Some Things Are Best Left to the Pros

We all want to help - all of us- but there are so many reasons why we should step back and take supporting roles in our
efforts to assist our swimmers. As parents and officials it is extremely important that we each understand what this entails and that we understand quality support and what it looks like. For this guidance we must look to our coaches.

Very loosely based on the work of Dr. Jennifer Nalepa, PhD, an assistant professor in the Department of Kinesiology and in other graduate programs at Michigan State University, her suggestions made sense to me. Although her writings focused on coaches, it was simple to invert the information and address the parents. Keeping in mind that the goal for each swimmer is to have the best possible experience in the pool, regardless of skill level or personal goals, paying careful attention and adhering to the following will support that goal:

1. When the coaches explain swimming, the techniques, the rules, etc., listen. It is their job to know what they are doing. Respect that.

2. When the coach provides a Code of Conduct for Parents, follow it. These guidelines exist for excellent reasons and have been developed over time. Whether at practice sessions or competitions, your swimmer is part of a team and you, the parent, are not a coach but a valuable support for your child or children. If the Code of Conduct is in writing, read it, sign it, and follow it.

3. Establish two-way communication with your swimmer's coaches. Please select an appropriate time and place, being prepared to affectively state your question and/or concern. Ask for clarification if necessary, then be done. Time is valuable

4. Listen carefully when the coaches discuss positive parenting behaviors. It is essential that you understand how to best support your swimmer, whether in the car and or at home, as well as in the pool. Expect that the coaches explain clearly the potential negative effects and consequences of certain parental behaviors and/or coaching. No matter how well-intentioned, it is not your job. As parents we have the power to effect and support our swimmers both positively and negatively. Please choose the positive. Further, respect the teaching/learning process. Progress takes time.

5. Attend all meetings. Welcome the communication. Participate positively. Everyone is watching and every child matters.

Note to Officials: If it is not your job, leave it to the coaches. Smooth the way if you can, otherwise, have the coach informed and step back.