

Mentoring Apprentice Officials in Potomac Valley Swimming

Goals

- Encourage volunteers to train and become certified as a Stroke and Turn Official
- To mentor and teach swim officials to perform at a consistent high level of swim officiating

A good mentor...

- Has good communication and listening skills
- Is able to develop a relationship with his/her mentee
- Is able to provide guidance and encouragement
- Is committed to the development of the Mentee
- Has experience and is knowledgeable

Mentoring Skills

- **Patience:** Try not to rush to judgment on skills or ability; allow the official extra time to improve their skills; avoid doing it for them; be reassuring.
- **Encouragement:** Nervousness, anxiety and insecurity can be roadblocks to success. Encourage officials that they have the “right stuff” and help guide their talent in a new and different direction than they might have experienced previously.
- **Listening:** “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” Try to find discussion areas that are free from distractions; focus just on that conversation; allow the official time to finish communicating without interruptions; and ask questions if clarification is needed.
- **Questioning:** Frame questions in a positive way. Focus on what has gone well and then what can be improved. Consider using empowering questions that facilitate thinking and help the official discover his/her own answers. Examples of empowering questions include: “How do you feel about your performance so far?” or “What key things would you like to change? Why?” or “How are you thinking of changing that? What kind of support would you like?”
- **Feedback:** “You may not remember what someone says or does, but you’ll never forget how they made you feel.” Use a blend of compassion, tact and diplomacy both to encourage and to help teach new skills. Use positive verbal reinforcement and consider using nonverbal communication, including hand signals (thumbs up, high five, quiet clapping or fist pump), as well as smiles and head nods. It’s imperative to provide feedback at a time that is most comfortable for the recipient. Ask if he/she would like feedback often during a session, only when a skill absolutely has to be corrected, or at the end of a session. Remember to start the discussion using positive reinforcement before talking about skills that need refinement. Try to avoid overloading the officials with suggestions. Try just three top suggestions at a time.

Stroke and Turn Training and Certification

- Apprentice official should complete necessary requirements before training on deck (register with USA Swimming as either an apprentice official or as a non-athlete member)
<http://www.pvswim.org/official/certification.html>
- Apprentice official should contact meet referee or officials coordinator prior to meet (ideally several weeks in advance) and request an opportunity to train during the meet (specify day and session)
- Apprentice official should review Evaluation Form prior to the session and use training sessions and work with Mentor to ensure that he/she acquires the necessary skills for the position:
<http://www.pvswim.org/official/StrokeEvaluationForm.pdf>
- Apprentice official should arrive at the training session at the beginning of warm-ups and report to the meet referee
- Meet referee should assign apprentice official to work with experienced certified S&T official during session (mentor should be certified for at least 1 year)
- During session, certified (mentoring) official should make all calls. Mentor should review calls with apprentice official as well as discuss rules, protocol, etc., with mentee during the session. Mentee should ask questions of Mentor during session and ensure that he/she understands all the requirements and skills on the PVS Stroke and Turn Evaluation form. At the conclusion of session, Mentor should meet with Mentee and review session, answer any questions, provide feedback and recommendations for future training sessions, etc. Training card should then be signed by deck or meet referee who should also review the session with the apprentice official.
- Prior to the evaluation session, the apprentice should make sure that he/she has completed all necessary requirements for the position.
- Once apprentice official feels ready to become certified (note – the required number of sessions is a suggested minimum; apprentice officials are encouraged to train for more than the minimum number of sessions prior to requesting evaluation for certification), apprentice official should contact either his/her Club Official's Chair (<http://www.pvswim.org/clubchr.htm>) or the Meet Referee/Official's Coordinator for a meet (see meet announcement) and request an evaluation. This request should be made as soon as possible to allow time for the recruitment of evaluators. The Official's Chair and/or Meet Referee/Official's Coordinator should make every effort to find an evaluator for the apprentice.
- During the Evaluation Session, the Apprentice Official should make all calls by raising his/her hand. The Evaluator should be standing near the Apprentice Official as an observer only. The Apprentice Official should discuss the calls with the Chief Judge or Referee with the Evaluator confirming the observations. The DQ slip should be signed by the Evaluator after review by the Apprentice Official.
- After the evaluation session, the Evaluator should find a quiet place to sit and complete the evaluation form and review with the Apprentice Official. An evaluation session is part mentoring and part evaluation.
- If the evaluation session was successfully completed, the Apprentice Official should submit the training card and evaluation to the PVS Certification Office, Lynne Gerlach, 11910 Callow Terrace, Laurel, MD 20708-2802.