Published on Sports Management Resources

Q: Do you have a sample policy that sets professional standards for employee e-mail and other written communications?

A: All policies should be customized to conform to correct position titles and operating rules of the organization. Consider the following policy elements when designing a policy for your organization to govern mail, e-mail and written communications:

1. Accuracy. When communicating by fax, e-mail, or in writing by postal service to anyone outside the athletic department, each employee is expected to verify the name and title of the recipient before transmitting any document. Do not assume that the information contained in the department database is accurate, because people regularly transfer to new jobs, change addresses, or are promoted. To verify the person's name, spelling, and title, call the person's secretary. Enter correct information in the database if inaccuracies are discovered. The e-mail address must also be checked, even if the department is sending snail mail. Always run a spell check before sending out any document.
2. Supervisor Approval. The employee's supervisor shall approve all communication to individuals outside the department both within the institution and external to the institution, unless a form letter format has previously been approved (i.e., contest agreements, department positions on rules and regulations, etc.).
3. Development Officer Approval. All correspondence relating to the solicitation of financial gifts or gifts-in-kind shall be approved by the [name of chief fundraising director].
4. Recruiting Correspondence. Head coaches shall be responsible for approving all correspondence related to recruiting.
5. Professionalism. No employee shall ever write a letter, memorandum, e-mail, or other type of communication that criticizes any person or company or expresses anger. Standard e-mail acronyms like "LOL" (laughing out loud) should not be used.
6. Official Department Stationery. All correspondence must be sent using official department stationery and official department closures. Department notecards may only be used for thank you or congratulatory communications. No employee is permitted to purchase other stationery for athletics-related communications.
7. Salutation and Closures for Official Correspondence (exclusing notecards)
    - Mail Signatures. Employees are required to use their full name and title for all postal mail

communications, whether memorandum or standard letter format, with proper academic or professional certification credentials such as : Jane Doe, PhD, Associate Director for Rules Compliance
    - Salutation. If you do not know the person to whom you are writing, use his or her title and last name with the salutation: Dear Ms. Smith,
    - Closure. The following closures are standard for official business: “Sincerely,” (if the person is not known to you) or “Warm regards,” (if the person is known to you)

8. Use of E-Mail

- Inappropriate Use of E-Mail. Although e-mail often seems like the most convenient form of communication, it should not eliminate phone and in-person contact and should never be used to handle a disagreement or problem. Consider whether speaking to the person by phone or in-person would be more efficient and positive. For instance, in thanking a donor, a personal handwritten note demonstrates that the person communicating took the time and care to extend a personal courtesy that feels different to the recipient than an e-mail or even a typed letter on department stationery.
- Careful Composition. E-mail tends to be more informal than standard memos and letters, but it is not a forum for careless or inappropriate writing. If you wouldn’t say something in a formal memo to a person or in personal conversation, then it should not be said in an e-mail. A negative comment or misinterpretation of information in a personal conversation has the benefit of immediate resolution. The same comment in an e-mail may take hours or days to resolve. This point is particularly important when carrying on e-mail correspondence with other athletic department staff. Recipients of e-mails do not have the benefit of judging the voice intonation, facial expressions, or other visual and situational cues that may be taking place at the time when the e-mail is being typed.
- Guidelines. Employees shall adhere to the following guidelines for e-mail content and use: (a) Address e-mails to people from whom you expect a response or action. Do not send an e-mail to groups of people with broad questions addressed to no one in particular (e.g., “What does everyone think about this?”). If you expect different responses from each person in your “to” box, each should be individually addressed in the body of the e-mail. (b) If you don’t expect a response from anyone, you should indicate that the e-mail is FYI. (c) Use "cc" for people from whom you do not expect a response. (d) Check your e-mails for spelling and grammar before sending them. (e) Refrain from using all capitals, underlining, bolding, or increased font size (e.g., PLEASE, DO NOT, ASAP). Such devices are the e-mail equivalent of shouting at someone. A standard e-mail font of Arial, font size 10 [or other font and size] should be used. (f) If including the recipient's original text in a response, distinguish between original text and your response by using italics for the recipient's text. This approach is especially helpful when more than one other person is involved in the response.

9. Use of Standard Signature Block. All employees must create a standard e-mail signature block, which must be added to the end of every e-mail. The standard required block for department employees is as follows:
John Doe
Head Volleyball Coach
[name of institution]
Department of Intercollegiate Athletics

1 Champions Drive
Toledo, NY 11111
O: [office phone and extension]
C: [cell phone]
E-Mail: jdoe@institution.edu

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