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A few months ago, I read a wonderful press release featuring an administrative assistant at a BCS school who was being inducted into the Athletics Hall of Fame. She had worked for several different athletics directors during decades of service and was highly revered by those around her. I was particularly interested in this story for two reasons. I, like many other athletics administrators, worked with an administrative assistant for 14 years who was arguably the most important person in our department. She created and implemented highly efficient day-to-day operations, averted crisis situations on a regular basis, served as a confidante to everyone in the department without compromising responsibilities or relationships, and bolstered staff morale.

The second reason this press release was compelling to me is because I believe that support staff in athletics departments rarely get the recognition they deserve. In fact, I think they are taken for granted far too often. This is particularly true for athletics trainers, equipment managers and sports information directors. In many cases, coaches are permitted to unilaterally create their in-season and non-traditional season training and game schedules with no regard for the impact it may have on support staff. What makes matters worse is that coaches will make last minutes changes to these schedules without asking

anyone how it impacts them. Sometimes those changes are necessary; sometimes they are rescheduled on a whim or because a coach wants to punish a team by extending or adding another practice.

My feelings about this resurfaced the other day when I spoke to an athletics trainer who has decided to leave the profession. He told me that he absolutely loves his job and the athletes. The fact that he is woefully underpaid for a seven day a week job doesn't even bother him. He said he just couldn't stand being treated like "an ancillary piece of garbage" by coaches anymore. He is well educated in his field but felt there was little respect for his skill sets as a professional. He said that the vast majority of coaches treated him and other support staff like indentured servants instead of significant members of the team. I suggested that he might be happier at another institution. He said that he had talked to countless peers at other campuses and discovered that this was more the norm than an isolated instance.

It seems to me that the responsibility of creating an environment that recognizes support staff as colleagues and valuable contributors rests squarely on the shoulders of the athletics directors. Some strategies that athletics directors can use to "set the tone" for the treatment of support staff include:

- Demonstrate respect for them by asking them for feedback or for their opinions when appropriate
- Take advantage of opportunities to thank them publicly
- Include them in staff meetings and ask them to "report out" about their areas so coaches can acquire an appreciation for what they do
- Create policies that demonstrate a concern for their seven day a week, year long schedule (i.e. restrictions on Sunday practices; giving them a seat at the table when non-traditional season practices are being constructed; giving them the option to say no when schedules are changed for unnecessary reasons, etc.)

Intuitively, I think everyone understands that support staff plays vital roles in the lives of athletes, the success of the programs, and in the case of trainers, may even have to handle life and death situations. Unfortunately, too many coaches want to control every aspect of their program. What they don't realize is that by doing so, they often marginalize some of the most important human resources available to them.

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