

## HOW TO...

### CONNECT WITH MEMBERS

Associations are always thinking of new ways they can connect with their membership. In today's busy times, traditional meetings are not always the best option. Time and distance to meetings are some things associations must consider, especially for members who are working a full-time day job.

#### Use Technology

There are now many apps that allow for organizations to connect with members to both provide and obtain information. If an association would like to know what its members think about a subject, as an example meeting times, Survey Monkey is a viable solution as opposed to a traditional paper ballot. The company provides free, customizable surveys that can be accessed by members through their phone or computer.

#### Make It Personal

Association leadership should know each member personally, regardless of the size of the organization. When members know the leadership cares about them personally in their development as an official, they are more likely to support the association and its endeavors.

#### Recognize Greatness

Everyone wants to be recognized for their accomplishments. If a member is officiating his or her first state playoffs, being recognized in the organization's newsletter or being given a certificate from the association president is a good way to motivate members. The association can issue its own "Official of the Year Award" as well.

#### Provide Logo Gifts

No better way to build morale than to provide apparel with the association's logo. Whistles, pens, patches and T-shirts all can have the association logo and be used as prize giveaways or made available for purchase to members only. You can also have a flipping coin designed with the association's logo to help connect with members and promote the association brand.

## SOCIAL MEDIA BLASTS

By Donald C. Collins

**Q** What do you do when a member blasts the group via social media? Can the member be disciplined?

**A** Officials live in a world of bylaws, contracts and standards. Any analysis of an official's comments made on social media starts right there.

For officials who work very high levels of play, social media rules can often be summed up as, "the answer is always no." Some leagues/associations don't allow any social media use. Thus, any use of social media pertaining to officiating is a violation of policy and the contract or bylaws would tell one what the ramifications of the violation are.

The law at these higher levels of sports may be easy, but it's hard for the rest of us. Officials assigned by associations to work in youth, high school or rec leagues, and other forums don't face absolute bars. And that's what makes life complicated.

We start our regulations of social media by treating it like other forms of communication. We don't always need special rules to regulate social media. Our bylaws and standards address professional and unprofessional behavior.

Officials who make unprofessional public statements can be disciplined whether they are blasting the association, blasting their fellow officials from the stands, running down a fellow official over a few beers with a coach, or making hostile comments to scorekeepers at a game site. Our bylaws cover this. Social media isn't that unique. We don't need special social media bylaws to penalize officials who use social media forums that can reasonably be expected to be seen by broad segments of the public.

Intentional unprofessionalism and negligent use of social media

should not be difficult matters for us. Yes, there is the defense that one hit the wrong button and inadvertently released a private message, but an association's hearing panels can take that into account and make a determination on such claims.

We need social media regulations to set guidelines because no matter how careful we are some private messages on social media just aren't as private as the writer thinks. The social media is distinct from our conduct regulations in that social media guidelines are regulating how we use social media as opposed to regulating conduct or setting standards of professionalism. Indeed, one could be professional and still violate a social media policy.

Violations of an association's social media regulations can be the basis for discipline. Associations would be advised to have an appeals policy to ensure benign comments that technically violate a policy don't result in penalties that are too harsh. Finally, hearing and appeals panels can be used to determine whether a negative comment is an unprofessional comment. After all, not every negative comment is an unprofessional comment, but one could violate a social media policy without making a negative comment or an unprofessional comment.

Associations can take heart in knowing that groups of the past had to regulate new technology and did quite well. Slightly over 90 years ago, radio was the new technology. You can do a lot of harm when you breach professional standards on the radio, but we've long ago learned that the fault lies with the official, not the radio. In time, we'll make a similar adjustment with social media.

*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. ■*