

ADVISOR



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READY FOR SOME RELATIONSHIP ADVICE?

By Tim Sloan

One thing I've learned over the years in this officiating business is that one person's cynicism is another person's pragmatism. Today's topic illustrates this well.

Being an association leader, as with so many public/managerial functions, is about relationships. While your capabilities, knowledge and experience are important, if you can't work effectively with the people around you, you're on course for eventual failure. There was a time when almost any issue could be decided by constructive dialogue. That's being replaced today by a form of nihilism, where some believe being successful in their aims means simply thwarting their adversary. They'll use any effective narrative — factual or not — to suit their purposes and leaders must be ready for that. What do we need to understand about the challengers we face today to avoid unnecessary conflict and be more effective?

Members

Let's start with our members. Loyal members aren't usually your problem; they're willing to help at almost any turn. The problem children are the ones who are in your group because they expect you to give them something. They've been educated and groomed to demand

and expect "theirs," regardless of qualification. There was a time when entitlement monsters like this would wear out their welcome and fade away if you resolutely stood your ground. Nowadays, they push back with cries of patriarchy, nepotism and several other "isms," every time things don't go their way — and if they don't see any of this, accuse you of it anyway. As Saul Alinsky once pointed out, they're looking for any narrative about you that resonates with enough others to make them turn against you. It isn't fair, but if it's effective in their worldview, you need a different response.

Be advised that we're not in

Kansas anymore. You probably can't win over the instigator, but you can plan on putting more time into inoculating his or her potential disciples with fact, reason and accountability. Allow more time during meetings for discussion of concerns of the membership. Don't be afraid to use committees where you once would have appointed individuals to things like assigning and evaluations: The idea is to create an atmosphere where the troublemakers are dealing with "us," rather than "you." Preempt the destructive narratives by creating a credible set of your own.

SEE "RELATIONSHIP" P.3

MONTGOMERY SUMMIT SESSIONS TO FOCUS ON MAKING SPORTS BETTER

Nationally known sports officials, officiating leaders and other key stakeholders are committing to speak at the 2020 Sports Officiating NASO Summit, which will be held July 26-28 in Montgomery, Ala.

With numerous significant sessions in the works, this year's Summit, with the theme "Good

Sports, Bad Sports, Better Sports Through Officiating" will, in the words of NASO President Barry Mano, "bring unique focus on the skill set that sports officials need to effectively ensure that sporting contests remain fair, safe and competitive according to rule. That is becoming a taller and taller order for all of us in officiating.

“The theme for the 2020 Summit centers on how officials themselves can make sports better – better in the sense of displaying and reinforcing the values that we as a society hold in a place of honor. ... The Montgomery Summit will bring many of the best and brightest onto the stage, sharing perceptions and practical advice about how we can do superlative work under more demanding conditions. And of course, we will be celebrating officiating and recognizing individuals who have contributed so much to this industry.”

One of the innovative and informative sessions on tap for the opening night of the Summit on July 26 is “Why Officiating Matters More Than Ever.” Greg Sankey, commissioner of the Southeastern Conference, will open the 2020 Summit with his perspective on the key role officiating plays in organized

sports at all levels, not just the Power 5 conferences. Sankey will share his thoughts on the demands being made of officials, their ability to fulfill those demands, the requirements of accountability and the need for more open communication about officiating.

Other sessions scheduled for the 2020 Summit include:

Sports Is Life With the Volume Turned Up – Can you “C” the light? Officials are now being asked to do what most others in positions of authority are loathed to do: know what the rules actually require and then to enforce them impartially. That takes Character, Commitment, Courage.

Work Through the Noise – Officials are trained from day one to block out noise. Back in the day, that noise pretty much came from within the contest itself. Not so today: the harping from social media; the carping from unsporting behaviors; the snarking from fans in the stands ... these are stark reality and equipping officials to handle the onslaught is the order of today.

Workshops: The Sportsmanship Puzzle – Twelve workshops will be held with participation by attendees, addressing sportsmanship and the challenges faced by officials in their own efforts to make sports better.

A Bad Bet – An expert presentation presenting a perspective that at first is disquieting but then key to understanding the intersection between gambling and sports officiating.

Yes, You Do Make the Call! – An array of plays on the huge screen and you get to vote on the ruling. Let your clicker be your guide.

Breakdown Your Sport (Mini-Clinics) – Video breakdown sessions to immerse you in

the subject, run by renowned officials of various sports.

Data Points – NASO’s historic survey of two years ago was answered by 17,478 officials – more than 6,000,000 data points! Our industry is beginning to develop its research base and this session presents the latest data points and statistical interpretations available.

Critical Issues in Officiating – A Legal Perspective – The need for legal perspective in officiating has never been greater. This session is guaranteed to over deliver on the promise of providing a legal perspective on the critical issues being faced today in officiating.

Better Sports Through Officiating – This is the Summit’s Sportsmanship “show and tell” session and you won’t want to miss it! Time to see, hear, feel, programs and initiatives that have actually made a difference in how the games are played, watched, reported on and officiated.

High School Replay: Upon Further Review – With experience under its belt, the Alabama High School Athletic Association reports out on the adoption, creation, implementation and evolution of its replay system. This session will include a spirited debate about replay and high school sports.

RefereeVoices – It’s NASO’s version of “Ted Talks.” Come hear some of the industry’s finest riff on their experiences and the issues facing the officiating industry.

In addition to these sessions, annual staples like the Officiating Industry Luncheon, Game Changers and Working Lunch Breakouts will be included in Summit activities.

To register for this year’s NASO Summit, go to sportsofficiatingsummit.com or call 800-733-6100. ■

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RELATIONSHIP (CONTINUED FROM P. 1)

Board members

A subset of your members are your board members. While the odd one could be included among the troublemakers just described, they're more likely to be benevolent toward you. (If there are *that* many complainers, it's hard to understand how you got elected.) Assuming that's the case, then the best thing you can do is double down on supporting them and rewarding their loyalty. Manage them as individuals, first giving them the opportunity to succeed their way. Step in only when they ask for help, don't realize they need help or are unable to be heard over the murmurs of the problem children. People almost inevitably become board members because they have some vision of how things could be different and, therefore, better. If their pursuit of that vision leads the group someplace you want it to go, then lend every bit of verbal, non-verbal, written and tacit support you can: What you do for them will go a long way in counteracting the grumblers.

Schools

And then there are the schools. Without them, all you have is a bunch of oddly dressed, idle adults. On the surface, they

seldom call to give you something and more often want to point out the flaw(s) of someone you assign to their games. When you dig deeper, however, there are likely to be more ADs and principals who see eye to eye with you than any other group – especially at the high school level. If you think you have problems with people playing the victim and expecting to be marginalized, try being the person who hired an unpopular coach or wants to suspend a kid for cussing out one of your members. In the right surroundings, you can often reach out to them and unite against common aggravations and issues. In these situations, you're not colluding with anyone, nor are either of you betraying the people for whom you work. You're simply sharing ideas, finding some common ground, building some more trust and, ultimately, *servicing* your groups. Dealing with schools seldom brings instant gratification, but if you understand you're working toward a common prime directive, more good things can happen in a pinch than you might expect.

Public

Finally, there's the public: You read the blogs, news services and NASO *Advisor* just like I do; we all understand the headwinds of public perception we sail against. As in politics, our vocal detractors are seldom swayed from their beliefs: Everyone knows we're on the take, according to some of them, and they will never be deceived. With this attitude they are the worst of the four groups we've considered – it isn't even a close vote. Educating the public on the "truth" about our avocation is Quixotic, at best. Responding to criticism no better than Al Capone did isn't a wise course, either – it just proves their

SEE "RELATIONSHIP" P. 8

BYLAW BIT

There are certain things you will need to comply with depending on the laws in your state (number of meetings, minimum number of board members, etc.). Check to see what laws apply to your nonprofit association.

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THE PULSE

LOCAL ASSOCIATION NEWS NATIONWIDE

WVBOA Hosts Motivational Speaker

In conjunction with its Adam Ward Classic basketball tournament for high school teams around Salem, W.Va., the Western Virginia Basketball Officials Association featured a free motivational speaker on Jan. 30. Former NBA player Chris Herren shared his story of beating heroin addiction.

Jerry Spangler, commissioner of the association, said he got the idea when he saw an ESPN documentary on Herren. Spangler wanted students to be able to learn from Herren. The basketball officials from the group paid Herren's speaking fees and expenses.

The tournament itself has raised \$10,000 yearly for a scholarship fund administered annually by the Salem Educational Foundation and Alumni Association.

CIAC Starts Appreciation Initiative

In January, the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) invited its schools to participate in its first-ever "CIAC Officials Appreciation Initiative." The purpose of the initiative is to reduce the negative actions toward officials, support positive sportsmanship, and combat the growing challenge of retaining officials and recruiting new ones. The initiative encourages schools and their teams to make small gestures of appreciation to officials at all levels of play over the course of the month.

The idea for the Officials Appreciation Initiative came from the CIAC Sportsmanship Committee, which is made up of administrators, coaches, athletic directors, students and CIAC staff. Discussions from the group have focused on two primary areas of concern for schools in regard to sportsmanship; treatment of officials and fan behavior.

Group Raises Money for Students

Helping Hands, a group started by basketball official John Akins with the support of the Lake Region Basketball Officials Association (LRBOA), raised about \$5,600 that was used to buy gifts for 21 students from 11 Polk County, Fla., schools in December.

For four years, LRBOA has raised money to help provide gifts for needy Polk County students and the amount raised has grown each year. The group has raised more than \$18,000.

The students provided a wish list, and the group did the best it could in fulfilling the lists. A lot of the money raised is from the officials. The group asks officials to donate a game fee to the fundraising effort, but many give more. There were outside donations as well.

SOURCES: THE ROANOKE TIMES, CIAC, THE LEDGER

MOVE UP YOUR MEMBERS

By Rick Woelfel

Some officials don't particularly care what level they work. They have no aspirations of working a Final Four or a bowl game and may well be content working recreation or youth league games.

It's safe to say, however, that the majority of officials have, at one time or another, entertained the idea of moving up the ranks. If they're currently working junior varsity games, they aspire to being assigned to varsity contests. If they're regularly handling varsity assignments, they may have aspirations of working college games.

So, what should associations be sharing with members about how to climb the ladder?

What's the best way to move up without ruffling feathers and maintaining the respect of fellow officials and assigners?

Mike Salada is the president of the Niagara Falls Umpires Association, a group of about 45, which handles baseball games in the northwestern portion of New York state, both during the scholastic season and the summer months.

Salada notes that up-and-coming officials can enhance their status simply by being available when the assigner calls.

"I tell the guys all the time that when I'm in a pinch, I'm calling the guy that I can say, 'I've got a game in three hours, can you do it? And the answer is just 'yes.'" he said. "It's not, 'Who am I working with? What level is it? How much am I getting paid? Is it plate or bases?' There are no other questions, it's just 'yes.'"

Salada says there are vibes a newcomer gives off that indicate they're serious about umpiring. "It starts in our new member classes," he said. "They're the ones that are engaged, asking questions, getting involved."

Salada says newcomers who make time to attend offseason clinics are demonstrating their level of commitment. As a result, leaders should encourage them to show interest in improving.

"We're lucky to have the coaches of our high school teams open up their gyms a couple times a year for cage work," he said, "and they're the ones who are there, ready to go."

"We have a couple of opportunities every year to have clinics regionally. (The new umpires) are the ones who are signing up for those, buying extra books, a subscription to *Referee*, anything they can get their hands on to learn a little more. Those are the ones who are wanting to advance."

Another quality good prospects possess is a willingness to listen. Some organizations have formal mentoring programs but some of the best mentoring opportunities arise in informal situations, in the locker room or parking lot or perhaps over postgame refreshments. The setting doesn't matter as much as the new official being willing to accept advice when it's given and criticism when it's warranted.

Salada will often pair veteran umpires with newcomers for middle-school level games. "Not every varsity guy," he said, "(but) the one I can trust to go out there and give good feedback. And I can tell instantly if the guy is willing to accept the feedback or if he's just going to take it in and keep doing what he's doing."

It's no secret that some young officials have an enhanced sense of their own abilities. It's a trap that doubtless many of us fell into at one time or another until a veteran gently pulled or shoved us out or we had an experience that showed us that we still had some things to learn.



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HOW TO ...

FIX MEMBER APATHY

Every officials association is going to have good officials and bad officials. What every officials association needs to avoid is having officials who just don't care. If you are an association leader and detect apathy in the ranks, there may not be a quick fix. But make no mistake, change is necessary, lest this unwelcome virus begin to infect even more officials.

Immediacy

As with most things in life, failing to address member apathy is an area where procrastination and kicking the can down the road is not a good idea. As soon as your association leadership detects an issue, jump on it. You may not have all the answers on day one, but you don't want to allow it to fester. Recognizing there is a problem — and being willing to tackle it — is important.

Inquire

You've noticed there is a group of officials that seems stuck with a case of the blahs. Ask the members what you and other leaders can do to help. If they are apathetic, chances are they are not going to make the first move. Reach out to identify the source of the problem. You may determine it's due to a simple misunderstanding that requires a quick fix. Or you may discover a major overhaul is in store. But you won't know until you ask.

Include

An apathetic official is likely one who does not feel valued as a member. Look for ways to seek out these members' input. Show these members that what they have to say matters. Offer them more responsibility within the group. It's more difficult to not care when an official knows he or she is responsible for the success of more than just himself or herself.

Incentivize

Athletes often talk about "having something to play for." The same can be true for officials. Yes, there is the paycheck and the satisfaction of having done a job well. But sometimes that just isn't enough. Consider implementing a program that recognizes officials for a variety of accomplishments: working a certain number of games, achieving a high test score, perfect meeting attendance, etc. Some food and drink, association swag or even a nice certificate in recognition of a job well done can go a long way in buoying the spirits of an official.

Some officials have incredible success at very young ages. But it can't be overstated that that is the exception and not at all the rule. Success in officiating requires not only rules knowledge, sound mechanics, etc., but a level of maturity as well.

Salada speaks from experience. "I think the age itself can be difficult at the start of a career," he said. "I was working varsity level at 18 years old, and college by the time I was 25.

"I think there tends to be barriers with coaches, players and fans set just because of your age. They might try to take advantage of your young age. If you don't have the ability to handle the tough situations, it might make it hard to continue and advance. You definitely have a tougher time proving yourself and showing your abilities when you are working higher levels at a younger age."

Each step on the ladder requires a greater commitment of time and

energy. Young officials may find they have reached a step where they can climb no higher, or they may wish to climb no higher because of other obligations and interests.

The reality is that not everyone trying to reach the "top of the ladder," however that is defined, will get there.

Salada sees no harm in a young official having ambition but offers this caveat. "As long as they have a realistic view of their abilities, then I believe they should strive for the level they want/deserve," he said. "I try to set expectations with members and if they aren't ready for the next level, I try to help them with what might be holding them back."

Rick Woelfel is a writer, broadcaster and podcaster based in Willow Grove, Pa. He works various levels of softball and has previously worked football, basketball and baseball. ■

THE LEGAL IMPACT OF TAKING A PUBLIC STANCE

By Donald C. Collins

Q Should your association weigh in publicly on matters in support of a member? What legal considerations go into a decision on that? Or what if a group wants to weigh in on a statewide officiating matter that impacts all officials in that state? When should your group get involved and when shouldn't it?

A Taking public stances is a tricky thing.

Associations normally take positions through a regulatory process. Boards of directors deliberate on bylaws, vote on

policies, hold hearings and conduct meetings.

This regulatory process isn't always compatible with the need to take a public stance. Sometimes, you need to move fast — at the speed of business. You don't always get to deliberate when you take a public stance. Associations can find that the media, the legislature, a member or a client wants quick answers.

Associations can take a public stance. You don't have to hold board meetings for everything. However, associations should take a few steps to protect themselves.

First, associations should realize that some public stances take place in routine meetings with

clients, governing bodies, leagues and coaches' committees. The association should not think of itself as an insider in such meetings. The association is presenting its public face and taking a public stance.

Officials associations have to clearly designate representatives to these meetings and ensure that the representatives update the board and report back. These representatives will likely be the president or an assigner, but it could be someone else. The key is that the association makes a clear designation. Policies, procedures, rules surveys and a wide array of other matters that impact one's association can happen in these meetings. Remember, boards set policies and parameters, but representatives have to take daily actions. The key is to get those representatives to update the board with regular reports.

Next, associations should be prepared to speak on matters of public interest. One never knows when the media, a league representative, a school superintendent or a legislative office will call, but one must be prepared when they do. It is best to either designate a spokesperson or delineate who can speak on what issues. After all one would not want the vice president speaking on a matter that the association would prefer to have addressed by the assigner, the president or the spokesperson.

Of course, associations don't need to speak on all matters of public interest. The board has to give its spokespeople some parameters. Associations can set parameters as they see fit, but it would be wise for boards to tell their spokespeople not to speak on personnel matters, field conditions and pending litigation.

Associations should not discuss any matters related to specific officials in public forums. Associations should also not discuss member misconduct, members who allegedly committed crimes and disputes among members. Those are personnel matters. Public comments

could create legal problems. Similarly, comments about field conditions could create legal problems if someone was injured.

Public relations people and lawyers can train association spokespeople on how to answer questions in a way that deflects the question, lets the association show sympathy and establishes some sense of humanity. That's good PR, but it can lead to legal problems if done poorly. Absent either some training or a spokesperson who's intuitively trustworthy at putting a good public face on matters without exposing an association legally, a "no comment" may sometimes be the best legal strategy on personnel matters, injuries, pending litigation and other matters where the board wishes to tread lightly.

Finally, it is always a good strategy to find a spokesperson who can make it clear that they are part of the association but are not giving an official association position when speaking to the media. Most media people understand this. Often, they just need a quote, and are happy to reference a spokesperson by name and title without claiming that the spokesperson speaks for the organization. We see this often where a reporter writes something like, "Sue, the vice president of Association X, has noted an uptick in unsportsmanlike conduct." The reporter just needed a title and a quote, and Sue has not represented herself as giving the association's position. Under certain circumstances, that could help you legally — and help with client relations.

Associations can certainly take public stances. They just need to provide some structure and guidance before they do so.

Donald C. Collins is the commissioner of the San Francisco Section of the California Interscholastic Federation. He is a longtime basketball official and lawyer. This article is for informational purposes and is not legal advice. ■

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RELATIONSHIP (CONTINUED FROM P. 3)

point. Absorbing public criticism without dignifying comment is seen as a sign of complicity today. In my view, we should treat the public the same way we treat the coach or a player on Friday night: Answer a fair question with a fair answer. Look the part, act the part and accept the consequences. Be accountable for what happened but never try to please everyone. Most of all, whatever you say or do in response to (what is usually) a complaint from the public won't right the wrong — real or perceived. What it will do, if you stick to the mantra, is at least show you're giving a more accountable response than they're used to hearing elsewhere. And that adds up, over time.

The common thread is that credibility is the key to your success as a leader and is established by a process that

takes days, months and years to establish but can be gone in seconds.

Be accountable, truthful, proactive, decisive and believable. Be all the things that pleasantly surprise people today and make a difference in every challenge you face.

If there can only be one person in the room people know they can trust, make sure it's you.

Tim Sloan, Davenport, Iowa, is a high school football, basketball and volleyball official, and a former college football and soccer official. ■

NEW ADVANTAGE

Association Advantage currently has more than 1,000 members. In all, those groups represent more than 100,000 individual officials. We welcome our newest Association Advantage member associations, listed below along with home cities and contact persons:

California: XFL, Huntington Beach (Steve Strimling); Stellar Universal Officials, Fairfield (Elaine Jojola)

Michigan: West Michigan Soccer Officials Association, Grand Rapids (Paul Holwerda)

New Jersey: New Jersey Wrestling Officials Association, Blackwood (Rick Solofsky)

Virginia: Metro Richmond Officials Association, Mechanicsville (Allen Gravatt)

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Minnesota State High School League
Minor League Baseball
Missouri State High School Activities Assn.
Missouri Valley Football Conference
National Assn. of Intercollegiate Athletics
National Basketball Assn.
National Collegiate Athletic Assn.
National Federation of State High School Assns.
National Football League Foundation
National Football League - Officiating Department
National Football League Referees Assn.
National Hockey League
National Hockey League Officials Assn.
National Intercollegiate Soccer Officials Assn.
New Mexico Officials Assn.
New York State Public High School Athletic Assn.
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Ohio High School Athletic Assn.
Oregon Athletic Officials Assn.
Oregon School Activities Assn.
Pac-12 Conference
Pac-12 Football Officials Assn.

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