

NACDA

2010 ATHLETICS ADMINISTRATION

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

DOING MORE WITH LESS

Pick up any article about college athletics finances and you will undoubtedly run across one of the most used phrases during this economic downturn: “doing more with less.” During these hard economic times, it has become one of those automatic business jargon phrases, replacing such clichés as “thinking out of the box” or any phrase involving “synergy.”



Josh Boone



No matter what your situation, all athletics departments have had to make some tough choices. Most athletics departments are trying to maintain the quality of their program while allocating fewer financial resources to do it. Other programs have decided to reverse the saying and simply “do less with more,” by cutting sports. They have fewer resources overall, but now they can devote more money to the remaining sports.

Whenever an athletics director utters these words, coaches and staff members automatically assume the worst. The person on the receiving end doesn't really hear what the athletics director is hoping to convey: I am depending on you to be able to fulfill our goals and objectives in the same excellent fashion as you have in the past, with fewer financial resources. What they really hear is possible position or budget cuts are on the horizon. Coaches become fearful, realizing that they will be held to the same level of expected success, while simultaneously having their legs cut out from underneath them.

Employing the philosophy “doing more with less” undermines your leadership position. It is a vague strategic term that only reinforces a perceived notion in the eyes of your employees. It acts as a bull horn drowning out the problems and concerns of your staff and can cause them to regard you as out-of-touch. “Doing more with less” assumes that the recipient of the phrase hasn't put full effort into their life's work. It implies that staff have been holding back or cruising in their current positions, and can deliver more on cue with fewer means.

So where does that leave us? You don't want to alienate your staff, but you still need to cut expenses. The process needs to be organized and presented as a specific strategy for dealing with fewer financial resources. The strategy should emphasize getting back to basics and rethinking what is really important for your organization. One such method is using principles of “lean operations” to uncover what is essential for your organization to not only operate, but to thrive.

The main principle of lean operations is to only allocate resources to operations that add value. The athletics department will need to review and adjust priorities based upon its core mission. This is done by specifying what does

and what does not add value to your client's (student-athletes) perspective and your customer's (fans) perspective. Organizations need to constantly take the pulse of these two groups, since both have concerns that will evolve over time. Once priorities are set for these two groups, budgets can be allotted based on a ranking system. It will become very apparent to what is absolutely critical in the operation of your organization. Lower priority items will be considered “waste” and eliminated from the budget. This could involve eliminating an administrative position that no longer meets the organization's needs or outsourcing a department until you are able to monetize the operation.

The accompanying principle to lean operations is to center your operations on people that add value. This is accomplished by forming teams that design their own processes and address complete problems. A lot of decisions are made in upper management without the perspective of employees who often can offer more practical solutions based on their day-to-day operational experience. Administrators and managers exist to support staff members, and a key component of staff support is to give staff members a voice. Empowering front line workers by forming multi-disciplinary teams is critical in optimizing the efficiency of your organization. Empowering workers can also be done by upgrading skills through training. Can't afford training? You have access to an entire booster club of business people that would be more than happy to come in and share their wisdom and expertise that is easily transferrable across industries.

A byproduct of empowering your employees is increasing their ability to respond immediately to customer's or client's requests. Information must be tailored to flow smoothly throughout the organization for immediate use by staff members, allowing them to communicate accurate information with student-athletes and external consumers. Bottlenecks of information and inefficient processes need to be identified and modified. This could become a bit tricky with difficult staff members who get caught up in office politics or are wary of stepping on other's turf. It is, however, an excellent opportunity to address problems with specific staff members and find new ways to address old problems.

The next time that you have the opportunity to speak with your team or department, don't take the easy way out by using the familiar “doing more with less” speech. Show them that you do care about their concerns by stepping up and leading. Have a systematic process in place that will continue to attack waste and add value to your organization, giving your organization the ability to reach its potential.

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

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