

JOURNEY WITH A PURPOSE

*“Every day is another opportunity to get a little bit better.” ~Unknown*



Joi Irby



Whether a student-athlete, coach or athletics administrator, each level demands and desires an individual that firmly believes that personal and professional growth is paramount. Within athletics administration, there are limited opportunities for professional development outside of the walls of formal education. Associations such as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA), National Association of Collegiate Women Athletic Administrators (NACWAA), Black Coaches and Administrators (BCA) and Minority Opportunities Athletic Association (MOAA) provide programming that is essential to growing the professionals within the athletics administration industry. The athletics sphere is continuously evolving. It is the student-athletes, in conjunction with the business aspect of athletics, who are at the helm of this evolution, generating changes with which we, as athletics administrators, must adapt. I am sure we have all grappled with lagging ticket sales, fundraising during the present state of our nation's economy, in addition to the challenges of understanding the student-athlete and their ever-changing culture. Professional development can be an intricate part of formulating strategies and methods of implementation to face these challenges head on in an effort to stay ahead of the curve as opposed to merely being a part of the curve. Therefore, it is extremely important to take advantage of the professional development opportunities available through associations and strive to not only succeed, but achieve in the upper echelon.

I have been uniquely positioned, based on my background, which is inclusive of experiencing three very different, yet related areas of the athletics arena. I began my career as a student-athlete (women's basketball), which led to a career in coaching. However, my career transitioned into athletics administration while coaching and earning an advanced degree. My chief values were, and still encompass, any and every action that will fulfill my need and passion for self-improvement. This personal philosophy falls directly in sync with the aforementioned quote, as I steadfastly believe that every day does, in fact, provide the perfect opportunity to become a better person — personally and professionally. Possessing this type of progression has motivated me to take advantage of learning opportunities from coaches, former teammates, workshops and clinics geared toward coaching and now athletics administration through conferences, conventions and institutes.

Most recently, I attended the NACWAA HERS (Higher Education

Resource Services) Institute and the Division II Governance Academy through MOAA. The experience at both professional development platforms, while lying on opposite ends of the educational spectrum, through structure and composition, both have been essential towards my personal and professional development. Essentially, the objective is to gather and process the most vital elements while shaping those points specifically for personal and professional use, ultimately developing an individualistic philosophy. This is the foundation to personal and professional development.

Professional development, by definition, is the advancement of skills or expertise to succeed in a particular profession, especially through continued education. Across all disciplines, professional development is paramount for individuals who wish to succeed within their field of specialization. Passionate individuals, no matter the field, long to progress within their careers and seek professional development opportunities. Imperative to this process is the opportunity for like-minded individuals to connect and share ideas, strategies, successes and failures. Along the winding road of professional development is the ongoing effort of building lasting relationships and support systems, while securing a solid foundation of trust on which to build a career. Professional development does not conclude once the seminar, workshop or academy ends; this is where the journey begins. It is our responsibility to take what we learn from these various platforms and our colleagues, to then apply it to our daily career decisions, choices and actions. Not only should we apply it, but we should also make it our own.

Presenting itself in several different forms, professional development takes shape in a more familiar, traditional environment. Conventional to form, it is the common notion that professional development opportunities occur at conventions, conferences, seminars, retreats and clinics, where individuals listen intently to an expert express and illustrate their philosophies on “how ‘this way’ is more efficient” than in previous years. On the converse, professional development may surface in a non-traditional setting; through self-reflective activities and even through networking platforms. This is an area any and everyone can benefit from long after the seminar, workshop or conference has concluded. Taking a proactive role with your colleagues allows you to observe one another's careers, provide support when necessary, and seek professional advice at a moment's notice. To some, this can also be the most difficult part of professional development; the great task of keeping in touch and keeping your head down at the same time. It is imperative that we master both, for if we don't, we may miss out on great opportunities and great people.

Thanks for this article to Joi Irby, academic advisor/Life Skills specialist, Cleveland State University.