

## Shut Up!

How to Eliminate 'War Stories' and Keep Meetings on Topic

By Tom Degraw



Don't scare away new officials! That's the lesson we learned at my association, the Greater Chesapeake Officials Group, eventually. But first we had to figure out that we had a problem and work to solve it.

My association felt the numbers crunch last year as much as any other group. We went about our normal recruiting methods, which consisted of an advertisement in the local papers and word of mouth. We had about 15 new recruits at our first meeting; things were looking pretty good. Then I started getting some calls from veterans who decided for one reason or another that they weren't going to officiate this year. Suddenly the warning bells started to sound. I began to review our meeting sign-in sheets. After looking at the sheets and making phone calls, I determined that 10 prospective

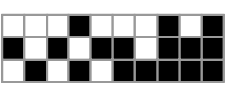
officials who attended that first meeting had decided not to become officials.

That's when we realized something must have gone terribly wrong at the first meeting. To protect and boost our officiating numbers, we had to identify the problem and prevent it from happening again. We narrowed the focus down to several key components. The first problem was that we scheduled our meetings with one week off between the first and second meetings. Another problem was the topics of our discussions. We reviewed independent contractor status and insurance obligations, as well as passed out an independent contractor form that was to be signed before games would be assigned. The last problem, but certainly

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## A Marketing Approach to Recruiting

By Donald C. Collins



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Successful recruiting has a lot in common with marketing. Companies advertise by pursuing the demographic with an interest in their product. Companies expand that demographic by generating goodwill and trying to make new demographics feel a need or a desire for items which, quite frankly, they never felt a need for before. A successful recruiting program must make more people want to officiate.

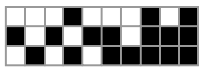
**1. Identifying and reaching people who have a propensity to officiate.**

Information is the key. Associations must determine which groups of people have a propensity to officiate.

Associations must poll their new recruits and determine vital information, including age, profession, how they found out about the association's training program and how they were recruited.

Polling information should not replace traditional recruiting. Rather, it should be used to supplement it. Of course, it is still most likely the

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traditional sources — teachers, police officers, former players and people with a personal tie to current members — will become officials. However, the data, if scrupulously analyzed, might lead associations to new and unexpected sources.

Most recruiting programs focus on players, former players and intramural programs. However, an association facing a shortage of officials may do well to consider pursuing older people by reaching out to parents and those who have some flexibility in their schedule — insurance agents, real estate agents, investment professionals, doctors and dentists.

**2. Increasing the public's propensity to officiate.** Associations must constantly work to increase the number of people who have a propensity to officiate. That work involves building goodwill and exposing people to officials and the officiating avocation. The benefits are long-term as the work will gradually increase the number of future prospects, but isn't likely to have immediate results.

Associations should expose parents, coaches and players to officials away from the game. Preseason and midseason question-and-answer sessions with parents, and access to high school and even middle school gym classes are easy starters. However, officials can do more.

Associations can use local newspapers or television programs to visibly demonstrate a local official's day, from regular job duties through the game itself. People should know there's a real, valuable contributing member of society in the referee's

stripes. The key to increasing the public's propensity to officiate is to expose the public to officials by marketing the special people who make up the avocation.

Associations can supplement promotional efforts by developing programs to train high school, junior college and college students. Association leaders can work with state governing bodies and youth groups to create programs allowing the trained high school students to officiate middle school games and college students to officiate intramurals.

Those programs help create a future pool of young officials, and give associations the ability to target the youth market. The young person who has fun officiating and makes more money than he would at McDonalds will harbor a residue of goodwill toward the officiating avocation. An association should track the students and other young people it works with and help them to join associations once they are trained.

**3. Closing the deal.** There's no sense in marketing officiating if associations can't retain their new members. Too many new officials make a very reasonable decision to place their careers ahead of an avocational service performed in a hostile, unpleasant environment where they are rarely shown they are valued.

Thus, the final stage of marketing officiating is for associations to do two things. First, associations must take active steps to work with leagues, teams and sports governing bodies to schedule games in a manner that accommodates people who work

traditional hours. Second, associations must show they're taking steps to have participants and spectators realize the official is a valuable part of the sports community and must be appreciated and treated accordingly.

*(Donald C. Collins is the executive director of the San Francisco Section of the California Interscholastic Federation. He is a longtime basketball official and lawyer.)* ■



LOAN currently has 450 members. In all, those groups represent more than 55,000 individual officials. We welcome our newest LOAN-member associations, listed below along with their home cities and contact persons:

- **California:** Inland Football Officials Association, Redlands (Dave Farmer), Capitol Sports Officials, Dixon (Angelo Queirolo).
- **Ohio:** Northern Ohio Hockey Officials, Strongsville (George Flynn).
- **Connecticut:** Connecticut Board of Approved Baseball Umpires-Hartford, New Britain (Brian Kurnik).
- **Arizona:** Richardson's Officials Association, Phoenix (Winfred Richardson).
- **Ontario:** North Bay and District Football Officials Association, North Bay (Paul Condon).

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