Published on Sports Management Resources

Operating Principles for Athletics Organizations

Operating principles reflect the athletics director's beliefs about the ways in which people and organizations achieve excellence – the keys to personal and organizational success. Many times, these principles are the product of a manager's past experience in leading teams, groups or organizations but they are always consistent with the stated values of the current organization and its leadership. The essence of an operating principle is that it is an expectation about how everyone in an organization is expected to relate to each other, treat external publics and approach everyday tasks. Some examples of operating principles might include:

Commitment to Relationship Building. We are all responsible for building great relationships with everyone we meet and with whom we work. If we treat everyone like the most important donor to our program or with the respect we would accord the president of our university or the principal of our school, we will be successful at everything we do – from fundraising to facility maintenance to being respected by the media and parents.

Strong Work Ethic. Achieving great things doesn't come easily, excellence requires a commitment to diligent effort to produce quality work product.

Learn from Mistakes. Even the most successful people make mistakes because they are always trying new things in an effort to become better. Key is never making the same mistake twice.

Avoid Selfishness. As soon as we feel selfish, like someone is stealing our good idea or instituting a better program, we should do the opposite of what selfishness dictates - we should reach out to share, help others and offer assistance. Such acts will generate good will and respect that will come back to benefit the organization tenfold.

Community Service. Every team and employee has an obligation to participate in the department's community service activities. We are fortunate to have good health, good jobs and people who care about us. We have an obligation to 'pay it forward'.

Use of Resources Responsibly. We are responsible for the careful use of the resources given to us. We appreciate the generosity which made these resources possible and will not be wasteful. Misuse of

funds will not be tolerated.

Treat Athletic Participation as a Privilege. Coaches are expected to use the 'carrot' of participation as an incentive for educational success. Students who are not fulfilling academic or developmental/behavioral expectations shall be withheld from participation until improvement is demonstrated.

Self-Report Violations. Whenever we discover that we have broken an eligibility or governance association rule or policy of our institution, we shall self-report that transgression and impose on ourselves an appropriate penalty. Professionals are expected to self-govern.

Build a Green Program. We are privileged to live on this planet and in all athletic program activities and in building new facilities, shall do our best leave the earth as it was given to us.

Confident Crisis Management. In the midst of a crisis, each of us needs to demonstrate calm confidence, even if it's an illusion, so we are examples for all to follow. Lower your voice, slow down your movements, find out the facts, reassure those who are upset that the problem will be resolved and don't be afraid to ask for help.

Honor Rules. We never relieve ourselves from the responsibility to do the right thing on the basis of a technicality. We know deep down what is right and what is wrong. We always do the right thing based on the spirit as well as the letter of rules.

Maintain Position Playbooks. If anyone in our organization unexpectedly becomes ill or leaves the organization, a replacement can go to that person's desk, open their "position playbook" and take over their responsibilities without the organization missing a beat.

Full and Complete Performance. When any employee is given an assignment, 'completed staff work' is the expectation: (1) a comprehensive analysis of the problem or assignment and (2) the presentation of a solution or action in such form that all that remains to be done on the part of the assigning supervisor is to indicate her approval or disapproval of the proposed action.

Uphold Gender and Racial Equality. Historically, women and persons of color have been underrepresented in athletics participation and employment opportunities. Our department is committed to treating male and female athletes equally and providing equal employment opportunities. Sport is as important for our daughters as our sons and staff diversity celebrates difference and enriches all of us.

Think of what a working environment would feel like if you heard the above words and operating principles repeated every day. Think of how you would feel about the organization that acted according to these values and principles. It bears repeating that the athletics director's most important leadership responsibility is making these values and principles explicit. Write them down as organizational policy. Distribute them at the staff meeting at the beginning of each year. Require that the statement of values and appropriate operating principles be a part of every sport's "team rules". These words and statements should be mantras, verbally repeated frequently by the athletics director. Such repetition is required to facilitate internalization and adoption. The goal should be that everyone in the organization will feel proud and comfortable voicing these rules of conduct and will do so as the explanation for their every day decisions and actions.

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