province of the next great power, Rome.
    - Rather than speculate on possible historical parallels, I'll just say that history has shown repeatedly that just printing more money doesn't mean that you have more money.

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## Playing the Victim

- **Never play the victim, even if you are**
- **Control what you can control – yourself**
- Kids in my math classes that struggle
  - I had a **bad teacher last year**
    - **Did you do your homework?**
  - I **didn't learn anything from your sub**, he/she doesn't teach it like you
    - **Did you do your homework?**
- I invested in a real estate broker who wanted to start a brokerage
  - Lost my butt
  - She wasn't doing the actions we outlined in our business plan
  - **When results weren't coming, she'd play the victim**
    - The market is bad
    - Average home price is dropping
    - Both true, but who cares – can't control that
  - So why are other brokerages in this town making money?
  - We couldn't control the market
    - But we could control how many agent recruiting appointments we had each week – 2 a week?
    - We could control the quality of our training – continually canceling?
    - We could control the new agent boot camp that we ran – executed poorly?
- I love a line one of the other VPs I worked with used to use on his General Managers
  - He was another wise country-boy named **Jim McNemar**,
  - ***“We are going to choose not to participate in the recession”***
  - Or better yet, find an opportunity in it
- If you **start making excuses now**
  - Bad teacher
  - Bad coach
  - Project partner didn't do his part
  - The ref made a bad call
- You'll **continue later years later**
  - I haven't been trained on that
  - Management is bad
  - Sales underbid the job
  - Superintendent messed up the job

- My budget was unreasonable
- Or worse,
  - I got fired from my sales job because I was old, fat, disabled, minority, etc.
  - How about the fact that you didn't sell anything!
- We still live in a meritocracy where excellence and risk are the keys to success
  - We all have obstacles to overcome
    - Some of us more than others
  - Concentrate on the things you can control and quit using the things you can't control as an **excuse for your own mediocrity**
    - If you don't, you'll never get to 212-degrees

## ○ Selective Excellence

- As you know, my father died during the season
  - I hope you were able to read the Eulogy I wrote about him, because he could have pretty much written this little book that Kevin gave me.
- Growing up, 2-inch lift on my dress shoe
  - Already a bad athlete
  - But that didn't stop him from having me play football, baseball, basketball every season
    - I played poorly, but that's not what he cared about
- One question I always got from my Dad:
  - "Did you do your best?"
  - Didn't matter if that was good, as long as it was my best
- As I got older, he'd tell me "Bloom where You're Planted"
  - Picture in the "Man Room"
  - That was his code for finding the "Extra Degree"
- That's why I push all of you for PRs
  - **Personal best effort every time you hit the water**
- Years ago, my **niece Shannon invited me to talk** at the induction ceremony for the History Honor Society at Tappan Zee High School
  - A public high school in New York
    - A serious danger zone for a guy like me 😊
  - To prepare for the talk, I was talking to her father
    - She had been **voted "Most likely to go all out in gym class"**
    - Kids **cheered "Rudy" on the sidelines**
    - At the time, she was **approaching the 100 Goal** mark in lacrosse
    - I'll tell you a secret
      - You don't score 100 goals by just playing hard in the games
      - **You score 100 goals by playing hard every practice**
    - Ever hear me say "**You play the way your practice**"
      - Yes, and it's why some of you breathed out of your turn at States.
    - The same was true of her AP Stats grades
      - Not earned just by participating in class
      - Earned at the desk in her bedroom
    - And I **bet she got good letters of recommendations** from her teachers

- Because she sucked up to those teachers for a couple weeks during her senior year?
  - No, because **she was excellent all of the time** and her teacher's saw that
- Key to being "Average"
  - On a continuum from abject failure to massively successful, what's the middle called?
    - Average? Mediocre?
  - Here's the formula for being average: **Only do the things you like to do**
  - If you want to be good at something, there's going to be some sacrifice involved
- Extends to your whole life
  - **Math grade doesn't matter?**
    - "I'm going to Christendom"
    - "I'm going to study history"
  - **Are you kidding?**
- **What are you going to be doing** when you are in your 30s, 40s, and beyond?
  - **If you don't know, then how do you know what you're going to have to be good at?**
  - Trust me when I tell you that **being a Math Teacher and Swimming coach were not big goals** in my life when I was sitting in Algebra class and going to swim practice
  - We should always be discerning God's plan for us, but we seldom know God's plan
    - Especially at your age
  - This is what we can know though:
    - **We all have God-given gifts, and we got them for a reason**
      - **Even if we don't know the reason**
      - You have an obligation to use those gifts to serve others
      - Make sure you are prepared
  - It's why I'm so fond of saying:
    - **Catholicism isn't merely compatible with excellence – it requires excellence.**

- **Lack the Confidence to try**
  - Man, I hate the words, “I can’t” – just ask my kids
  - I remember when **Fr. Sean** was growing up
    - My most frequently asked question of him was: “**What, are you helpless?**”
  - “**Dad, can you make this phone call** – you can do it better”
    - Son, I’m SURE that is true, but that doesn’t mean I’m going to do it for you
    - I **knew he had gotten the message** when I e-mailed asking for his zip code
      - He e-mailed me back asking “What, are you helpless?”
  - I’ll never forget when **6-year-old Shane Koehr was accidentally put in 100 FR** in a meet at the newly built WARF.
    - I was terrified for him, but afterwards, he asked to do it again after
    - Why?
    - “Just to see if I’m any better”
    - Not premeditated answer – natural
  - That was more than 15-years ago, but **it was a lesson I’ve never forgotten**
    - It’s why everyone on this team swims the 500 Free
    - I can’t tell you the number of times I’ve had a mother **tell me that one of you wanted to quit the team because I might put you in the 500**
      - So, what do I do?
      - I put in the 500 Free at the first opportunity
      - And I can’t tell you how many kids later tell me that it was the highlight of their season
  - I **was not immune to it myself** though
    - I remember years ago **when I was struggling to run**
      - I was convinced that the best I could do was to run/walk
    - Started training with **a heart rate monitor**
      - **The monitor told me when I needed to start walking**
    - I gave blood, and that really me back
    - I had a big breakthrough after I returned from a backpacking trip at a place called Philmont in the Rocky Mountains of New Mexico
      - Was it the high altitude?
        - Maybe

- I later realized that was not it.
  - **The breakthrough came when heart rate monitor broke!**
- What is your **first thought** when you look at a hard math problem?
  - **I'll never figure it out?**
    - **Or I'm sure I can eventually figure this out?**
  - Your first thought makes all the difference
  - Probably an indication of how you are likely to think whenever you encounter any obstacle
- Think of it this way:
  - **How can you expect others to bet on you if you aren't even willing to bet on yourself!**
- I know this is natural for even the most confident people
  - That's why I don't tell my students that the homework assignments I put in my syllabus are the suggested assignments out of the book for "Advanced" students
  - Then I demand they do all of their homework 100% correctly
- You've all heard me say this a hundred times, but one of favorite quotes is from Thomas Edison:
  - **"If we did all the things we are capable of, we would literally astound ourselves"**
- And another quote I saw recently from Henry Ford:
  - **"One of the greatest discoveries a person makes is to find they can do what they were afraid they couldn't do."**

## C. Conclusion

- Unique time in your life – **your entire vocation is to improve yourself**
  - This will never happen again
  - Next time you **skip America’s Got Talent to study Algebra II**
    - You’re boiling
  - Next time you **draft a paper a week early** so that teacher who is dying to see you do well can comment on it in advance
    - You’re boiling
  - Next time you **don’t breathe out of the turn at swim practice** even though you know the coach is not looking
    - You’re boiling
  - Or the next time you **wake up early to do P90X with your daughter** even though you were up late with your brother-in-law
    - You’re boiling
- Excellence is **not one big act**
  - It is a **collection of many, daily and small acts of the will**
  - It is a near infinite **collection of good choices** that are not always the easy choices
  - **Excellence is habit nurtured by taking advantage of countless opportunities** every day
  - Excellence is **not about being objectively good**
    - It is about doing your best and being better than you were yesterday
- **Choose excellence in the many small things and you’ll get exponential results in the few big things!**
- And remember, don’t ever
  - **Look for the quick fix**
  - **Play the victim**
  - **Be selectively excellent**
  - **Say “I can’t”**
- That’s a **formula that will only put you in hot water**
- It’s YOUR life
  - YOU are responsible for your results – and those results are not a matter of luck
  - **You have greatness in you**, or you wouldn’t be here
  - **It’s time to turn up the heat**