



SETON SWIM & DIVE

GRATITUDE • EXCELLENCE • MEEKNESS • SACRIFICE



Building Culture at Seton Swim & Dive

A Case Study



Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Frameworks
 - a) Culture
 - b) Leadership
3. Captains
4. Actionable Ideas
5. The Trust Equation
 - a) i.e., Dealing with Difficult Parents and Kids

Introduction

- **In a room full of talented coaches, I'm not going to try to tell you how to coach your teams**
 - We are here to talk about team culture, not coaching philosophy
- **We learn from each other.**
 - This will be my 25th year as a Head Coach, but I'm still learning.
 - Let's learn together today.
- **This is a case study on Seton's Swim & Dive program so not everything will be directly applicable**
 - But avoid the natural trap of "My sport is different. That won't work for us."
 - Make your first thought "**How can I make this work?**"
 - I'm looking forward to discussing your ideas at the end of this presentation.
- **Rome wasn't built in a day**
 - Our culture and systems are the product of continuous improvement over many years
- **I will likely say uncomfortable things here.**
 - Just like with high school athletes, discomfort is the key to improvement



A Coach is a Leader

“The only thing of real importance that leaders do is create and manage culture”

– Edgar Schein, MIT Sloan School of Management

Culture is a Force Multiplier



How Do you ...

Attract 130 kids to swim at 6:04 a.m.?

- Culture

Recruit 77 parent volunteers with named responsibilities?

- Culture

Attract 16 volunteer Swim & Dive Coaches?

- Culture

Cover a \$98,000 budget that includes \$0 in labor?

- Culture

Get kids to swim 1,134 Personal Records during the season?

- Culture

Get even beginning swimmers to swim 200 lengths of the pool for Cystic Fibrosis?

- Culture

Focus on culture and the winning takes care of itself

What is “Culture”

The root of Culture is “Cult”

Cults value, and even “worship” things of primary importance to them

Culture is the Manifestation of What we Value

Culture is what drives action in alignment with our values

Intentional Action Requires an Intentional Definition of Values

The pool deck, the field, and the court are not playgrounds. Coaches teach virtue. Virtues do not derive from the whims of strong personalities on your teams.

“Swimming Ain’t About Swimming”

This is not the NFL or the World Cup. Your sport is not the culture; it is the vehicle for the culture.



The Cultural Framework for Seton Swim & Dive



Seton Swim & Dive's GEMS

- **GratITUDE**
 - “Who has it better than us?”
 - Nobody!”
- **Excellence**
 - We focus on better. Good takes care of itself.
- **Meekness**
 - We help our opponents over the bar that we raised by winning
- **Sacrifice**
 - We offer it up. We were not made for comfort; we were made for greatness.

GEMS Video

Foundations of the Seton Swim & Dive Culture

Culture cannot be created in a vacuum. The Culture you promote for your team must fit into the context in which the team exists

The Swim & Dive team is from Seton

Our culture must be consistent with the founding values that Mrs. Carroll has for Seton School

The Swim & Dive team is Catholic

The virtues we value in our culture must be explicitly Catholic – making the Catholic faith real in the lives of teenagers

The Swim & Dive team never cuts an athlete

We believe that the development of the “whole person” must have a physical component. Every Seton student should play a sport, and swimming can be that sport.

The Swim & Dive team is an all-volunteer effort

Paid professionals push out passionate and capable volunteers. Kids don't join the team, families do.

The Swim & Dive team is a meritocracy

Through the Parable of the Talents, our faith teaches us that “equity” is against the laws of Christ.



The Leadership Framework for Seton Swim & Dive

People Will Follow You Anywhere If

- They know you **love them**,
- They feel part of **something bigger than themselves**,
- They feel like they are **personally getting better**, and
- They feel like they are **winning**



Captains, Your Tool of Culture



There is no more important tool in your box for culture-building than effective Captains who are used well by the Coach

Captains are an extension of the Head Coach

This must be clearly communicated with your Captain(s) in advance. They can disagree with you in private, but in front of the team, they must understand that you and they are of one mind.

Use your Captains for every leadership task possible.

Great captains must be developed. Have them lead practice drills, lead game warm-ups, lead pre-game cheers and prayers, plan and execute cultural events. Expect a great deal.

Captains are the keepers of the Culture, not simply your top athletes

They are your first line of defense when problems arise. They must act at the first sign of drama or other behavior counter to the Culture.

Follow a process to pick your Captain(s)

This is so important that the Coach should always make the final decision. The kids never have the final say in who will serve as Captain

- Pick your Captains at the end of the season for next season.
- Poll the team (i.e., Google forms) but be clear that it is not a vote
- Don't fall into the trap of just picking entitled rising Seniors or your best athletes. Rising Juniors can make great Captains, especially if they are working with a rising senior. Entitlement attitudes kill culture.
- Announce who is "eligible" at your awards banquet, make your expectations clear, and ask them to commit to you personally after they have had time to think about it.

Enough Theory.

Real, Practical
Ways We Build
Team Culture

How to Build Team Culture



Practice Gratitude Daily

“Who’s Got it Better Than Us? – Nobody!”

End every prayer with a Captain asking the question and the team shouting as loudly as possible “Nobody!”

Athletes must thank their coaches after every competition and practice

Teach your kids how to look you in the eye, shake your hand firmly, and say thank you while using your name. Make it a daily habit.

Teach your Athletes to thank officials and volunteers

Captains take the lead here. Don’t wait for the handshake line.

Be a gracious host and a grateful guest

Again, Captains lead here. Greet the other coaches and captains to welcome them or thank them for hosting.

How to Build Team Culture



Talk the Talk

Your cultural framework needs to become part of your daily language

Develop a stump speech and use it

Describe your cultural framework at every opportunity, including all team information, parent meetings, the first practice, and awards. It's never too much.

Write a Blog after every competition and frame it in your cultural framework

I post a 5,000-to-7,000-word blog after every Meet. It always contains a cultural topic, the top performances, a description of every Personal Record, and opportunities to improve.

Bring direct cultural references to all team meetings, including pre-competition meetings and awards banquets

Every time you open your mouth, try to use a piece of your cultural framework. Have a speaker at your awards banquet to talk on a cultural topic.

Insist that your Assistant Coaches and Captains use Cultural language with the team

The language of Culture needs to come from everyone

How to Build Team Culture



Tradition Never Graduates

Celebrate your program's tradition. Your team is bigger than this year's roster

Celebrate past heroes

Talk about them, write about them, bring them back to talk or help coach.

- Blog and Banquet Speech Stories
- All-Time Greatest Swims YouTube Channel
- Team Record Board
- All-Time Top-20 Times
- Drills and body positions named after them
- New this year: Hall of Fame with a nice induction dinner

Host a Homecoming event each year

On the Saturday before Christmas, alumni swim in our annual homecoming meet. Some of them are still very fast!

Celebrate past success

Kids love to be part of a winner. Make sure they know that your program is a winner. Highlight success:

- on the Team Information page,
- in SwimmingWorld Magazine and newspaper profiles,
- with banners in the gym,
- in blog posts, and
- everywhere else that can convince a kid that they are winning themselves.

How to Build Team Culture



"Man finds himself only by making himself a sincere gift to others"

– Saint Pope John Paul the Great

Build service to others into the fabric of your team

Get as many parents involved as possible

You cannot have too many coaches or parent volunteers. It will enhance the culture by bringing families together and by giving the kids a reason for gratitude.

Include a major annual service project into your schedule each year

Since 2012, our annual Cystic Fibrosis Swim-a-thon has raised \$124,000. Each Fundraising team is led by a Captain.

- Idea: Host a clinic in your sport for homeschoolers or younger siblings, organized and led by Captains?

Drive your Captains to lead by example

Your Captains set the example on how to think of people other than themselves

- Taking turns coaching the beginning swimmers on Wednesday/Friday
- Cheering for new swimmers and getting others to do the same
- Leading pool clean-up after practice and meets



How to Build Team Culture

Live Your Culture at Every Competition

Be intentional about how athletes behave at competitions. Set the example.

Make the Opening Prayer and National Anthem a big deal

- Make it important by tying it to cultural value of Gratitude
- Make it a team event where even one person out of line, looking the wrong way, or not standing at perfect attention brings down the whole.

Your Warm-up is a lot more than just a warm-up, it's a show

How you warm-up sends a big message to your competitors and your own team.

Make it very intentional by practicing it in advance.

We use our annual Time Trials Meet to practice the National Anthem and our warm-up procedure. They should know how important it is to you personally.

Excellence is Attractive

- If you run your competitions in an excellent manner, your athletes will see that.
- Do one thing each season to make your competitions better (e.g., music, web site, new scoring tech, videos, livestream, new Meets, etc.)



How to Build Team Culture



Create Opportunities to Shine

Run great competitions for your kids

Seton Swim Meets are more than competitions, they are productions

- No more boring dual Meets. Every Meet is an Invitational.
- There's a "run of show" document for everything that happens
- Loads of music and videos, all captured on a livestream broadcast

Found your own invitational championships or travel to others

- Northern Virginia Catholic High School Invitational Championship – annually since 2011
- VISAA Junior Varsity Invitational Championship – annually since 2008
- VISAA Division II Invitational Championship – annually since 2007
- Attended the National Catholic High School Champs annually since 2004

Create special awards to highlight success

- Traveling trophies like the "Holy Grail" for NoVa Catholics
- Swimmer of the Meet trophies
- Meet Records
- St. Peter's Sprint, 100 Free Champion at NoVa Catholics listed on a canoe paddle

Idea: Create a special mid-season tournament for JV Teams?

Multi-team tournaments run and officiated by Varsity players with unique rules

- Shorter and frequent games (like the Fall Brawl Lacrosse Tournament)
- Adjust rules to emphasize culture like awarding a point for every assist
- Create special awards like a traveling trophy for the annual winner and a Tournament MVP

How to Build Team Culture

“Be hearty in your approbation and lavish in your praise”

Reward the behaviors that you want to encourage

You get what you measure

Seton Swimming had 1,134 Personal Records, a number everyone knows. Every one of them was specifically highlighted in a blog.

Align Year-End Awards with your culture

Seton Swim & Dive gives the following major awards:

- High Point – the boy and the girl who scored the most points
- Most Improved – 2 boys and 2 girls with the biggest time drops
- Coach’s Award – a boy and a girl who best live our GEMS

We include the Junior Varsity athletes in the event.

Make your year-end awards banquet a big deal

A multi-sport death march in the gym doesn’t build culture. Do it someplace that makes it special and include a speaker to emphasize a cultural topic.

Prepare to recognize each athlete’s contribution

Come with detailed notes. Don’t just wing it. Find my complete notes from last year’s Awards Banquet (90 pages) [here](#).

Recognize your parent volunteers

Make sure that you have plenty of involved parents to recognize



How to Build Team Culture



Include Cultural Events in Your Season Cadence

Make your competitions cultural events that send a message to your team

- December Meets are about every kid swimming 6 (of 8) different individual events. We don't even consider "winning" until January.
- New Year's Eve Cystic Fibrosis Swim-a-thon
 - Fundraising teams lead by Captains
 - Every kid, even beginners, swim 200 lengths of the pool.
- Every athlete swims the 500 Free at a Meet specially devoted to the event
- Senior Parade at the Conference Championship meet and at States
- Idea: Mary's Rock Run?

Turn some practices into cultural events

- Breakfast after the first practice
- Fun Relays at a final joint Varsity-JV practice, led by Captains
- Sumo Wrestling (boys) and Line Dancing (Girls), led by Captains

Bring your culture to bear at championships

Culture is a powerful tool to get kids to compete at their best

- Team dinner before States
- Presentation of a State Team Rugby shirt by Captains to first time State Team members
 - Sign "The Cone" and display it on deck
- AirBnB houses for boys and girls instead of hotels
 - Mom's prepare meals and eat family-style
- Have a party on Saturday night after States

How to Build Team Culture



Integrate Your Varsity, JV, and MS Programs

Your sports program at Seton in one program, not three.

We take swimmers of all abilities, the more the better.

Every kid at Seton should play a sport, and swimming can be that sport

Grow your farm system

- Get personally involved in the development players of your future teams
- Personally teach fundamentals to younger teams
- Use Captains to help coach younger kids

Coach the Coaches

Inexperienced volunteer coaches can become enormously effective if you are willing to teach them. We have countless examples on the Swim Team.

Have a celebratory joint practice

Before the championship season, we celebrate the end for the JV with a joint last practice led by the Captains:

- Fun relays with older and younger kids racing together

Big Brother, Big Sister

The oldest kids are assigned a younger, first-year swimmer to mentor

How to Build Team Culture



Dress for Success

The origin of the word “uniform” is from the word “uniform”

Look like winners

Be absolutely unrelenting on how your team looks. They should look good, and they should look the same. It sends a message to your athletes and your competitors.

Get a special uniform for States

We award a one-time gift of a Seton Swim & Dive Rugby shirt to first-time members of the State team. Everyone on deck knows where Seton is!

Provide team bags

Walk around Seton in the winter-time and see the festival of over 100 Seton Swim & Dive bags all over the lockers. Kids want to be a part of that.

Look like a leader

Coaches (and volunteers) should have uniforms too. If the competition is special, communicate that to your athletes by dressing up for it. None of us is Bill Belichick.

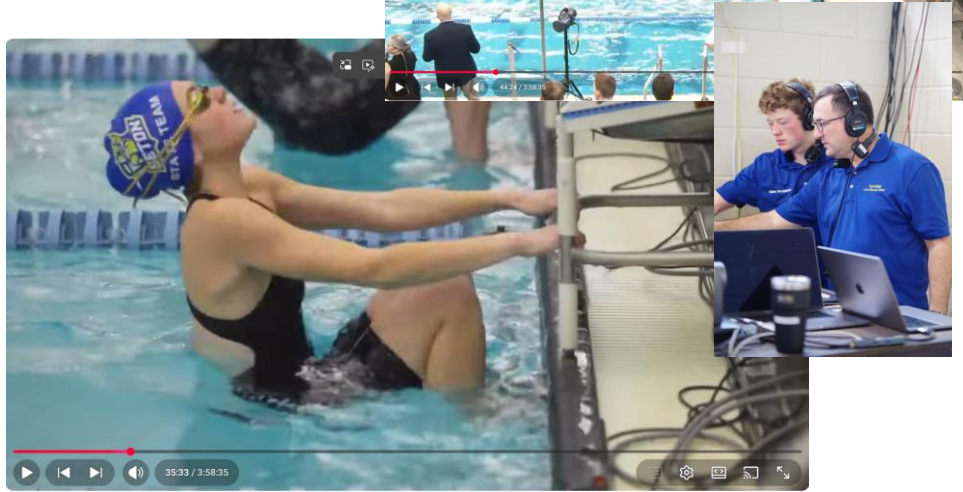
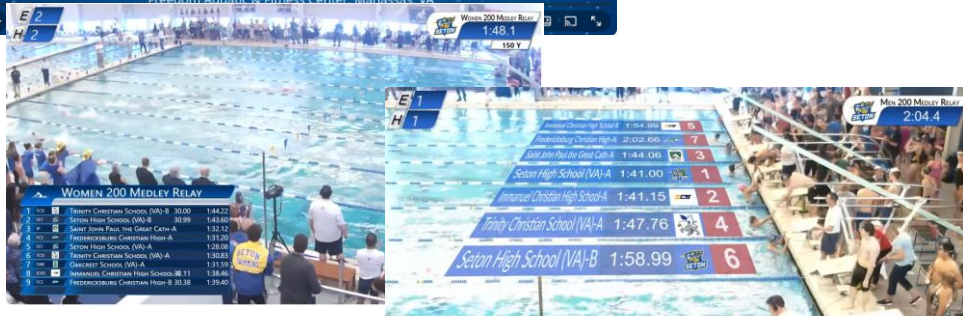
Make liberal use of team swag

Have a team store for athletes and parents to buy-additional uniform items. Quarter-zips and Boathouse jackets are allowed as part of school uniforms.

Athletes should never have anything in their ears

Never allow an athlete to separate themselves from the team, even on bus rides. They can blast music as a group.

How to Build Team Culture



Market Your Team

Kids love to be a part of the “buzz”

www.setonswimming.org

Our web site is so much more than a communication tool. 74,000 hits last season builds “buzz” for the team.

An elaborate livestream capability

A student club called “Seton Sports Network” (aka “Stream Team”), led by Paul Fifield, live streams meets with near cable-broadcast quality. Parents and Grandparents all over the country watch it – and rewatch it.

Hype and Culture Videos

We make heavy use of videos to promote our culture and our team. We play them on the scoreboard before and during Meets, we play them off our web site, and we let them go viral on social media.

You don’t need a professional

Anyone with an iPhone and iMovie who can set up a Facebook page and Instagram account for your team to become a marketing machine.

Now, where do we start?

What are the top 3 or 4 cultural
development ideas for your teams
this season?

A Bit More Theory.

Difficult Parents
Probably Don't
Trust You

Trust is the willingness to rely on someone because you believe their competence, character, and intentions are sound

The Trust Equation

$$(C + S + C) = T$$

C = Credibility

- Credibility has the same root as “credentials”
- What evidence exists that you are capable of doing this?



The Trust Equation

$$(C + H) = T$$

H = Honesty

- Honesty means that you will tell the truth, even when it is hard
- Are you willing to have the difficult conversation unemotionally?

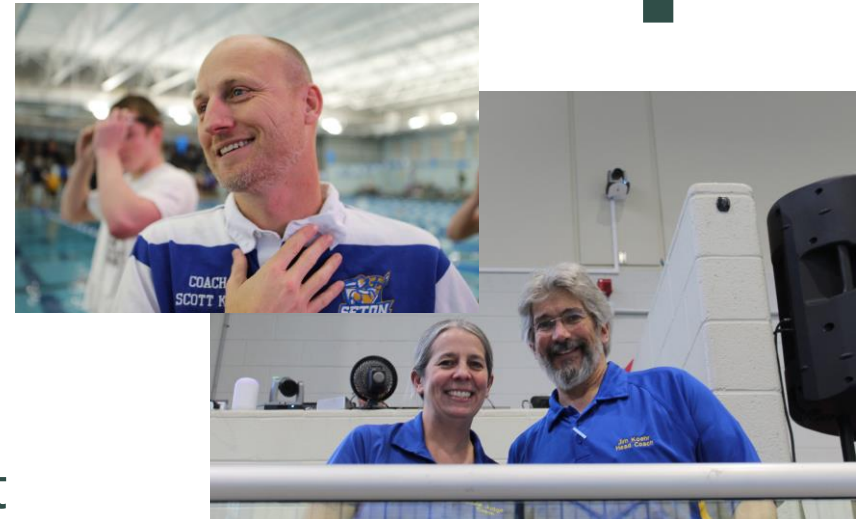


The Trust Equation

$$(C + H + R) = T$$

R = Reliability

- Reliability is about dependability and predictability
- Can I count on you to give your best effort to do what you say you are going to do?

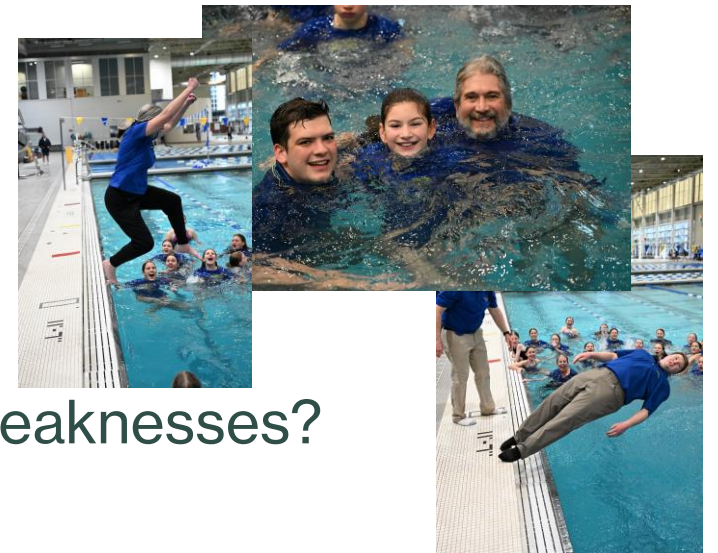


The Trust Equation

$$(C+H+R+I) = T$$

I = Intimacy

- Intimacy is about discretion, empathy, and risk-taking
- Can I be vulnerable to you with my inner thoughts and weaknesses?
 - That is the very definition of a “friend”

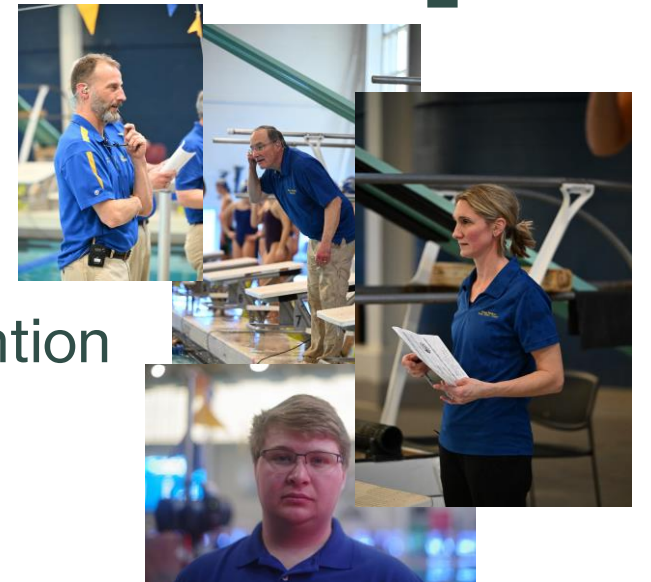


The Trust Equation

$$(C+H+R+I)/S = T$$

S = Self-Orientation

- Self-Orientation is about your focus – your motives and attention
- Do you care about me or is this about you?
- Mathematically the most powerful variable.



The Trust Equation

$$(C + H + R + I) / S = T$$

Your athletes and your parents will trust you if you live a life of
Gratitude, Excellence, Meekness, and Sacrifice

Last Words (that work)

“Great idea. Would you like to take charge of that?”

“You might be right”

Now, Let's Go Do Something Great!



Questions?

Want More?

Purposeful Leadership



See Coach Koehr's banquet talk on "Purposeful Leadership" on www.setonswimming.org under Blog/Banquet Speeches