

HEADING TOWARDS BEING A FULL-TIME COACH

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There are many different pathways to becoming a swimming coach. Many coaches begin their involvement in coaching once they finish swimming and begin teaching swimming or choose to start coaching at a young age. Other swimmers may finish up and leave the sport for a while and realize that they miss the involvement and begin teaching or coaching as a way of staying involved.

There are many parents around Australia who recognise that their son or daughter has talent in swimming and they take an interest in how they can assist their child, particularly if there is no coach available who can commit to the training sessions required. Often this leads to parents completing a coaching course and getting involved in the coaching at the club that their child belongs to.

There are thousands of swim teachers around Australia and a small number of these teachers choose to progress into coaching. In many ways, swim teachers have the potential to be excellent coaches because they usually have a strong background in teaching the strokes and various skills from scratch. When employing coaches at Nunawading Swimming Club we place a heavy weighting on applicants who have teaching and coaching experience.

There are many different ways that coaches can be employed including on a casual basis, part-time working regular hours each week, full-time or self-employed. There are advantages and disadvantages of each and it really depends on whether you want to commit part or full-time to coaching or whether you are happy to work casually and work full or part time in a different role or industry.

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Self-employed coaches are often owners of swim schools. A majority of these coaches are very passionate about the sport. They will sacrifice financial returns for their business to coach squads and often have to back-fill their own positions when they travel to competitions, adding further expense to their business.

Full-time coaching positions are few and far between in Australia. There are a number of employment scenarios that you should consider if you wish to become a full-time coach. A good place to start is the local Council, particularly if they are building a new swimming complex. A number of Councils manage their own swim schools and coaching programs and many will employ a full-time coach to manage their squad program. This coach will be responsible for the performance of all swimmers in the various squads and may have the opportunity to employ coaches on a casual basis to assist with the coaching duties.

Leisure and Recreation Management Groups manage many of the key pools around Australia. These organisations may run a squad program and there may be employment opportunities working for them. Many of these groups manage the learn-to-swim component of the business, ensuring a strong financial return, and then lease out or sub-lease the coaching contract at the Centre. For entrepreneurial coaches this is a great way to work towards full-time employment. While you may be self-employed, coaches with exclusive leases of swimming pools for squad training including junior squads can often make a good living.

A small number of Clubs around Australia offer full-time coaching positions. These clubs normally have a substantial income stream through the owning or operation of a swim school or other business interests. They use the financial income to support a squad program and the payment of coaches. While there are not many positions currently available with Swimming Clubs, this is an ideal growth area for the sport. If your club

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wants to take the next step in its development, to build a business and employ full-time coaches, then read on.

Private swim school operators who have an interest in competitive swimming may be another avenue to seek full-time employment. While many may employ coaches on a casual basis, there may be ways of combining teaching and coaching to become fully employed.

With the growing number of private schools and Universities building their own swimming pools there is also an opportunity to work full-time for one of these organisations.

I often get asked where you can find these coaching positions. Websites have been a very valuable tool for identifying coaching positions. Probably your best bet is your own association's website www.ascta.com. Another highly rated website that provides job opportunities for coaches, administrators and managers in many sports in Australia and New Zealand is www.sportspeople.com.au. Two other websites worth keeping an eye on are www.coachingjobs.com.au and www.sportsjobs.com.au. Both these websites are free to advertise in. Check all of these websites on a regular basis, at least once every two weeks, if you are serious about finding a full-time position.

One of the best sources to find where full-time coaching positions may be available is your State Associations Development Officer or Coaching Director. Let your State Development Officer know that you are in the market for a full-time position and they will keep you in mind, particularly if you have been successful in your casual or part-time coaching position. Another suggestion is to contact your local swimming centres or management groups to see if any positions are available.

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I would like to share with you two examples of successful organisations and how they have managed employing coaches on a full-time basis.

In 1995 I was employed by Carey Baptist Grammar School on a full-time basis. The school had an indoor 25m pool which was not being utilised effectively. My role as Head Coach was to start a swim school and squad program to cater for children who attended the school and members of the local community. In the first 3 months I focused on developing and marketing a swim school. At the end of the 3 months the school agreed to employ a Swim School Coordinator to manage the day-to-day running of the swim school. The income from the start-up learn-to-swim program was enough to cover these expenses and part of my wage.

This enabled me to start a number of small junior, development and mini squads. I started with just 4 swimmers and made a conscious decision to only coach swimmers aged 12 years and under in the first year. I also decided as a matter of ethics to accept no swimmers from my previous club in the first 12 months. In this way, the program would truly be a new squad program in Victoria and I would be able to develop the culture of the club from scratch.

The program grew quickly and two months later we formed a swimming club using the 10 swimmers and one parent from each family to get the required 20 members. The Club was called Carey Aquatic, and is now known as CA Tritons.

By focusing on the 10 swimmers in the program and taking them to a number of smaller meets, their results spoke volumes for the structure and attention these swimmers were receiving. This led to an increase in enquiry from swimmers in surrounding clubs and these new swimmers, combined with a number of swimmers progressing from the junior squads, enabled us to begin a new Junior State squad.

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By growing the program quickly, the school agreed to the employment of a part-time assistant coach for 20 hours per week. Within 6 months, the program had a full-time manager / coach (myself), a part-time swim school coordinator and a part-time coach, as well as many casual teachers and young coaches.

The combined learn-to-swim and squad program produced a profit every year for the school and the profits in years two, three, four and five covered all the schools expenses in running the facility. Four and half years later the club was positioned 3rd in Victoria, had 23 swimmers compete at the Australian Age Championships and 13 swimmers compete at the 200 Olympic Trials with 3 making finals.

If you have the opportunity to work in a school program then these are the minimum results you should be aiming for – both financially and with swimming performance. Build your learn-to-swim business first and do it quickly. Then employ staff to manage this area of the business and focus your attention on the coaching.

When I finished up in 2000, Rohan Taylor took over the club and has made many additional changes which have resulted in further massive improvements in swimming performance at an age and open level.

I relate this story because there are many coaches in Australia who have the ability to drive this type of success. If you are one of them, approach schools who may not already have a program up and running, design your own plan for success and make a presentation to the school.

The second example relates to a full-time coaching position in a Club environment. The key ingredient for a Club to be in a position to employ a full-time coach is to have a solid

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income stream. Nunawading Swimming Club in Victoria is a prime example of a Club who has done this.

Nunawading Swimming Club owns the rights to four swim schools and uses any surplus from the business operations to support the employment of high level coaches and a well structured squad program. The Club's Head Coach back in the 1980's Leigh Nugent together with the Club's administration had the foresight to build a business that the Club owned and operated. This vision has been fully developed in recent years and the club is financially stable and provides substantial swimmer support at all levels.

For swimming in Australia to improve we need more clubs that own a business. I am aware of at least four clubs in Australia who have had the opportunity to purchase a swim school in the last 4 years. They have discussed it as a committee, together with their coaches and in each case decided it was too difficult and too much risk. In each case, private operators or the club's coach have taken up the deal and are now making a healthy surplus. In each case, the Club would have paid off the business in profit in the first 12 to 16 months. **The risk for a Club not to establish their own business is far greater than the risk to get in and start a new business!!** The number of swimming clubs in Australia will reduce in coming years because many of them will not be financially viable. Lane hire will increase and be out of the reach of many clubs in 5 to 10 years time. **Clubs are the critical success vehicle for swimming in Australia.** **Does your club have an income stream to support the coaches and swimmers?**

The essential ingredient that a Club needs to be sustainable in future years is a passionate leader. In many cases, this leadership will need to come from the Club's coach as most volunteers do not have the time to implement the business structure required.

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In this way, Clubs can become a source of full-time employment. Ideally we should be looking at establishing up to 20 swimming clubs that employ a full-time head coach and full-time assistant coach as well as a number of casual coaches. To do this successfully, these clubs will require a business income. It may require the merger of two or three clubs in the one region into one club. Another model may be to establish a National level club with strong income stream and then develop a relationship between this club and 4 to 8 clubs in the surrounding area. The main focus of these clubs may be to provide for Junior level, State level and social swimmers with the goal to move them on to the National level club once a swimmer reaches a certain performance level.

To become a full-time coach, you must have strong technical knowledge, strong organisational skills and the ability to communicate effectively to parents, swimmers and fellow coaches. Commitment and leadership are also critical if you wish to be successful.

Many of the Generation Y coaches are very ambitious when it comes to coaching at an Open level. It is important that coaches who are looking to make swim coaching a full-time career experience many different situations as they develop their coaching skills. Be prepared to spend at least 3 to 5 years coaching Junior swimmers and another 3 to 5 years coaching age groupers before heading down the path of coaching open level swimmers, particularly at a National level. While some coaches may be fast-tracked, and these are usually the more mature, life-experienced coaches, most coaches need to develop the background of skills required at all levels in the sport to effectively coach older swimmers.

This is even more important if you become the Head Coach of a club and are responsible for the performances of the coaches and swimmers in the age group and junior programs. If you have missed this important part of your development it is unlikely

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you will cope with the various situations that arise as a Head Coach. Be prepared to learn your craft.

Two other qualities that I like to see in full-time coaches are the ability to get results and the ability to motivate others. Results are important in this sport because swimmers have to commit to a lot of time at training and competitions if they wish to be successful. A full-time coach will often be the Head Coach or be responsible for coaching more than one squad and may have direct contact and the ability to influence at least 50 swimmers. For these reasons it is important that the coach can create a learning environment whereby swimmers are motivated to turn up and fully participate. Coaches also need to be able to provide motivation for assistant coaches within their club and parents.

Once you have a full-time position it is important that you manage yourself really well. Managing the number of hours you work is critical, particularly if you work in a school or university structure where the expected hours of work are 8:30am to 5:00pm. A lot of your work will take place outside of these hours so it is important that you educate the person you report to in relation to your hours of work. Make sure you allocate time each day for planning and reflection. Allocate a small amount of time each week for longer term planning and allocate additional time each week to work on activities that are coming up in 6 to 8 weeks time. Swim meet information, travel arrangements and the distribution of training schedules should all be planned and completed well in advance of the proposed travel, swim meet or activity.

Personal development for full-time coaches is one of the most overlooked areas of a coach's development. Ensuring that you have a good work/life balance is crucial for your longevity and enjoyment in the sport. It is important to develop yourself in many areas including communication, attitude, goal setting and your own knowledge.

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Finally, there are a number of traps to being a full-time coach and how you deal with these will often determine how successful you are as a coach and in your own personal life. It takes time to be successful, so be patient while always looking to improve. Work efficiently at all times to ensure that the hours you do put in will lead to the results you deserve. There is often a lot of travel away from home and evening work required, so ensure that you work on the balance between work and play, particularly if you have a partner or children. Weekend work is another catch for the full-time coach. Plan carefully the meets you are going to attend with your team so that you do get some weekends off.

So if you would like to become a full-time coach, start planning to be one today. Look out for the opportunities and if you can't find any, think about ways to manufacture an opportunity. If your club is looking to secure their future then encourage them to establish a business – swim schools are ideal in this industry.

Swimming in Australia needs a consistent influx of new coaches coming through who are hungry to learn, keen to lead and are dedicated to be successful. Are you going to be one of them?