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ASCA Fellows Research Project Identifies Practical Solutions to Improve Swim Coach Retention and Career Sustainability

New study identifies three major barriers to coach sustainability and outlines actionable steps to reduce burnout, strengthen benefits and create clearer career pathways.

Who will coach the next generation of swimmers if the profession cannot retain the coaches it has today? A new study from the American Swimming Coaches Association (ASCA) Timothy Welsh Fellows puts that question at the center of an urgent conversation about the future of swimming—and identifies concrete steps the sport can take to better support the people who make it possible.

Our Greatest Asset: Holding on to Great Coaches: A Coach Sustainability Study, conducted by the ASCA Fellows, identifies three key challenges affecting coaches' ability to build sustainable careers: excessive administrative workloads, limited access to essential benefits and adequate time off, and unclear pathways for professional advancement.

The [full report](#) and a [Coach Sustainability Playbook for Organizations](#) are posted at www.swimmingcoach.org.

The findings point to an important opportunity for swimming organizations: **retaining great coaches requires more than a passion for the sport. It requires workplaces that make coaching a sustainable career.**

Combining findings from the ASCA Fellows Nationwide Coach Sustainability Survey and the 2022 Fellows study on burnout, attrition, and culture in the swim coaching profession, with follow-up interviews involving five USA Swimming clubs identified for high coach retention, the study examines the conditions that challenge coaches—and the organizational practices that may help them stay. Its recommendations offer a practical roadmap for clubs, LSCs, and national organizations to move from recognizing the problem to taking action.

The Challenges Behind Coach Retention

The study highlights several areas where swimming organizations can make meaningful improvements:

- **Administrative burden:** Coaches identified administrative work as a significant source of stress, underscoring the need to protect time for coaching and athlete development. Thoughtful delegation, administrative support and clearer staff roles can help reduce the demands placed on coaches.
- **Benefits and time off:** The survey found that 28% of respondents reported having no health insurance, while 46% reported having no retirement benefits. Although 79.2% said paid time off was offered, only 59.4% were satisfied with their time-off arrangements. Nearly half—46.1%—said they personally arrange deck coverage when taking time off.

- **Career advancement and professional growth:** Sixty-one percent of respondents were indifferent or dissatisfied with career advancement opportunities. The study points to a need for clearer expectations, more transparent advancement pathways and consistent opportunities for professional development.

Work-life balance also emerged as an area of concern, with 38.3% of respondents dissatisfied with their work-life balance. These findings reinforce the importance of examining not only the demands of coaching, but also the workplace structures, benefits and support systems surrounding the profession.

What High-Retention Clubs Can Teach the Sport

The study also examined five USA Swimming clubs identified for high coach retention to learn more about their organizational practices. Interviews highlighted approaches that may help create more sustainable coaching environments, including delegating administrative responsibilities, defining staff roles, providing coaches with autonomy, supporting rest and recovery, and encouraging peer relationships.

These findings offer practical examples for clubs looking to strengthen their own coaching environments. While every team operates with different staffing and financial resources, organizations can evaluate their current practices and identify changes that better support coaches.

A Roadmap for Action

The study calls on organizations throughout swimming to share responsibility for improving coach sustainability. Its recommendations are tailored to the roles of national organizations, LSCs and individual teams.

National organizations can develop evidence-based coach sustainability resources, provide education on burnout prevention and workload management, establish salary and benefits benchmarks, and help normalize rest and recovery as part of a sustainable coaching career.

Local Swimming Committees can expand access to coach development clinics, formal mentorship, onboarding resources, certification opportunities and peer support networks.

Clubs and teams can take practical steps such as separating administrative and coaching responsibilities where possible, clarifying roles, establishing transparent compensation and advancement practices, creating predictable time-off policies, and regularly reviewing workloads. Smaller organizations can adapt these approaches through shared responsibilities, volunteer support and other solutions suited to their resources.

The report also includes a **Coach Sustainability Playbook and Coach Resource Guide** to help organizations translate the study's findings into practical next steps.

"Coaches are the foundation of our sport, yet passion alone cannot sustain a career without the right support," said ASCA Board President Bill Dorenkott, Director of Swimming and Diving at Ohio State University. "This research provides a roadmap for meaningful change. We need to move beyond acknowledging the challenges and begin changing the systems that shape coaches' daily lives. ASCA will begin working to implement selected recommendations, but lasting progress will require commitment from organizations at every level of swimming."

Learn More: ASCA Live on October 28

The ASCA Fellows who conducted the study will present their findings and discuss the recommendations during **ASCA Live on October 28, 2026, at 1 p.m. Eastern.**

ASCA members can register by visiting www.swimmingcoach.org, logging into their member accounts and accessing the ASCA Live registration information. A recording will be available on ASCA's YouTube channel following the event.

The full report is available on the ASCA website at www.swimmingcoach.org.

Research Team

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About ASCA

The American Swimming Coaches Association (ASCA) is a professional organization dedicated to inspiring, supporting and advocating for swim coaches while elevating the profession and uniting coaches at every level. Through education, certification, professional development, resources and advocacy, ASCA works to strengthen the coaching profession and support the people who help athletes and swimming programs thrive.