Published on Sports Management Resources

Q: Should the athletics director/CEO in the athletics department or non-profit organization be professional managers?

The most defining characteristic of an educational institution or a non-profit organization is its nature as 'professional bureaucracy'. In a professional bureaucracy, the professional workers are so well respected and highly trained as teachers, researchers, or program experts that they are also entrusted with the administration of the non-profit business. Thus, managers are usually educators and program experts first and foremost, and managers second or possessing little if any managerial training.

The larger the institution or organization, the higher the position in the professional bureaucracy, and the larger the salary for the position, the more likely it is that professional management training and experience will be required in addition to program expertise. The smaller the organization or the lower the position in the bureaucracy, especially middle managers within academic or athletic departments, the less likely it is that these professionals will be required to have formal training in managerial and supervisory skills as a condition of employment. For instance, at a small high school, the football coach may also be the athletic director, with no administrative credentials required to be an athletic director and the CEO of a sports-related non-profit organization might be a former athlete and iconic founder with high public recognition and marketing enthusiasm, with no management training.

Therefore, two of the real obligations of athletics directors or non-profit CEOs are to (1) avoid the mistake of assuming that employees have had management training or that administrative experience equals management training, and to accept the obligation of providing that training, especially to senior staff members, and (2) recognize the need to acquire leadership and management training for themselves.

Prepared by: Donna Lopiano, Ph.D., President, Sports Management Resources

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