

Lane Etiquette by Coach Curtis Reddy

As a swim coach I am often left shaking my head when I see some of the lane etiquette being displayed during workouts. When I used to swim competitively, there would be meet warm-ups with so many swimmers that all the lanes had kids swimming one immediately in front of the other, both up and down each lane. It was congested to say the least but rarely was there any bickering because everyone did their part to be considerate to one another. Some people have never really been taught any lane etiquette so the following article will help you from being ostracized from your lane.

First, do your best to listen to the coach when he or she is giving a set. I empathize with your need to discuss which triathlete is dating which triathlete and what the latest titanium part you just purchased for your bike but knowing what is going on for the next set is important. If your coach has to spend time in the middle of a set telling swimmers how to do the set properly then the coach has less time correcting swim technique. If it so happens that the coach did not describe the set clearly then ask them to explain the set over before you get underway.

Next, you should always leave 10 seconds apart. This rule is not just in place to satisfy your anal coach but your fellow lane swimmers will appreciate it as well. It's bad enough having other people hitting your feet during races but not many people enjoy getting a foot massage during workout.

Related to the 10 second apart rule is the ordering of swimmers in the lane. If you are one of the slower swimmers in your lane, do not try to be a hero by leading out your lane during the main set. Doing so will only cause a backlog of angry swimmers behind you. Conversely, if you are one of the faster swimmers, do not start near the back of the lane because you will inevitably have to pass everyone unnecessarily.

Theoretically in swimming, everyone should think and count for themselves but this is rarely the case. Therefore, the lane leader bears the awesome responsibility of starting an interval session at an appropriate time on the pace clock. If the lane leader starts an interval set on a number such as 13, 27 or 52 the coach will automatically think evil thoughts about the infidel. Ideally, a set should be started on the top/0-second mark of the pace clock. This way both the coach and the swimmers know whereabouts the lane is during the set and what kind of times everyone is holding. Knowing your times is important so that you learn proper pacing and technique focus. If everyone in your lane is freezing or being impatient then it may be acceptable to leave on the bottom/30-second mark on the pace clock so long as your coach has not specifically stated otherwise.

If you can not see the pace clock you should wear a digital watch on your wrist. Go to the pace clock before workout and start it on the top. I know most of you like playing with your watches but try to leave your watch running the entire

workout. This way you can use your watch just like a pace clock without messing everyone else up in your lane.

Since we live in Canada, and not New Zealand or Australia, it is understood that everyone will swim on the right hand side of the lane unless discussed otherwise. All of you are probably thinking this one is a no-brainer but some people insist on constantly swimming on or near the centerline. Not swimming near the lane rope leads to collisions and collisions lead to animosity. Not many people like to be upset so leave the middle of the lane for those who need to pass.

If you do need to pass someone, try to do it early in the length and in as little time as possible. This requires you to pick up your speed beyond what you were going before. Conversely, the person being passed should slow down just a little in order that the person passing is not left swimming down the middle of the lane for too long. All too often I see the person being passed actually pick up the pace when someone is trying to get around them. This is a good tactic in open-water races but completely unnecessary during workout.

Another problem area I see is in regards to turning. Too many people come in to the wall on the right-hand side of the lane and try to push off from that exact spot. What inevitably happens is that the person pushing off runs into the person swimming behind them. Instead, when you come into the wall for a turn, you should cut into the middle of the lane at the last minute. This way, when you push off, you are not doing so in the same line as those coming in behind you.

Far too many swimmers stop 1 to 5 meters out from the wall. How many mountain climbers trek up a mountain only to stop 3 meters from the summit? How do you compare your 100 meter all-out you did last week to the 98 meter all-out you did this week? Two things need to happen so your coach does not continue to be annoyed with you. First, once you come into the wall at the end of an interval, get out of the way of those coming in. Second, if it is you coming in, get to the wall at all costs, even if it means ending someone's life. Those who do not have the privilege of reading this article will soon get the point that you do not mind using them as a wall should they not allow you to get to the one already in place.

Finally, it is acceptable if you refuse to get out of the pool in your lane and instead want to use the ladder on the side of the pool. A problem does arise though when you end up getting the way of those swimming in the lanes you are trying to cross. Crossing other lanes is not like crossing the street. In the swimming context, the pedestrian (you) yields to the cars (others).

That's about it. Swimming is challenging enough when your coach pulls a surprise main-set on you so there is no need to test your lane-mates anger management skills. If you follow these rules everyone will love you so long as you do not have bad breath or an abrasive personality. Happy swimming.