

Club Culture: Fostering Participation and Loyalty

Creating club loyalty by building a culture of inclusion, fun, social events, and community support

Kysa Crusco - New England LMSC, Granite State Penguins, & NELMSC Communications Chair

Tara Mack - New England LMSC A&R Chair, Slow 2 Fast Swimming, USMS R&A; Level 3 Coach

Bill Meier - New England LMSC, ALTS, SSL, Swim Across America Chair

Kate Stephensen - Pacific LMSC, Davis Aquatic Masters, Level 2 & ALTS Coach



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Presenters



Kysa Crusco
Granite State
Penguins



Tara Mack
aka "TMack"

Slow 2 Fast
Swimming, Inc.



Bill Meier
Simon's Rock
PaceMakers



Kate Andrup
Stephensen



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Agenda

- Getting to Know You & Your Team
- Team Culture & Loyalty
- Increasing Participation Through Purpose & Connection
- Community Outreach



Getting to Know You & Your Team

- Swimmer Goals as a Path to Connection
 - A PROCESS focus for setting and chasing goals
 - Have a Dream - start with WHY
 - Assess Strengths
 - Plan the Work
 - SMART
 - Execute
 - Accomplishment - Time to Recognize and Move Forward



- ***Smoke on the Water: A Swimmer's and Coach's Guide to Developing Mental Toughness. (2012) By Alan Goldberg***
- ** Gallup's Clifton Strengths***



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Getting to Know You & Your Team Breakout Group Activity



- Small Groups of 4-6 people each
- Introduce yourselves
- Designate a note taker who will share out to the room
- Swimmer Goals as a Path to Connection
 - Example
 - Individual Reflection
 - Share Out



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Culture by Design

How Masters Teams Keep People Coming Back



- Granite State Penguins
 - 2024 USMS Club of the Year
 - “Rowdy Penguins”
 - Unique blend of local swimmers and satellite teammates



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Shared Identity & Team Pride



- Team mascot
 - Penguins, capybaras and sharks, oh my!
- Team merch
 - T-shirts, hats, caps, pins, stickers and more!
 - Custom Ink is a great resource!
- Logos, including special event logos and alternate team logo designs
 - Utilize Etsy designers (\$35) or AI options
- Posters for meets
 - Gather photos for a collage poster (year recap!)
 - Use a template with Canva
 - Easy printing at stores like Staples
- Team suits
 - Mini meet suits (find something wild!!)
 - Tech suits (share discount codes!)



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Traditions & Rituals & Events That Turn Teammates into a Team



At the Pool

- Christmas Cookie Swap after practice in December
- Christmas in July with Christmas suits, themed workout, music, decorations
- Underwater santa hat photos
- Birthdays with special formatted workout for birthday age and decorations
- Easter practice picking set from Easter eggs
- Thanksgiving practice pluck the turkey feather to choose the set
- Halloween practice with spooky sets and music
- Taylor Swift album release practices with bejeweled gear and TS playlist



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Traditions & Rituals & Events That Turn Teammates into a Team



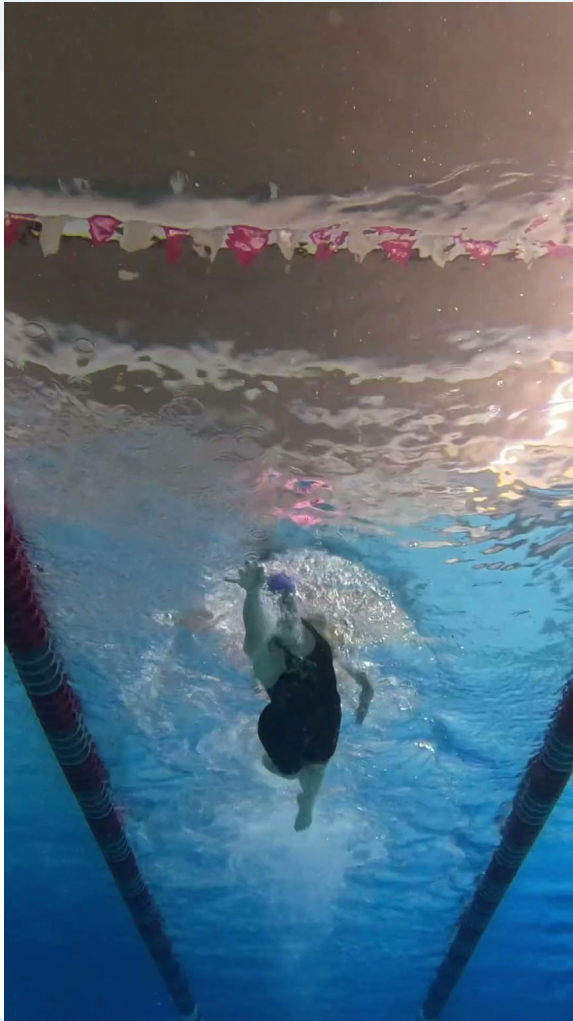
With Clothes On

- Sip & paint party
- Ski weekend
- Ice skating party
- Soup swap
- Birthday parties
- Breakfast after practice
- Yankee swap with special "waterfall" rules
- Jaws outdoor movie night
- Pizza party Saturday of championship meet
- Pyramids
- River swims
- Mountain day
- Trivia night on Zoom



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Open Lanes: How We Communicate



Team chat

- Slack
- GroupMe
- WhatsApp

Social media

- Instagram, Facebook, TikTok
- Capcut and Canva for content creation

Website/Google Drive

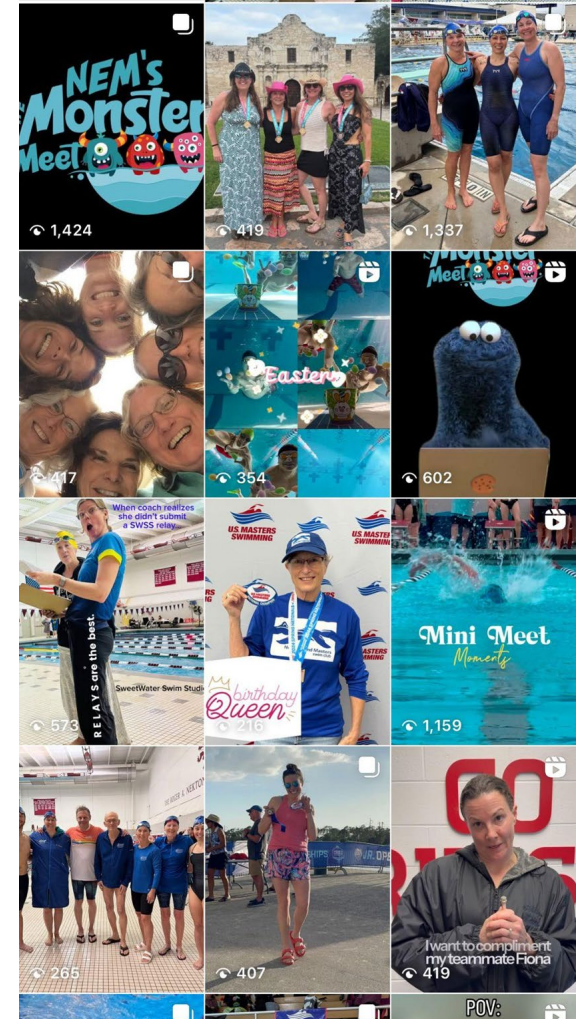
- schedules, policies, workouts, signups, archives
- SquareSpace for easy website development

On-deck board:

- today's set highlights, meet deadlines, quick notes

Email newsletter

- Google Groups list or member registrar



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Increasing Participation Through Purpose and Connection

“Common Ground” exercise



- Do all of our swimmers know each other?
- Do we know all of our swimmers?



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Increasing Participation Through Purpose and Connection

“Common Ground” exercise



- Do we know who the “Natural Connectors” on our teams are?



- Connections provide a shared sense of Purpose



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Loneliness: A Tough Statistic

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s definition of loneliness:
"Feeling like you do not have meaningful or close relationships or a sense of belonging."



Number of people
reporting feeling
loneliness:

In 2023, 1 in 4

In 2024, 1 in 3

National Institute on
Aging, Health Risks are
equivalent to smoking
15 cigarettes a day

**Our programs and teams offer an
amazing opportunity for increased
connectedness & belonging**



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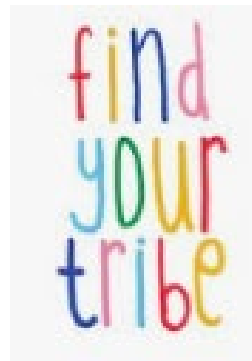
The Power of an Invitation

Why are we here?

Not existentially, but literally: Why are we at the USMS 2025 Relay?

There is an Event to Attend; Invited; Received Info; Saw the Value

Common Ground: Seeking support, education, camaraderie, skills, idea exchange, fun, and more



Who was invited/encouraged to become a coach? To join a committee?

Increase Participation through Invitations



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Increase Participation through Invitations: *Team Events*

Provide **CLARITY** through invitations vs *announcements*.

Ex. “The 100 X 100s swim is at ___ (time & venue) on ___ date. Sign up through the app.”

Alternatively: Have you heard about the 100 X 100s?
Some vs All. Use Equipment. It’s flexible & fun!

What additional questions can I answer for you? Do you know how to sign up?



Clarity is Key
Are we inviting or telling?



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Increase Participation through Invitations: *Meets*

Many People will do more for others, than solely for themselves=> especially if asked

Invite people to participate on RELAYS! It's a great way for all swimmers participate at meets

Ask the Team Connectors
to help! It's their specialty!

Build to swim meets through practices. Add "Social Kick" & Relay practice => Keep it FUN!



Team Connections are POWERFUL



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What else may reduce participation?



Embarrassed means “feeling self-conscious and uncomfortable. It usually happens after making a mistake that was witnessed by other people”.



Sign-ups are low

Practices

Meets

Events

Members

Participation

Breaking Through “Resistance” by Reducing Embarrassment & Uncertainty

We can proactively work to reduce Embarrassment and Uncertainty
Creating Connections and Active Listening are great tools



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Increase Participation through Camaraderie: *Team Sets*

Noticed a pattern in my life. Tested it out in the pool.

The Pool as a **Safe** Place
to “Go For” something

CHALLENGING

⇒ In this case, a goal
time we may not reach

The “Chasing Failure” method can boost camaraderie, confidence, and fun



When can we add a “*Chasing Failure*” set to our team’s regular schedule?



Ex. “Fast Fridays” and done as the Whole Team=> Common Ground, Support, & Fun

Bonus: Building Habits that can extend beyond the pool

TMack’s Fav
Chasing Failure
HIIT Set

8X100s

Broken
@ the 75
FAST Goal Time

Plus a 25

On 3 minutes

75 = ALL OUT!
25 = Recovery



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Increasing Participation Through Purpose & Connection



Boost Connections AND Reduce Loneliness ←

Create Events= Ask others to help us

Invite, Invite, Invite

Leverage Natural Connectors

Schedule Team Events, like a Chasing Failure Set & Pizza Parties

FYI: It might not work out perfectly the first time! Keep going

Have FUN! If it's not fun, who wants to do it?



Focus on: What's in it for them? AND we don't have to do it all ourselves.



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Community Outreach

Service to your local community,
focused on the activity you love,
enhances the experience for you
and provides essential training
and healthy experiences for ...

everyone who participates!



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Community Outreach Awareness of the Environment



Open Water Swim Day



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Community Outreach Overcome Fear of the Water



April is Adult Learn to Swim Month



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Community Outreach PARTIES!



Bring a friend to our community gatherings.



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Community Outreach Paddle or Swim



Community Lake Swims



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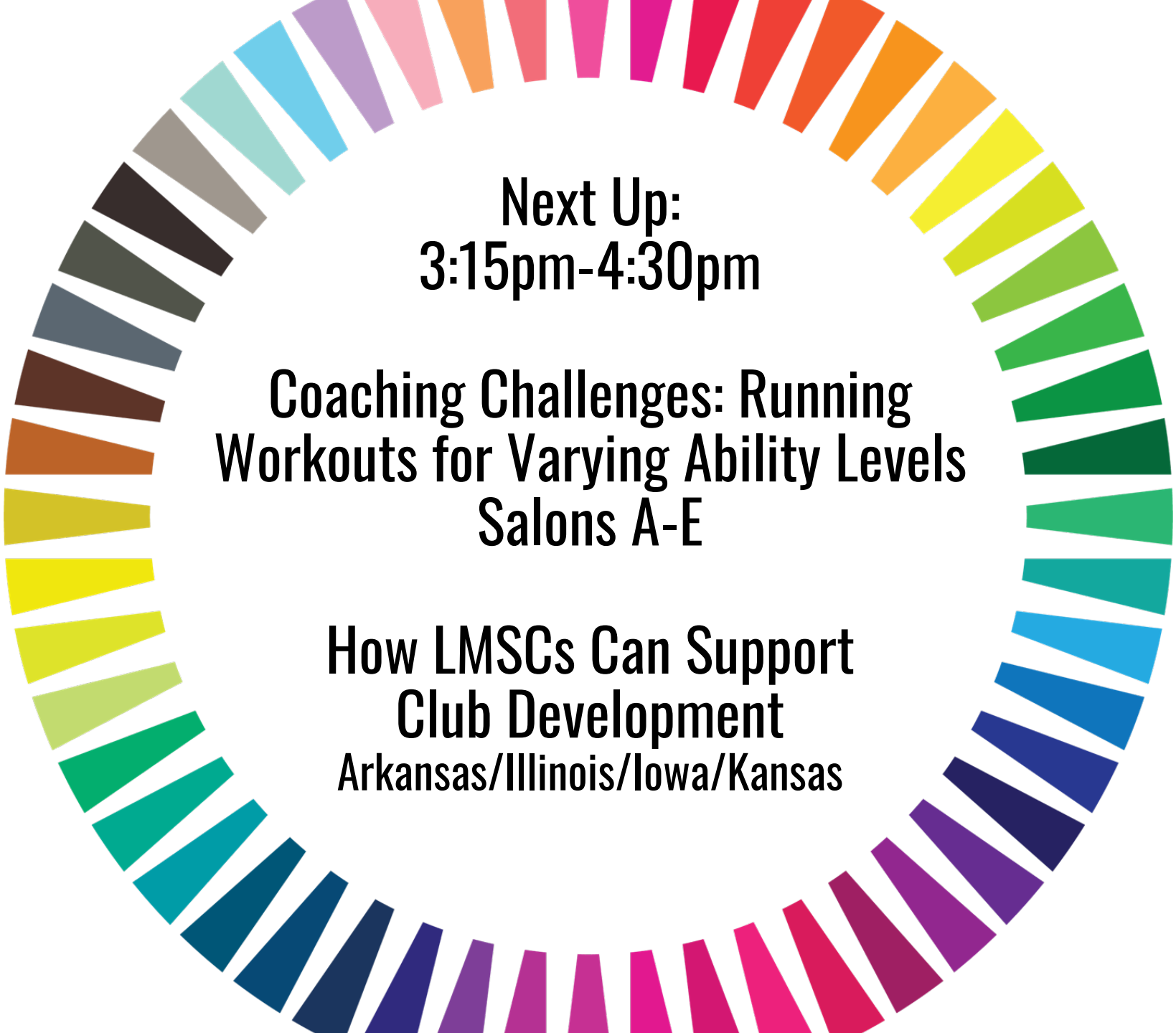
Wrap-Up / Questions & Answers

**Don't be afraid. Ask away.
(If you're thinking it, someone else
probably is too!)**

Next Steps / Call To Action

- A. One Goal for you as a coach & one team goal
- B. One Planned Team Event
- C. One Scheduled “*Chasing Failure*” Set
- D. One Community Building Event Idea/Plan





**Next Up:
3:15pm-4:30pm**

**Coaching Challenges: Running
Workouts for Varying Ability Levels
Salons A-E**

**How LMSCs Can Support
Club Development**
Arkansas/Illinois/Iowa/Kansas

Resources

- Extended [Goal Setting](#) Info and Ideas from Kate Stephensen

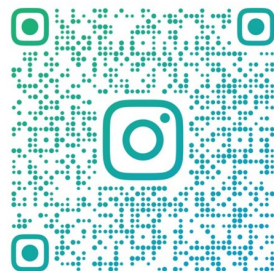


Kysa Crusco

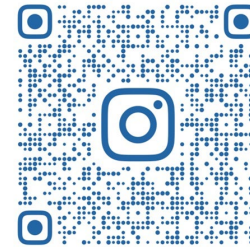
- Kysa Crusco swims with the Granite State Penguins, a workout group of New England Masters Swimming (NEM), and serves as the Communications Coordinator for the New England LMSC. Known affectionately as the Penguins' "Cruise Director," Kysa manages team communications and social media, organizes social gatherings, writes creative themed workouts, and rallies the Penguins for meets and events across New England.
- Under her leadership and infectious enthusiasm, the Granite State Penguins were named the 2024 USMS Club of the Year, recognized for their strong sense of community, fun, and innovative team spirit. In 2025, Kysa received the June Krauser Communications Award for her outstanding work promoting Masters swimming and connecting athletes across the region.
- A lifelong swimmer, Kysa competed for Boston College before joining Masters Swimming in 2012. She has represented USMS at World Aquatics Masters Championships in Montréal, Budapest, Gwangju, Fukuoka, and Singapore, and has competed in 14 USMS National Championships. Kysa has accumulated 121 individual and 80 relay USMS Top 10 times, is a five-time USMS National Champion (three individual, two relay), and a 16-time USMS All-American.
- Outside the pool, Kysa is an attorney and Guardian ad litem based in Bedford, New Hampshire, where she owns Crusco Law Office, PLLC. She lives in Manchester, NH with her husband Jeremy and their two children, Reagan and Max. Kysa brings the same energy and sense of community to her professional and volunteer work as she does to her lane mates — proving that leadership, loyalty, and a good sense of humor go a long way, both in and out of the water.



@ROWDYPENGUINS



@NEWENGLANDLMSC



@KMEREDITHC



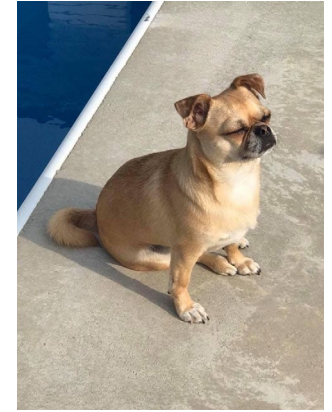
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Tara Mack, aka “TMack”



Connect with me on IG:
tmack_agingintoawesome

- Founder & Head Coach Slow 2 Fast Swimming, Inc.; Level 3 Coach; R&A Committee; NELMSC A&R Chair; CEO Aging into Awesome.
- TMack is the Founder and Head Coach for Slow 2 Fast Swimming, Inc. “S2FS”; a certified healthy aging & performance coach; and a retired high school science teacher. TMack has taught and coached swimmers of all ages, from 18 months to 94 years young, including swimmers, triathletes, water polo players, and surfers. She focuses on breathing and using a relaxed effort in the water, and most of all having fun. TMack hosts and travels to teams to run clinics and also offers 1:1 coaching.
- TMack is a self-proclaimed “Obsessed Dog Mama” to Chewie the Chug, a bonus mom to two amazing women, a wife, and multiple business owner who has created a method she calls “Chasing Failure” to insure we all get the most out of life. (It feels icky and exhilarating.)
- TMack has been a competitive swimmer for over 40 years and a swim coach for over 30 years and believes there is an athlete in all of us waiting to come back out to play. She is a lifelong learner, teacher, and community builder. She loves leveraging information, skills, technology, and systems to live a vibrant, healthy, and fulfilling life which she calls “Aging into Awesome.”



1:1 Coaching



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Bill Meier

- Bill Meier has been a swim coach for over thirty years, coaching age-group, high school, and college teams. He has been the Head Coach for the Simon's Rock PaceMakers Masters Team for 20 of those years.
- Dedicated to all things water related – He has been an ocean lifeguard on Long Island, NY, captain of his college team, triathlete, lifelong surfer, and open water swimming enthusiast. As a SwimAmerica Program Director, Bill has helped thousands of people from 7 months to 90 years old to learn to swim. Bill was appointed the SwimAmerica National Director from 2022 to 2025. As a Red Cross Lifeguard Trainer, he has taught close to a thousand people how to protect their community in and around the water.
- Hired as the Aquatics Director for the new Kilpatrick Athletic Center in 1998, Bill oversaw all programming in the pool and was eventually promoted to Athletic Director for the whole facility. In his capacity as the Chairman of the Board for the NELMSC, he developed an adult learn to swim program that served as the foundation for USMS's ALTS Program. As a USMS Lead Instructor, he has trained over 1200 people how to help adults in their communities to overcome their fear of water. He is responsible for April is Adult Learn to Swim Month.
- Bill has received the Dot Donnelly Award, Kerry O'Brien Coaches Award, USMS Fitness Education Award for 2019, and the NELMSC Coach of the Year for 2024. And the achievement he is proudest – His 38-year marriage to his wife Maureen and their two children.



Kate Andrup Stephensen

- Kate Andrup Stephensen – is a USMS coach and swimmer. She has been a USMS member since age 19 when she started substitute coaching with the Northwestern Masters Swim Team. She has coached in Illinois, Massachusetts, Virginia, and California. She is a former at large board member for Virginia Masters Swim Team. She is currently a member of Pacific Masters Swimming and is Chair of the LMSC's Diversity & Inclusion Committee. She is a former member of the USMS Open Water Committee and is a USMS Certified Coach and USMS Certified Adult-Learn-to-Swim Instructor. She enjoys volunteering at open water swims and also enjoys volunteering as an adult-learn-to-swim instructor.





Thank you for joining us!

Kysa, TMack, Bill & Kate