What are the goals of the [ ] Swim Team?

(Team e-mail I sent prior to an important parent's meeting to clarify the direction and Mission Statement of an age group team that grew a bit faster than expected during its first four years, causing many growing pains.)

As a team we emphasize goal setting with our swimmers. We ask them, "Where are you now and where do you want to go?" We need to do this as a team as well. We are finding a need to get coaches, parents, and swimmers on the same page and working toward the same goals.

As our team has grown and changed over the past 4 years we have honed a general philosophy and a more focused direction. Unfortunately, we have not been effective in sharing that information with parents and swimmers. We have had many disagreements among the coaches and management on some key issues. We will now try to rectify that by outlining our short-term goals, our long term goals and our overall plan for achieving them. These still may be subject to a little "flux" over time, but they will be our outline for the next 3 to 5 years.

Let's start with our motto "Be the Best You Can Be". What does it mean?
Taken literally, does it mean that PST won't be satisfied until every single swimmer has an Olympic Gold medal around their neck? Obviously, that isn't possible. But we must start by determining what IS possible. To do this we begin with the main factors to any team's success :

1. Swimmers 2. Pool Time 3. Coaching 4. Team Structure

Right away we know we have the talented **SWIMMERS** to achieve the goals we set, so our focus will be on the last three... Coaching, Pool Time, and Team Structure. These are briefly summarized below.

Coaching: Quality stroke-work, proper training, motivation, goal setting, etc.

Pool Time: enough pool time allows the coaches to effectively do those things just mentioned.

Team Stucture: ….. is the "house" where all this takes place. It includes the team hierarchy or "chain of command" as well as the organization of practice groups. These practice groups have a carefully planned structure which is explained in the team manual. It also includes the league(s) we compete in.

NOW…..before we try to determine what is possible for us to achieve based on these 3 factors we need to take one more step back and determine the VALUES we hold important. These have and always will be the following:

1. We are a competitive swim team, not a recreational one. Everyone swims in meets.
2. Everyone can participate if they can pass the basic entry swim test for their age and level.
3. Continued improvement to reach your own potential … "Be the best you can be".
4. Recognition of effort and improvement as much as achievement.
5. Nothing substitutes for good, old-fashioned hard work!
6. A close, family atmosphere with team spirit and supportive team members.
7. Have fun at each step along the way.

These are the core values we always come back to when determining team goals, policies, and structure. They also define the differences between us and other swim teams in the area. Let's start with our first goal. It concerns pool time as well as a couple core values.

GOAL #1

Is to maintain a close, family atmosphere. We do not want to be a "monster" club with 200 plus swimmers practicing out of 3 or 4 pools all over the place. We want our swimmers to have a close bond, to work hard together, and to take pride in representing our area. We can represent our area in the state league championships

and bring pride to our local pool. At U.S.S. meets we may sacrifice points to other "regional" clubs with a larger population base but we can be the best local or "one pool" club in our LSC. Our swimmers have home-grown speed and we can take great pride in these achievements. We “Water our own grass to make it greener!”

With the pool time we currently have, 100 to 110 swimmers is the number we can effectively handle and train. Fortunately, this number is large enough to have a decent number of relays in every age group yet small enough for everyone to get to know each other. (Our family activities will help with that goal.) This amount of pool time is adequate right now. As we develop more swimmers into the Junior and Senior groups we can add 2 or 3 more hours a week to handle that progression. We should not need more than that….. but …….

We were recently asked “why?” by a mother of a new swimmer. She said … "My nephew in New York is on a team that has 4 hours pool time a day and he is in a group that swims 15 hours a week. Isn’t this what you need?"

Our coaches and Board of Directors need to be on the same page when it comes to a parent (or prospective swimmer) asking these questions. How much pool time will we offer the swimmer in the Senior group who has high goals and wants to "be the best they can be"? If we can offer 11 hours a week, wouldn't 12 be better? If they have 14 hours/week , wouldn't they be faster if we added weight training onto that? What about adding 5:00 a.m. practices ? Where does it end? This leads into goal #2.

GOAL #2:

We strive to give our swimmers what they need to swim VERY FAST! Yardage is important but it's also the quality and design of that yardage that makes the difference. What good is a swimmer who makes a national qualifying time if they have no other life besides the chlorinated kind? What good is it to score at a national meet if you get so tired of swimming that you quit before you experience the true joy that is collegiate swimming.

More than ever swimmers are making tremendous improvements in the college ranks while other swimmers who were very fast in high school quit their college teams because they find out there is more to life than 5:00 a.m. or double practices. It is a scientific fact that you can get close to maximum conditioning from your body on 11 or 12 hours of practice a week. Big U.S.A. clubs (or "monster" teams as some call them) can certainly squeeze an extra 1 or 2 seconds off your best time in a 100 or 200 race by requiring much more than that. Our goal is to use our time effectively and wisely so our swimmers will be FAST and will continue to improve up to the time they head off to college. As college freshmen, they may be a tiny bit slower coming in than other freshmen from "monster" teams, but they are within "striking distance" and still excited about swimming. The other swimmers are often tired and less excited about taking advantage of the opportunities offered. Who do you think will be faster as college seniors 4 years down the road?

This is what will give swimmers to help them achieve their potential:

1. A physical and mental progression through well designed practice groups that keeps them fresh and excited.
2. An emphasis on stroke technique will prepare them to swim fast at any level.
3. At the upper levels: hard work on a daily basis and weight training to complement the swim training.
4. The proper competition/swim meets at each level to help draw out the best in every individual.
5. We will offer double practices in the summer when swimmers have the time and energy to do so.

   As it stands now, we will not offer doubles in the winter …. most teenagers don't get enough sleep anyway) Distance swimmers benefit the most from doubles. We can still develop fast 400 I.M.ers and 1650 swimmers, but if not having 5:00 a.m. practices or winter doubles means our team will never develop a world record holder in the "mile" then so be it. We would love to offer double practices in winter for the motivated seniors but if it's unavailable or too costly then we must work harder in other areas to make up for it.

Let's now focus on point #4 a little bit….proper competition. This has been a point of contention with some parents. What "proper competition" means is that swimmers need to swim at meets with others at the same level, as well as at meets where they can achieve some success, **AND** at ones where the competition is faster.

A steady diet of only one type isn't mentally healthy for the swimmer and doesn't allow his/her best to shine through. THIS IS WHY WE COMPETE IN BOTH STATE AND U.S.S. MEETS. The full benefits of both will be explained in an upcoming newsletter. The state championships have the added benefit of bringing everyone together for a season ending, team-unifying party that shows everyone what our team, in full force, can do.

The team is still deciding whether it will gravitate toward practice groups structured by ability or by age groups, or perhaps a mix of both. Coach interviews will focus on this point. But, regardless of the method selected, all coaches are working as a cohesive unit toward achieving all the goals we have outlined here.

Just as the team has a manual for parents and swimmers, the coaches will have a manual that outlines the goals of the staff, the practice groups, methodology of strokework and the entire recognition process (to reward and recognize swimmers for effort in both practices and meets.)

GOAL #3:

"TOPS IN OUR STATE ….. TOP 10 at REGIONALS"

Hmmmm…. that's all well and good….. but what does "TOPS" mean?

-Is the top team the one with the most event "winners"?
-The team with the fastest relays?
-The team that is the most financially stable?
-The team that scores highest at the LSC Championships?
-The team that runs the best meets?
-The team with the most team spirit?

It encompasses all the above. If we follow the core VALUES listed earlier and work as a team, we can be "tops" in most of the above areas. The scores of both the state championships and the combined regional Championships results give a very good indication of how well our team program is working. We are not out to WIN in terms of points but in terms of improvement, spirit and FUN. These goals involve the whole team and every age group so each swimmer can take pride in the accomplishments. And if everyone keeps improving the points, the satisfaction and the fun will follow.

Our State League does not have any "monster" teams with large population bases and multiple training pools so it is a good goal for ____ to eventually place first. Since a focus on "WINNING" can be looked at negatively, let's just say we want to keep on improving until we place ***"in the upper half … of the top two."***

The final factor involves Coaching. The philosophy is set, the team structure is set, the pool time is sufficient to develop "home-grown speed". So now who will oversee this process?

GOAL #4

We want our coaching staff to be supervised by a qualified Head Coach who ensures that the team is working toward the goals listed herein. He/she will coach the Junior and Senior groups and directly supervise the Age Group program. The Board of Directors has realized that this is critical for future success which is why they have advertised nationally for an experienced Head Coach.

If you have specific questions about anything here, please call the coaches or the team president …..
….and we will see you at the meeting.