

Top Ten Suggestions for New Administrators

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I have spent 35 years in the world of educational athletics. Many of those years were as a coach and teacher. I also spent a large portion of my career as an athletic director. As I progressed through the years, many new and upcoming professionals asked for my advice as they embarked on their journey into athletic administration. They often asked what was needed to know to get ahead, or to survive. Quite often, I found myself giving the same responses. I attempted to organize my reactions to questions from new hires, and do so in a humorous manner. I decided to take a page from the work of David Letterman. Letterman often used a Top Ten list in his late-night show. I took several of my thoughts and organized them into my own Top Ten. This list was shared at clinics, meetings and our states' new athletic administration workshop. These 10 suggestions are not all encompassing, but are a good start down the path of athletic administration. Like Letterman, I always started at # 10 and worked my way down to # 1.

My Top Ten Suggestions for the new athletic administrator are as follows:

10 Reference Materials

Make every attempt to find, buy or borrow any type of reference material. Ask other schools for coaches' handbooks, student athlete documents or athletic department handbooks. Search the Internet for examples of athletic polices in numerous areas (booster clubs, building projects, sportsmanship codes, travel polices, etc.) Take LTI classes and use manuals provided as reference material. Procure leadership books whenever possible. Seek organizational manuals from anybody related to the field of athletic administration.

9 Workshops and Conferences

We all know budgets are tight. Superiors are hesitant to allow release time away from daily duties. It vital to seek professional learning opportunities. Networking with other professionals in the field can provide information and insight that will allows opportunity to raise production to the next level. Seeking experts to share best practices is one way to move your program forward and expand opportunities and examples which can share with coaches and other stakeholders. State conferences are excellent and the NADC conference is a great experience for gaining knowledge and networking. Become a life-long learner in the field of athletic leadership.

8 Learn to Document

The current legal climate in the United States is often a litigious one. Many leaders find themselves exposed to many challenges. Quite often, those challenges require a defense for actions taken or not taken. I have found that documentation is often the best defense for such challenges. After every meeting or extended personal conversation with a concerned parent, jot down a few notes. Include the date, time and location with all such interactions. Save these items on a flash drive and place them in a secure location. Be just as diligent with all financial decisions, purchases and other transactions. A paper trail is the best insurance policy that can be created in the busy world of athletic administration.

7 Find Supervisory Help

The main concern of every professional is longevity. The goal is to do a great job over a long period of time. If asked to do this difficult job, with little or no help, burnout will be guaranteed. The best strategy to prolong longevity is to find and use some type of supervisory help. Whether this includes other members of the school leadership team, an assistant athletic director or event supervisors from the coaching ranks, seek help to lighten the load. An extra night off during the week or an extra weekend spent with family can be just the answer to stave off burnout and extend your career. Trying to go it alone often has disastrous results.

6 Prioritize Tasks

A wise former administrative associate once told me, "Take care of what will get you fired first, and then worry about the rest". That was the single most effective piece of advice I ever received. In simple terms, he was telling me to prioritize tasks in a meaningful and effective manner. The idea was to attack the most pressing and time-sensitive items first and then move to those that might allow some degree of flexibility in completion time. At no time, should needed tasks be ignored. Rather, develop a protocol and practice of addressing those most vital first and then moving on to other challenges.

5 Produce and Use an Athletic Handbook

Businesses and organizations call them POP manuals (policies, operations and procedures). A successful athletic department might refer to them as athletic handbooks. Some professionals produce a separate coaches' handbook for staff and student athletic handbook for athletes. Regardless, there must be a written set of guidelines produced and approved by upper level administration to be used as a source for all policy and procedure used in the everyday management of an athletic department. Without such clear and written direction, no precise path can be charted and maintained in any effective athletic department.

4 Produce and Use AD Checklists

Regardless of the level of expertise or knowledge or experience, a written set of reminders can reduce the chances of missing an important deadline or responsibility. Checklists are the most commonly used format to maintain order in the hectic life of an athletic administrator. These checklists could be constructed by month, season, or sport. Separate lists can be formatted for individual tournaments or for staff members. Regardless of

the format, this type of written reminder is an invaluable tool for both the young and experienced athletic administrator. Failure to plan and follow that plan often end in failure.

3 Find and Lean on an Athletic Assistant

The size and configuration of the school served will often dictate how much clerical and/or organizational assistance can be provided to the new athletic administrator. An athletic secretary or an assistant athletic director are preferable. If that is not possible, student assistants can always aid with typing and filing. College interns can also be used in some areas that are near local universities. The key to any assistant it to make sure sensitive items do not cross their desk. Regardless of the type of help, learning to delegate duties is method to aid in the longevity of the new AD.

2 Go as Paperless as Possible

The days of using file index cards, three ring binders and legal pads are coming to an end. With the advent of technology, the use of paper is being cut to a minimum. An effective athletic administrator should work to convert as much as possible to electronic format. Such conversions can reduce the amount of space needed for storage and increase the prompt and effective way data can be retrieved. Countless documents can be formatted or scanned into electronic files. This technique can make life much easier in the process.

1 Pick up the Phone and Call

Often, the coaching profession in shrouded in secrets and attempting to get ahead of competitors. Athletic administrators are wired in a different manner. The goal of athletic administration is to make the collective group stronger by sharing as many ideas, policies and practices as possible. In all my years as an AD, I never made a call for help that was refused. The person on the other end of the line might know the answer, but they were quick to come up with somebody that had been there and done that. When in doubt, pick up the phone and call an athletic administrator in a neighboring city or in your league. Such a request will be worth the time and effort. An athletic director is only as good as the weakest AD on his schedule. Working to lift the collective group makes for a better profession and help aid in the growth of the fraternity of athletic leaders.

These 10 suggestions will not answer all the questions of the new athletic administrator. Rather, they serve as a starting point. Athletic administration is a great profession. Starting off on the right foot can set the direction for the rest of a career and prolong that career at the same time.