

The American Swimming Coaches Association

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"Leadership in American Swimming Through Education, Certification, Cooperation."

When you are ready to launch your program toward to a new standard of quality, it's time for...

Long Range Planning -- The VVMOST Process

In 1986 ASCA learned of a long range planning process used by a major corporation. The process is called VVMOST, an acronym for Values, Vision, Mission, Objectives, Strategies, and Tactics. We modified this process for our own internal use and immediately made giant leaps in our ability to grow our organization. At the time we had a staff of three people, a membership of 1,500 coaches, a couple of moderately successful membership services, and a budget of \$150,000. Today we have a staff of 13, over 5000 members, a budget of 1.3 million, and three dozen effective services for coaches and clubs. We attribute the structure of the VVMOST process and the work of our staff with our growth.

We know that clubs can use this very same process to achieve significant goals. Is it time for your club to start a VVMOST?

ASCA has been facilitating the VVMOST process for clubs for ten years.

We facilitate a process that develops a living, breathing, dynamic plan of action that will move the program forward toward its goals. This is not a tidy academic exercise that is put into a notebook and stored on a shelf somewhere. It is a real world working plan of action. It will change your club's life.

On the following pages are two reprints about the VVMOST process, one from our Level 4 Administration Course and one from our Club Newsletter. As you read these pages picture your club in the VVMOST process and preparing to achieve high goals.

Now, having said that, there are three very important caveats that must be addressed at the start. First, this process will only work where there is a good relationship between Board and staff. If people are getting along with each other and anxious to grow the club in quality, service, and/or quantity then the VVMOST has a good chance of working. Second, the principle players in the VVMOST process must be completely open and honest particularly during the Values, Vision, and Mission phases. Often times Board members learn new things about the staff or the program that they are uncomfortable with but don't say anything about. This leads to big problems later. Select people who you can count on to be open, and if necessary, able to agree to disagree without stopping the whole process. Third, all objectives and strategies must be championed by named individuals who are ready to do the work. Identifying and defining the most thought-out objective or strategy will be a waste of time if someone is not assigned to see it to completion.

As you read the following ask yourself if you can meet the three criteria above and if so, how soon can we start?!

For more information contact Guy Edson at 1-800-356-2722.

From the ASCA Level 4 Administration School

Your Central Theme and Long Range Planning,

What is a Central Theme and Why is it Important?

The concept of Goal Setting is a familiar one to most coaches. Unfortunately, the idea of Central Theme are usually less familiar. A Central Theme is the "main idea", the reason for being, the core of the program. All programs have a Central Theme, whether they are stated or unstated. The strongest swim programs in each segment of the swimming community have clearly stated, and fully understood Central Themes. People know what these programs stand for, and are all about. People are motivated by, and have respect for, particular Central Themes. The concept is well known in industry. Witness the following:

"Quality is Job 1." -Ford
"Progress is our most Important Product" -GE, previous
"We bring good things to life" -GE, present
"The Heartbeat of America" -Chevy
"Soup is good food" -Campbells

In Swimming:

"Education, Certification, Cooperation" -ASCA
"The Biggest and the Best" -USS

Some are unstated, but commonly recognized:

"Recognizing the High School Coach" -NISCA
"Good Quality at reasonable prices" -The Finals
"The Name is almost generic" -Speedo

And in swim teams:

"Building Olympic Swimmers" -Little Rock Racquet Club
"Best in the Midwest" -Cincy Marlins
"A Tradition of Excellence" -USC
"Academics and International Swimming" -Stanford
"Swimming Fast in Division III" -Kenyon

As you can see, a Central Theme is simply an identifying device for those things for which you are best known. (Or would like to be best known.) Most programs exist for and develop a multiplicity of reasons for their existence, and that is fine, but one should be a stand-out . . . one that the entire programs membership can "buy into" and hang their hat upon.

A Central Theme is both a motivational and a marketing device. It helps you "sell" your program to anyone who needs to support it, or you want to support, or be a part of it. The most successful Central Themes are ones that people can really support emotionally. They are "big ideas." The Central Theme sets the direction for the program. (No direction, no progress.)

High Schools and Colleges benefit from some unique built in advantages in terms of motivational concerns. Everyone, to a greater or lesser extent, develops school pride. To that extent, the successful schools develop a theme beyond "Win one for Great U." and identify some core values that they share, and support. An example would be a college team that trains on a once a day schedule, and uses that to its advantage in every publicity avenue available. Another is a high school team that trains especially hard, or one that prides itself on its perfect stroke technique, and start and turn proficiency. Some especially strong school teams base their success on the overall improvement of the group as measured by time improvement of the whole group in seconds over the course of the year. This makes improvement of the slower swimmers even more important to the success of the group.

In Club and YMCA swimming, a greater variety of Central Themes are possible, and recognizable. Listed below are some examples. Some of these are explicit — written down and promoted as positive aspects of the organization; and some are implicit — not written down, not promoted, and USUALLY not representative of the way the leadership wants people to feel about the program.

"Access to Success in Through the Mind" - Fort Lauderdale Swim Team

"We exist to support the HS Team."

"We exist to win the Summer Country Club League"

"We provide personalized, individualized coaching to those who can afford it."

"Be the Best that you can be."

"We are a National Championship Oriented Program"

"We provide Top quality Stroke Instruction."

"We train harder than any team in the world."

"The club exists as a place for parents to coach their own children."

"Our club is financially stable. We have an excellent bank balance. We are a sound business."

"Our club exists to allow each child to progress as far as they wish to in the sport."

As you can see, there can be a great variation in Central Themes for club teams, and some are less desirable than others. In many cases, the less desirable ones are recognized by everyone around the team, and act negatively for the team, even though they are never actually stated anywhere. People still recognize their existence, and they have a profound effect on the program.

It is important then, to recognize that a Central Theme is going to exist for your program, and thus it is important to control what that Central Theme is going to be. People are attracted and/or repelled by your Central Theme. The CEO Coach must make sure that the program's Central Theme results in the desired results.

Three Key Questions to Ask Yourself (and others):

- 1) What are we all about? Why are we here?
- 2) Are we happy with that? (Our Central Theme)
- 3) If we are not happy, how do we change it?

Most organizations do not have a stated Central Theme. It is our contention that all organizations will be happier, and more successful, if they will follow a process to establish one. Most organizations do not plan to fail, they simply fail to plan. Utilizing a real planning process will eliminate this situation. The process we recommend is called the "VVMOST" process.

It is adaptable to organizations of all types, throughout the swimming world. It is derived from an older form of a Proctor and Gamble planning device, and we have simply "fine-tuned" it for swimming programs. The following will explain the VVMOST system.

Defining the Central Theme and Goal Setting, Using the VVMOST System

First, lets define the acronym:

V	=	Values
V	=	Vision
M	=	Mission
O	=	Objectives
S	=	Strategy
T	=	Tactics

In working with the VVMOST process, it is important to gather all the "key players" in your program. Typically,

this might include a Board of Directors, the coaching staff, and any others that are critical to the operation, such as an Athletic Director, or a Parks and Recreation Director. Those whom you select, need to commit themselves to full participation, and an active role in the process. "Observers" will quickly defeat the purpose of the VVMOST process.

Be prepared to spend a considerable amount of time on the initial VVMOST planning session. A full weekend is not too much for an ordinary swim team to plan to commit. As you revisit the VVMOST periodically, you will be fine-tuning, and less time will be necessary, as a general rule.

Some other rules: Everyone must contribute, everyone must participate. At all times, first ideas are presented by everyone without evaluation. Following presentation by all, critiques of each idea are valuable. All accepted ideas must be by consensus. Voting in the VVMOST process is divisive, and the antithesis of what we try to accomplish. The VVMOST process builds consensus, so all ideas within it, must come from consensus, and all ideas must be modified, until there is consensus.

Practical Items: It helps to have someone serve as the recorder. This person will write the various ideas on large art pads, and post them around the room so that everyone can keep them all in front of them. Rotating this person from time to time is helpful. It is also useful to designate from the group, or secure from outside the group, a facilitator who is comfortable and knowledgeable about the process, who can act to keep the process on track. Utilizing a "parking lot" for ideas that may be useful, but are off the present point will also be a plus. When the existent point is concluded, the group can come back to the "parking lot" and pick up the ideas contained therein.

Now, on to the process.

Values

The initial discussion of the group should be about what ideas or concepts the group values in the program. What do they want the program to do, be, produce? What is important to them? Initially, ask everyone to list words or phrases that describe what is important to themselves individually about the program. Ask for roughly five each. Remember, there is no editing at this point. Accept all responses and have the recorder write them all down.

Then go around the room, and ask each person to list their values for the program. As you get doubles, list them all at first. No comments by anyone about anyone else's ideas at this juncture. Then, consolidate. Combine obviously identical thoughts. Finally, re-list, with the most popular ideas at the top. Now it is time for discussion.

Ask an advocate of each idea, starting with the top of the list, to explain as completely as possible, what they mean by each value. As explanations continue, seek consensus on acceptance of each in turn. All participants must be able to "buy into" or accept each idea before it becomes part of the process. This can be very time consuming, and at times, may seem academic. It actually is anything but academic because if not done, then later on enormous time will be wasted as people object to plans and ideas, because they basically do not approve of the values those plans represent. The first and most important thing to achieve is agreement on the values of the group. This may actually take as much as 75% of the total VVMOST process. Debate should be lively, and people should challenge the assumptions of others. This requires a commitment to totally open communication, and the acceptance of the idea that "I can disagree with you, and still like and respect you as a person."

Some values lists are as short as five items, and some are as long as fifty. There is no magic number of "right" values. The extent of the list is up to the thinking of the group. Once the Values segment is complete, you are ready to write your Vision statement. The Vision Statement.

A Vision Statement tells how you expect the program to be at some time in the future. We encourage you to make the future far enough away to allow time for real growth and development, and not so far away as to seem unrealistic. Most swim programs seem happy with the idea of about five years off.

When writing the Vision statement, and its accompanying piece, the Mission Statement, you should encourage the use of as many values words from your list as possible. The purpose of the Vision statement is to

paint a picture of the program as you wish it to be. It is best to write it in the present tense, as opposed to the future tense. The vision statement is a reflection on how things will look. Example: "We have a dozen swimmers competing at the highest level in our state", rather than, "we will have ... etc."

Use language that inspires, and leads to action. Keep it short, sweet and descriptive. The Vision statement can be a prime motivator to organizational change.

The Mission Statement

The purpose of the Mission Statement is to describe "How" the organization is going to go about achieving the Vision. This statement is written as a method of working on the vision. Many of the word or statements included in most values pages are included in the mission. Most people involved in organizations have strong feelings about the way that the organization works, and have included these in their values section.

The Mission statement is a call to action. It describes in general terms an approach to working on the vision. It is a method that is acceptable to everyone in the group. At times, it may seem like an unnecessary step, but, just like the Values section, it cannot be overlooked. Many people will agree on values, agree on a vision, and have totally different ideas on the methods that will be used to reach that vision. The actions of the organization will come from the Mission, and it is critical that acceptable methodology be employed.

Objectives

Objectives are the section where we begin to quantify the various goals that make up a part of the planning process. Objectives should be fairly major items to accomplish. They should require a major investment of time and energy of the organization. You will find the best success in writing them with a combination of objective and subjective language. This is where you "get the idea across" as clearly as possible. The time frame in which you wish to accomplish these items should be included here. Generally, it is best to have 4 to 7 objectives set in a 1 1/2 to 2 year time frame — although it is certainly permissible to adapt the number of objectives and the time frame to your particular situation.

Strategy

Strategy is considered to be the section where the "rubber meets the road" on the way to accomplishing your objectives. The organization here maps out what will be accomplished by whom, and when. The writing in this section assigns specific responsibility for actions, and lays out definite timetables for doing so. The language used is completely objective. Strategies are generally done in a 6 month time frame.

Tactics

Tactics are individual action plans that implement the strategy assigned above. Each person responsible for an action details what they will do, and how they will do it, in order to complete the task. Tactics are often monthly goals.

Final Thoughts

Upon the completion of the VVMOST process, you have a blueprint for the immediate future of the organization, and a plan for the completion of the various tasks necessary to achieve that future. You have a vision that is inspiring to all those who are involved in the program, and you have a mechanism for on-going program evaluation and improvement.

While the VVMOST process is rigorous, it is of the utmost value and importance to any group of people who wish to be directed in their efforts, and thorough in their preparation for the future.

The WVMOST document tells your organization what the next steps are to achieve your goals. In a sense, it is a philosophy as well as a plan for your group. In our next section, we are going to talk about how to make that

philosophy work in the real world, as we discuss the budgeting operation for swimming organizations.

From ASCA's Club Newsletter - Issue # 2 - October, 1997

Getting Your Swim Club On Track - R VVMOST Planning Session

If failing to plan is planning to fail, most American Swim Clubs are in trouble! Surveys both formal and informal reveal that the average USS Swim Club does not have a long term plan, or even a planning process, in place. Instead, Board Meetings are spent reacting to immediate or short term issues, problems, activities and needs. The number one issue in retaining good Board Members is combating the "volunteer burnout" that occurs when otherwise talented and enthusiastic club parents are asked to react to every issue that comes down the road. And continuity of effort and Board thought is the number two predictor of club "success" after coach stability.

ASCA has been visiting and working with clubs since 1985, (over 220 clubs in fact) and planning is the number one big "undone" for almost all of them. Most clubs say they would like to do effective long range planning, but get so caught up in day to day operations that it never seems to happen. The result? High Board of Directors turnover, unhappy coaches because "I seem to work for a new company every year!", unhappy, overworked team parents, and financial challenges to the very existence of clubs. Additionally, achievement of team goals and objectives is not what it should be.

A few clubs have taken a different approach. These clubs deliberately function with the Board of Directors as the planning body, and a committee system in place to do the day to day work of the club. The Boards are composed of experienced former Committee Chairpersons who now look further down the road and seek ways to maximize the effectiveness of the organization.

Since 1986, ASCA has been promoting a planning method with its Coaches called the VVMOST program. The Level Four Administration School provides coaches with detailed descriptions on how to put this method into place with their own teams. In addition, ASCA provides, for a fee, the services of an experienced planning session coordinator and facilitator who also brings the advantage of providing insight into how other USS clubs approach the issues that frequently come up in planning sessions.

What is the VVMOST process? Its a detailed long range process for planning the orderly and responsible development of the club following the values that matter most to your particular club. It is NOT a one shot program, it IS a repeated process that allows for new input from new Board Members and coaches, and becomes the driving force for the club to make progress and improve.

VVMOST is an acronym that stands for:

V=VALUES

V=VISION

M=MISSION

O=OBJECTIVES

S = Strategies

T = Tactics.

ASCA recommends that the Club Board and staff work together to develop the VVMOST and the ST segment is handled by the staff and selected volunteers.

Now, some definitions and explanations:

1. VALUES - This is the most vital part of the process. Most organizations skip this step, saying, "Well, we know what we value, what we want, why we're all here, we don't need to do this part." Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, when an individual says this, they mean, "I know what I want, why I (and my family) are here, and I ASSUME all of you are here for the same reasons." Every other person in that meeting sagely nods their head in agreement, because they are all thinking the same thing, "Yes, I know why I'm here."

What most organizations don't realize until they explore this, is that they are in fact at the club for vastly different reasons, and those values must be explored, reconciled and prioritized by the group before they can really be going anywhere.

A real world example will help. Mr. "X" says, "well, we value competition, so we swim here." Mr. Y says, "So do we of course." and they think they are in agreement. Are they? As we probe closer, it turns out that Mr. "X" thinks that competition is beating everyone in sight, while Mr. "Y" thinks that competition is about good sportsmanship, and working side by side with other people trying hard to improve...and that "competition" improves his child. Mr. "X" just wants his child to beat everyone else's child. They have widely different understandings of one simple and central word to our sport. Their values are different. Therefore, when Coach Jones decides to spend time and energy planning a trip to Cincinnati for a major meet, each parent sees differing amount and type of need for the trip, and conflicts are certain.

The fact is, people swim for many different reasons, and value many different things from the sport. The Swim Club needs to determine in a formal way, what they will value as a group, and thus provide for the community.

The process of determining values is the longest and hardest part of any VVMOST planning session.

2. VISION - A vision is defined as what the program wants to be in 3 to 5 years. Written in the present tense, it paints a solid, emotionally involving and exciting picture of what the swim club will become. It should be energizing, providing good reasons for parents to commit time, labor, money and their children to the program. Dream big dreams and make them come true!

3. Mission - A mission is the way, or method, that the organization will use to get to the Vision. If Vision is the destination, then Mission is the mode and method of travel to the destination. This section tells the organization how it will act and behave, in order to reach its vision.

So far, it's good to write the document in soft, subjective, descriptive language.

4. Objectives - As the name implies, an objective is an intermediate step on the way to the Vision. It is written in objective language...who will accomplish what, how, by when, who is responsible, how will it be measured, etc. Objectives are major tasks that will take 6 months to two years to achieve. This is the "road map of work". In any given meeting, we recommend that a club tackle 3-6 Objectives, depending on how aggressive the organization is, and how effective it has been in the past. Written well, Objectives are challenging, tough and valuable to achieve, and easily measured, so the whole club membership can look with pride and say, "we accomplished THAT! Now, what's next?"

Objectives are also as far as ASCA recommends that the Board and Staff proceed together.

5. Strategies - This is the monthly work plan that will be accomplished by the staff and volunteers. The Head Coach and Board President lay out the work, recruit the committees or individual workers to do the work, and offer their advise to the group and measure the success of the workers, as well as report back to the Board group on progress.

6. **Tactics** - This is the weekly work. Developed by those who will actively do the tasks involved, monitored by Coaches and Board President, this is where the work gets done. Evaluation and recording of success and difficulties are important.

Now, a few words about the process itself.

A) Expect to repeat the VVMOST meeting once every six months or a year. When you repeat, repeat the WHOLE process, re-evaluating your values, reminding yourself what each meant, and then proceeding to review everything else, and eventually write new objectives. This lets any new people, Board members or staff, to ask their own questions, have effective and immediate input and understand the thinking of the present Board. Combined with intelligent processes for replacing only a part of the Board each year, this process allows for Club Evolution, not yearly re-invention of the whole club.

B) A facilitator helps keep the process on track. An outside facilitator provides an objective source of other information and the ability to keep personalities out of the mix of conversation more than possible with only Board Members and coaches involved.

C) A comfortable room where you can write everything on large sketch pads, then post all of them around the room to keep all thoughts in front of everyone all the time, helps keep the group thinking and moving forward.

D) Plan to spend about a day and a half the first time you do a VVMOST. It will take 4-6 hours to write and agree on values if you do the process honestly. Then an hour for the Vision to emerge, and another hour to write a mission. By now, everyone has a tired mind. Come back the next morning and spend 2-3 hours writing your specific Objectives. Then turn it over to Head Coach and Staff for action. Plan to meet again for a one day session in about 6 months, or after the people change.

E) Try to operate by consensus. Keep talking until one emerges on any value. If it really looks like you're stuck, use a device called a "parking lot" which is where you park seemingly un-resolvable issues, or "out of order" issues, with the commitment to revisit them later. Don't get bogged down on what you CAN'T agree on, when there is so much you CAN agree on.

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