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CONNECTING YOUR EMPLOYEES TO THE ORGANIZATION

The standard employee in an athletics business office is well versed in the day-to-day expectations of their job. While the details are fairly obvious, it might not be as clear to them how they ultimately fit into the organization. They might also feel, as a less visible branch of athletics, undervalued and cut off from the rest of the department's operations. To combat such feelings and to make someone feel valued within an organization, one of the first steps is connecting employees to the overarching mission of the athletics department. This process is accomplished by isolating key concepts from the athletics department's mission statement and identifying how each employee can apply them to their daily operations.



Josh Boone



All athletics departments should have a mission statement. The mission statement should address the purpose of the organization and what it hopes to accomplish in the future. It should also outline a core set of principles that guide the operation of the department. The University of North Carolina's mission statement has 10 principles that address all aspects of the organization's operations. The sixth principle addresses the business facet: "The department assumes financial responsibility for its program, accepting the obligation to generate, without state funds, the resources necessary to operate as an auxiliary service of the university. The department budget will be administered in accordance with NCAA, ACC, state and university guidelines ..."

Once you have a copy of your department's mission statement, you can begin to integrate the key concepts with your employees. If you haven't created a mission statement for your business office, this would be an excellent opportunity for your office to get together and decide what is important to all of them. A common drawback with mission statements is that they are usually written by a board of directors or a previous administration which can lead employees to feel removed and detached from the process. If you start from the beginning, you will have immediate buy-in from the employees because they helped create it. Including your staff in the formulation of an office mission statement will make them feel more committed to the core principles and help them adhere to the stated goals.

One example of a possible mission statement for an athletics business office is: "The athletics business office's purpose is to oversee all financial matters of the department of athletics. We will assure that the athletics program operates within budget while adhering to NCAA, ACC, state and university guidelines. We exist to help student-athletes, coaches, staff and administrators succeed by providing efficient financial systems and sound financial advice in the operation of their budgets. Business office staff members strive to constantly improve communication and the daily work environments of athletics department staff members."

Your employees also definitely will buy into the next step: the creation of their own personal mission statement. From a work standpoint, this should reflect the overall mission statements of the department and the business office. It will be highly individualized and should be designed by the employee and refined by several meetings with the supervisor.

One framework to use is for each employee to answer the following questions:

- Who is someone that you admire as a leader or colleague? It could be someone in or out of the organization (coach, administrator, past historical figure).
- What are the key values of this person that you admire?
- What are the key values that you admire in yourself?
- What are the contributions in your position that you hope to make to the athletics department?
- What are your short-term and long-term goals?

You can begin to construct your personal mission statement once you have answered these questions. It may take weeks of revisions to get it exactly right. The great characteristic of a mission statement is that it can be used to resolve problems or differences between stakeholders. This could include coaches vs. administrators, staff vs. the accounting department, or everyone's favorite, you vs. a coach. While we all try to work with the staff members in our department, there are certain times when their perspective of how you should do your job will clash with your viewpoint. There always will be certain rules and restrictions that we must follow in the operation of our offices. Have a tough decision to make? Pull out your mission statement to reorient yourself to the correct point of view.

My personal mission statement is "to help student-athletes and athletics department staff members succeed by providing support in navigating our financial systems while adhering to NCAA, ACC, State of North Carolina, athletics department and university rules and regulations. I seek to constantly improve my support for colleagues and by creating an atmosphere of honesty and integrity. I will demonstrate a sense of urgency by addressing situations that I can change for the better. I will express my creativity to find unique solutions to problems. I will display a positive attitude in my daily work and commit to a life of continued education."

My personal mission statement is a fluid concept, and will need continued revisions as I learn and grow as an administrator. Some of my colleagues might jokingly argue that I don't always live up to my standards outlined in my mission statement. However, if you begin each day reminding yourself of your mission and reflect on it during the tough times, you slowly will begin to shape a different philosophy, and you will become your mission statement.

Thanks for this article to Josh Boone, assistant director of business operations at the University of North Carolina and member of the CABMA Membership Committee.