CULTIVATING THE CABMA FARM SYSTEM

During the past few years, CABMA has continued to put a lot of emphasis on the professional development and growth of our membership with the focus on what it takes to go from the business office to the athletics director’s office. While we have been very successful the past few years, securing athletics directors at varying stages of tenure and other speakers for our Convention that can address the challenges that exist in this type of transition, there is one very important factor that we can’t afford to overlook.

As we seek out mentors and colleagues that can help us get to the next level, we also need to be mindful of our responsibility to help develop those within our own shops. For CABMA to continue to grow and progress, we need to strengthen the business manager “farm system” so that when we move up to the front office, it becomes easier to call up talent from within our own ranks.

Whether your team is made up of additional professional staff, interns, students or a combination of staff roles, know that you have both the ability and responsibility to make an impact on their potential in this industry. For those who express real interest to continue in this line of work, their exposure to the skills and substance that will help them get to and succeed at the next level will only present itself when supported by you being active in their development.

Establishing a Comfort Level with Young Talent

This can be a challenging step in the development process, particularly for those of us working in a smaller business office. While you may need all the help you can get, there is often hesitation in relinquishing control of real work to others, but sometimes necessity dictates just that and it should be embraced, not resisted.

As your comfort level with their production grows over time, you can continue to expand their portfolio of responsibilities, but don’t just stop there. Encourage them to actively pursue opportunities for development with the knowledge that they have your support. Options could include:

• Working on a project outside their normal role.
• Including them in the work that is on your desk (if even from just an informational perspective).
• Having them attend a higher level staff meeting.
• Joining and becoming active in CABMA.

These are the types of opportunities that will allow growth and a broader perspective on what is involved at the next level, while at the same time developing the skill set necessary to execute higher level responsibilities.

Even for those of us who have the good fortune of having a staff with a little more experience, we must continue to remain active in their development and not overlook their needs. With this group, you can use the performance review process to identify what their goals are and what gaps they feel need to be addressed to help their careers. Regular follow up throughout the year can allow you to focus on skill development and providing a broader perspective of ‘how their work impacts the department as a whole.’ You’d be surprised how sometimes these conversations alone can help in their development.

When Experience and Ability Meet Opportunity and Timing

I am fortunate to be in the career position I am, having come through the “farm system” myself, starting out as a ticket office work-study student, and steadily working up to the position of assistant athletics director. This progression was made possible by having great supervisors and mentors help me along in my career, providing me the opportunities to grow and broaden my skill set to the point where, on multiple occasions, I was the right candidate to move up when others moved on.

Don’t Forget Where You Came From

Given my appreciation for how this approach helped my career progress, I have taken a lot of pride in continuing to provide opportunities like this to students and staff I have had the pleasure of working with along the way. I also have found that people who came up through the “farm system” are more likely to continue operating in this manner during their careers. They feel a sense of obligation to continue being active participants in the development of their own staffs because they have seen the benefits first-hand.

Remember, this process doesn’t end with transition. The staff you’ve helped cultivate can and should continue to be supported by your efforts regardless of where you are now.

As you read this, you probably stopped to think about how you got to this point in your career and about those that helped you get there, but I hope that train of thought extended to those you have mentored along the way as well. If not, now is your chance to do something about that.

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