

The Power of **HABIT**

By Coach Don Swartz

Charles Duhigg has written a potentially powerful book about "The Power of Habit." Thanks to Theresa for recommending it. We wish we could say we have finished it... not yet and have understood everything read so far... not yet. Perhaps when late August rolls around and we have more time.

One of the discussions centers on "keystone" habits. He writes, "Keystone habits offer what is known within academic literature as 'small wins.' They help other habits to flourish by creating new structures, and they establish cultures where change becomes contagious."

We think being able to change is huge when talking about making progress in life and competitive swimming. Without change everything stays the same – or worse, is subject to the direction of the "wind" blowing in your life.

Duhigg discusses the impact that Bob Bowman had on Michael Phelps when he changed a few "core routines" and that the other more significant things fell into place.

He goes on to say, "Small wins are exactly what they sound like, and are a huge part of how keystone habits create widespread changes. A huge body of research has shown that small wins have enormous power; an influence disproportionate to the accomplishments of the victories themselves."

"Small wins are a steady application of a

small advantage," one Cornell professor wrote in 1984. "Once a small win has been accomplished, forces are set in motion that favors another small win."

Duhigg writes, "Small wins fuel transformative changes by leveraging tiny advantages into patterns that convince people that bigger achievements are within reach."

As a coach that is exactly what our profession is about: convincing our swimmers that bigger achievements are within reach. So, how do we do that exactly? Pick something small. Do that one small thing really well; then move on from there. Pick something that has multiple impacts so that more than one good "next thing" can happen.

We've had some success having our swimmers do vertical dolphin-kicking holding a small weight plate. We're using 7.5 and 10 pound plates. We do 3 sets of 10 every two minutes, maybe 5-6 rounds. The first two sets, they hold the plate on their chest. The 3rd set, they hold it over their head (much heavier that way). We have several kids who can actually keep their chin at the surface on the 3rd set.

It is our ideas that they are learning how to hold their breath while dolphin-kicking – a small win – while simultaneously learning how to kick faster – another small win. We will expect to see this move into their

swimming as the summer unfolds.

Note that we have the breaststrokes and IM'ers do breaststroke kick. They must finish each kick completely streamlined. It is a chore to do it correctly, like most things. We think the small win here is the ability to drive the kick at the end of the pull through, when they have held their breath for nearly six seconds and would love to grab some air prematurely.

But not all of these small wins necessarily predict a logical outcome. Karl Weick is a prominent organizational psychologist. He writes, "Small wins do not combine in a neat, nonlinear, serial form, with each step being a demonstrable step closer to some predetermined goal. More common is the circumstance where small wins are scattered like miniature experiments that test implicit theories about resistance and opportunity and uncover both resources and barriers that were invisible before the situation was stirred up."

Human growth, it seems to us, is shaped by change. No change, no growth. Pick something "small" that you can do, and then commit to doing it until it is a new habit. Then you no longer have to think about it. It, the new behavior, has become you. Then move on from there.

See you at the pool. Hold your breath, or dolphin-kick... or do both at the same time! Or finish your stroke, every time. Do it! ■