

It is an honour and privilege to be addressing you all today. Thank you to Swim South Africa for inviting me to be a presenter and especially for giving me the topic I feel so strongly about!

## **CREATING A LIFELONG LOVE OF WATER**

I will break this topic down into each of the words to get its full meaning and importance.

**Lifelong** ..... This would obviously indicate introducing someone to water as early as possible – in a calm, loving and safe manner – from birth really. Many years ago I wrote an article for a local magazine on Making Bath Time Constructive. Let's take a look at some of the contents. The full article is attached with your notes.

## MAKING BATHTIME CONSTRUCTIVE

There are many fun ways to make bath time constructive from as early as a baby can sit in the bath – or even a tub of water.

It is recommended that ‘play time’ in the bath takes place before the child is washed.

Therefore, there is no soap in the water to burn the eyes and the bath is less slippery.

The bath water should not be too deep and the temperature not tooo hot nor tooo cold!

Yip just like our heated swimming pools!!!

For the baby who can just sit – use brightly coloured floating toys which will easily move around the bath area enticing the baby to reach out and get a ‘feel’ for the medium we all interested in - water. Cups and jugs with small holes in are clever ways at ‘tricking’ a baby to get used to water on its own face!

Even better is when they try dry the water off their own faces, they will be putting even more water on – no goggles to fiddle with at this young age!

For the toddler who can lie down on their tummy – remember that the water must be shallow – encourage the legs to be outstretched behind them and not under their own body. See this is the very early introduction to the correct position for swimming - streamlining.

The toddler can be given a straw to blow bubbles with. We all know the extreme importance of blowing out in swimming so we can breathe in again as quickly as possible. Lllllooong bubbles so encourage parents to count loudly for their little one. It is fun for them to see the bubbles popping on their own noses – the start of swimming with their eyes open! Then to encourage the face

getting closer to the water, the toddler can put one ear on the water and then the other.

And finally the older toddler can be given toys which sink in the bath for them to 'search for'. This will further encourage the child to open their eyes in the water.

Parents and child-minders are reminded to keep a watchful eye on **children at all times** when near or in the water.

But as we all know the saying, better late than never ..... It is soooo exciting to receive an enquiry from an adult who has decided that they want to learn to swim! It isn't the parents insisting nor pushing, but they the adults themselves have chosen to learn and more importantly, they have chosen us to entrust their lives with. What a really special treat – to help an adult conquer their fears and share in this joy!

The ONLY thing we have never been taught to do is BREATHE! We get taught how to sit, crawl, walk and ---- SWIM ---- but breathing happens naturally at birth when the doctor gives us a hard smack! So it is VERY important to make an adult aware of their breathing out of the pool – so they truly grasp the importance of blowing bubbles whilst swimming to assist with a quick breathe of fresh air when they swimming. I usually ask the adult if they drive their own car or use a taxi. If they drive their own car, I suggest they make use of the time at a red robot to make themselves aware of breathing in and then exhaling slowly til the robot turns green. If the adult catches a taxi, tell them to take a deep breath as they go through the red robot and breathe slooowly out when they get through the other side safely!

Lilfelong is the word we are chatting about.

Remember these adults have probably not had any access to swim lessons before or have experienced a really scary incident. Be patient and keep telling the adult that you will not trick them into anything that they cannot do. It is essential to build a strong relationship of trust. Once you break the fear of water, it is broken for good and now the adult can develop a love for water.

With so many relaxing picnic sights, weekend getaways or holiday destinations having water related opportunities and activities for us South Africans to enjoy and embrace – waterparks, dams, rivers, seas, snorkelling, or just visiting a friend with a jacuzzi or swimming pool – we need to RESPECT water. A safe swimmer is a happy swimmer!

I will just take this opportunity to touch on the extremely important topic ... WATER SAFETY.

## SAFETY, RULES AND DISCIPLINE

Now to truly enjoy and love water, we all need to fully understand, appreciate and respect water. I am a very strong campaigner on SAFETY in, at and around water at all times. In South Africa, drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death after road accidents! The World Health Organisation estimates that drowning claims the lives of more than 60 000 children under the age of 5 years old and more than 360 000 people each year! Sadly, Africa's drowning statistics are the highest in the world! Sad hey – they are such an everyday occurrence that they barely get a mention in the local media.

You will find notes on basic safety rules attached to your notes. IF EVERYONE behaved RESPONSIBLY around water at ALL times, less accidents would happen!

Several years ago I did a clip on Pool Safety for TV. It started off with the two brothers standing on the pool surround throwing the ball to each other. Inevitably the one brother threw the ball too far to the side, so the brother launched himself sideways, caught the ball but landed in the pool! Then riding a bicycle or skateboarding around the pool. The brothers went faster and faster, cutting corners and inevitably falling in with the skateboard or bicycle following behind and landing on their head! This is a really common mistake by parents with little toddlers when they first get their plastic scooters – or pushing the dolly's pram - the pool surround is sooooo tempting as it is level so easy to get around.

These words or phrases are so often used by parents or childminders:



## DON'T

- go near the pool
- go to the deep end
- get your hair wet (in the bath)
- go play outside, it is too cold or raining or windy – BUT then they take their child to their swimming lesson!

We as swimming teachers need to change all the negative connotations into positives.

That brings me to the next word in this presentation topic of Creating a Lifelong Love of Water ... **LOVE – the most powerful positive word! What makes up love?**

- trust – you need to convey to your swimmer and/or the parents that it is imperative for everyone to feel total trust in you the teacher
- patience – yip the most commonly asked question! How many lessons will it take?

- passion – if you the teacher truly have a passion for people and water, your swimmer will feed off your positive energy
- enjoyment – each and every lesson must be an enjoyable experience for both swimmer and teacher in order for the full benefit to be gained
- confidence – in you the teacher plus the swimmer in their own ability and improved ability
- fun – no lesson should feel like a drag for the swimmer nor teacher. If you have fun your swimmer will have fun – and will learn to swim with a smile on their face!
- encouragement – work on keeping your talented swimmers in the sport – remember Continuous Development Program was part of our workshops recently.

- forever - hopefully your swimmer especially those with a lot of talent and commitment should be encouraged to stay in the sport. Most of my swimmers keep in touch with me and let me know any major swim results (or other water sports related success). Most recently, just last week was a young girl I taught who had made the South African underwater hockey team and was about to go to Tasmania on tour. She posted on facebook 'it all started 13 years ago with you Tannie Odette!'
- respect – is earned, it is not a right! You the teacher will gain the respect of your swimmers through all of the words listed above and together with LOVE and your total commitment to their success.

ALL these words are extremely important attributes in making a good learn to swim teacher. If we portray the above, our swimmers will LOVE their time in the WATER! Yes you have guessed right, the next word is ....

## **WATER.**

70% of the world's surface is covered by water!

Water is known to be therapeutic to lie in, to listen to and to watch.

It is relaxing - you often get tired after a stressful or tiring day – go lie in a deep relaxing bath!

It is gentle – think of a trickling stream

It is powerful – picture a thundering waterfall

It is repetitive – watching wave after wave roll towards you

And it is ESSENTIAL to life. Not just to drink or wash in, but to LIVE! I could NOT imagine my life being as fulfilled as it is, without being totally submerged hour after hour for month after month out of water!

We swim in many different waters – not just the sparkly, clean, shallow swimming pool with marked lanes and even lane ropes. Think of our local streams, rivers, dams and the sea. These waters have varying water powers and depths. But the most underrated stress when swimming in open water events is the visibility – or lack of visibility! Providing your swimmer with the knowledge of how to swim, how to stay safe but most importantly how to treat each water condition with the care required, is essential.

And now to go back to the topic ..... how do we CREATE this LIFELONG LOVE of WATER??

My mission statement is to make every swimmer the best that they can be!

Remember there is only one world champion but my belief is that a neat swimmer is a safe swimmer and a safe swimmer is a happy swimmer!

And remember by swimmer we don't always have to mean competitive swimmer. So many of my swimmers realise later on in their school years the benefit of being an above average swimmer – water polo is huge in high schools for both boys and girls. Quite a few have done really well at synchronized swimming, lifesaving, diving and underwater hockey. Remember I mentioned just now about the young girl going on tour for underwater hockey?

The rest of her message was ‘Dankie Tannie Odette for everything you taught me and for always believing in me!’

Others are really just content with going happily to school on swimming lesson day, or participating with a smiley face at their inter house gala or most importantly of all is that they all feel safe and adequate in a pool or dam or sea or river with friends and family!

Back to creating this environment and how do I successfully get it right – hopefully anyways!

I remind you that this is my way of teaching. I totally understand it won't suit you all but it definitely works for me, my swimmers and their families. I have taught for 30 seasons and this past season was probably my most happy, stressfree and successful season.

I also am very aware that each swim school can only adapt a certain teaching method according to the pool that they use.

I designed the heated learn-to-swim pool at the Seals Swimming Club Complex in Pietermaritzburg taking ideas from my own home pool and different school pools I had taught in so it really is world class! I have been using this facility for the past 17 seasons. The steps are 3m wide. The top step is very shallow, the second step is about 30cm deep, then the third 60cm deep – ideal for any beginner whilst the 12,5m length works well for stroke work swimmers. The entire pool is one depth 900mm so no stresses about deepends or being tricked into swimming in deep water. I am fortunate to have another pool available to me, our 25m indoor heated pool which has an extremely deep end as it used to have diving facilities, so



I do use that when a swimmer is totally confident in their own ability to show them that they truly are safe in any pool.

But now let us take a very close look at **CREATING** the environment to make every swimmer feel safe and loved.

My late husband was quoted as saying he was very lucky because he had a wife who loved to go to work and then worked such long hours she couldn't spend the money she earned! My squash and bowls mates who see me after work often comment on I can't really call my work work ... it seems more like playtime!

Yes, I definitely do believe in play! I was the only KZN representative at the very successful National Swim Conference in Port Elizabeth two years back. They had invited the leading Dutch learn to swim teachers. Listening to them, watching them and then interacting with them over the 4 day period made me realise even more just how important play therapy is. I was sceptical at first as to how much time the Dutch do just play. But I have implemented some of this concept at certain times of my season and it has had a very high success rate.

At the start of the season, after the long Christmas holiday period and again after the Easter holiday period, I start each lesson with play. Freeplay. Nothing organised. This allows time for the new or timid or frightened or improved swimmer time to move around freely, chat and meet their fellow swimmers,

and generally relax and unwind. Then introduce catches – use a small limited space for very beginners so it is easy for them to succeed in catching a fellow swimmer then progress onto a bigger area for your stroke swimmers ending off with the tunnel game.

My usual lessons do however always start with kick. If I am working with a toddler group, they will be sitting on the top step and kick. I use this time to chat to them about a new costume, sorting out their goggles, noticing the sticker on their hand meaning server at preschool or participating in play ball or whatever. This period of time means I am now totally in charge of the swimmer and responsible for their wellbeing, no longer the parent. If the class was a stroke work group, I still start off with kick. Some swimmers kick holding the top of the board, greeting their fellow swimming mates or telling me how

they had just had a tennis lesson or rugby practice. If a swimmer kicks correctly, they will get tired and stop chatting and really importantly will listen to the next instruction! Maintain eye contact when chatting or instructing your swimmers.

Now all swim teachers can relate as to the stress that goes into preparing and getting a swim lesson timetable right. Accommodating all ballet, gym and tennis lessons plus doctor, dentist and OT appointments is a daunting task! Thanks to the implementation of load shedding in South Africa a few years back, I have changed my total approach to timetables! I remind you of what I said earlier, that this is my approach and how it works successfully for me – a lot to do with my facility but also my own personality. I WANT swimmers to swim, I WANT parents to feel that they are getting their monies worth

and I WANT to enjoy my hours in the pool too. Sooo, yes most swimmers do still swim at the same time each lesson on their set days but I was noticing a trend with loadshedding. Whoever was bringing the swimmer to the pool that day, had to leave work to drive to collect their swimmer – robots weren't working and traffic chaos increased and with it tensions increased. The swimmer would arrive late for their lesson and you could see the stress and tension coming through. My reaction was, 'please don't worry. I am here til 5.30pm soooo chill and relax whilst we have fun here in the pool'. The parents really did appreciate the fact that they weren't 'just throwing away their money'. And so this then led to swimmers sometimes arriving early for their lesson. Instead of them sitting in the very hot South African sun waiting for their official lesson time, I invited them to get in

and 'just play'. As discussed earlier, I am a stickler for water safety so all my swimmers know the rules of once you are in you stay in, play quietly but safely with no rough play etc. Then a ripple effect of getting in early was if the parents weren't in a rush after the swim lesson, the swimmer could stay in and join in the next lesson or 'just play'. Every parent of my swim school this past season listed this willingness to be flexible on my timetable as a big plus. If a child needs to go to the dentist or the parent has a very important meeting which would clash with the swim lesson, be accommodating – it can be done! When the parent needs to leave to go back to work or shopping or home they tell me and the happy, relaxed, content swimmer hugs me goodbye, says thank you for the lesson and the playtime, and leaves happily knowing that

they have had fun. FUN ... it is the essence of a happy and successful life!

A really important aspect of how I have created a successful business and this lifelong love of water is getting to know each and every swimmer. We all know the typically winey child, those who don't really listen too well and those that are so so well-mannered and a real joy to have around. We need to give as much love and attention and willingness to help to each and every swimmer. I challenge you to smile and really be happy to see the winey and talk kindly but assertively to the non listener - all your swimmers will eventually be part of the so so well-mannered and real joy group! We keep hearing about the fast paced, stressful environment that the world is becoming. We are really lucky to work in the calming, peaceful environment of a beautifully clean,

warm swimming pool – so embrace your work, the opportunity you have to positively make an impact on your swimmer and the life skill of being able to swim well. Whether or not your swimmer stays in the sport for one season or a decade, my wish is that every swimmer will always happily remember their time they spent with me in the water.

No matter our personality, we all really do like to hear or see how well we have done. In the lesson of young toddlers, whoever does something really well or tries really hard, gets one minute playtime with the ‘smiley ball’.

Works wonders! For many seasons I rewarded good behaviour and effort with sweets. Yip we all hear about our obese society so I moved from handing out sweets to a sticker chart where the swimmer selects their stickers. This was tremendously successful with the younger swimmers



because it served as a link between their swimming lesson and home. The swimmer shows the parents how many stickers they had gotten and for what effort which leads to relaxed chats about their time in the water.

I have 4 FUN galas each season. Participation is key and any swimmer who can kick 12,5m is able to participate. Swimmers from as young as 2 or 3 years old and ALL their family, come along to support, applause and praise! They swim in their age on that day. Every swimmer is rewarded with a small ribbon... red first, green second, yellow third and white to everyone else. Not one swimmer has ever asked me what the different colours mean!!! Reward for their effort is the essence here.

Another 4 galas are held for swimmers who can correctly swim 25m. Here the reward is a coloured badge according to speed for that particular stroke – not on 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> or

whatever place in the race. This allows each swimmer to keep monitoring their own speed improvements in each stroke throughout the season.

I do end off each season with a 6 week period where I combine swimming ability to a life skill – like swimming back to the wall if you fall in, or sculling when you have cut your leg on a rock, or treading water if you in trouble in a dam etc. These certificates are handed out at my end of season bring and share pool party. Playing safely in the pool with a huge range of ages (from about 2 years to teenagers) and an even bigger variety of swimming ability is truly important. Every swimmer needs to know their own limitations and if you have instilled the safety rules correctly, pool time is fun!

Highlights of my teaching relationship with Seals Swimming Club in Pietermaritzburg.

I am extremely proud to be associated with this Club, established in 1907. It is the only Club in SA that has produced an Olympic swimmer at every Olympics since re-admittance. Seals started the world famous Midmar Mile which is the worlds' biggest open water event – and is in the Guinness Book of Records!

I do believe in Community Service and giving back to Society. I am sure a lot of you do teach one or more swimmers for a reduced rate. Why not consider having an open afternoon or Saturday morning to the less fortunate? Last year I got involved with teaching Grades R, 1, 2 and 3 at a local school which caters for low income homes - for a few hours on a couple of mornings per week – for no pay. I can honestly say that it was so fulfilling and so emotional – one of the videos later on will be a group of these children –

that I used to say I could feel the blood pumping into my heart!

Until a few years back, I used to swim alongside a group of my own swimmers at Midmar Mile for their first time. The sheer joy in their faces and the pride of their parents was truly worth the time!

It was Midmar Mile which got me to swim the Henley Mile in the Thames River back in 2015 when our convenor Wayne Riddin took across the top South African Midmar Mile swimmers to take part in that event. I made sure my holiday to the UK clashed dates so I didn't miss out!!

But surely the biggest highlight ever was my association with Craig Deitz – the limbless American lawyer and motivational speaker – who came out this year to swim the 8 Miles for Pink Drive. I was his constant companion

out of and in the water. What a man, what a weekend and we were both extremely emotional recalling how water, our passion for swimming and our passion for helping others, got us together working on a mutual mission.

I will end off my address to you today by reading out a couple of messages and sharing a few photos and videos from this last season. Feedback in any business is really good – both negative so we can learn, improve and grow – and positive to recharge our tiring batteries at the end of a season but also to boost our own confidence that yes we are on the right path. Remember for every swimmer we teach and aim to please, there are two parents and four grandparents adding up to a lot of people to please throughout every lesson and throughout every season. IF you get negative feedback, my advice to you is to listen to

them, process it when your emotions are not at an all-time high or low, thank them for the time it has taken them to chat to you and assure them that you will address the issue at hand. A caring swimmer or parent is worth more to you IN your swim school than a swimmer or parent whom you haven't tried to resolve an issue with, and they go elsewhere spreading stories!

This letter is from a dad who is a surgeon in town and whose wife is in OT.

Dear Odette

I write to you as a proud Dad whose boys have changed their phobia for swimming into a passion to enjoy life, using the medium of water.

Our journey began 2 years ago with 3 boys aged 3 ; 5 and 10 with much fear ; nervousness and apprehension. Through tiny steps ; love and patience.... their lives have been transformed positively.

The eldest has shed his excess weight; improved in self confidence and is now recently accepted to one of the best schools in the country.

The second boy with hearing; balance and speech difficulties has evolved into an active; intelligent young student who has integrated well in normal school.

The youngest who cried the most when he started, is now the most eager to get in the pool.

The physical, psychological and physiological of swimming is well known but it takes special people to create a lifelong love for swimming in our future generation.

Thank you Odette for being that special person who assisted my boys. I am truly grateful.

Kind regards

Rishan



This letter is from a grade 8 pupil aged 14.

During my early years at Ridge (when I was 6 or 7 years old), I was completely traumatised by any type of competitive swimming. Mrs Randelhoff taught me to face those fears, to overcome them and then moved me to a place where I looked forward to Seals training with her. Yes swimming training! I love her dearly – she has a very BIG and BUSY heart – and she inspires me more every time I chat to her.

Love you lots Odette!

Nicole van Heerden

I truly do hope you have enjoyed listening to me, getting your own mind working on your own methods and looking forward to a successful season ahead where we can all work at CREATING A LIFELONG LOVE OF WATER.

Thank you

Do you have any questions or queries?

Your notes on my presentation are available to you all and you are obviously welcome to chat to me in our breaks.





