

The Six C's of Successful COMMUNICATION

By Dale Hierlmeier

When examining the qualities of successful high school athletic programs, characteristics such as organization, leadership, financial stability, coaching staff experience and athletic talent come to mind. However, one of the foundations of athletic administration is communication.

Today, more than ever before, 21st Century innovations provide technological hardware and software to facilitate traditional methods of communication. Still, because of expanded program complexities and continuous event juggling, athletic programs can be challenged to keep pace with communication demands. Following are the six C's of communication to illustrate the significance of successful communication.

CONNECTING

Communication is connecting – connecting the known with the unknown, linking the identified with the unidentified. Daily, coaches communicate with athletes about mechanics, strategy, self-discipline, training techniques and sportsmanship. Communication is also sharing – sharing beliefs and opinions, trading thoughts and ideas.

Coaches and players share and communicate after competing, searching for the optimal performance-enhancing strategy, while parents fast-forward to the next contest, and spectators swap stories and tales. The athletic administrator knows the communication process and the connecting and sharing required when schedules necessitate refinement or Mother Nature intervenes, causing a domino effect of instant communicative knee-jerk reactions. At times, the world of athletic administration is like a short-circuited switchboard or a summertime thunder and lightning display.

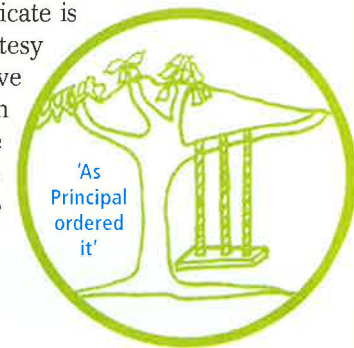


CARING

If communication is connecting, then caring about communicating is the will to communicate. Vince Lombardi, leg-

endary coach of the Green Bay Packers, said, "Winning isn't everything, but the will to win is." Similarly, the will to communicate is everything!

The typical and emergency communication flow chart must be a carefully crafted blueprint. With erratic schedule fluctuations including event, practice, transportation and officials, together with special event scheduling such as preseason meetings, award ceremonies, physicals and team pictures, caring to communicate is part of business and a courtesy everyone appreciates. Assertive communication is a double-win situation – the change is made and auxiliary contacts are informed because of caring to communicate!



CLARITY

A third component of successful communication is clarity. For the most part, communication assumes a verbal or written format, each of which consists of positive and negative qualities. Positively, verbal communication is immediate and precise if heard from a reliable source; but negatively, verbal interaction can be unintentionally tangled with second-hand inaccuracies.

At first glance, written forms of communication, such as event and calendar schedules, appear to retain a degree of validity; however, changes, updates and multiple undated materials may create disharmony. Whether verbal or written, communication snafus result in doubt, uncertainty and confusion. Including printed material with the generic statement "subject to change" is a user-friendly schedule disclaimer, or dating materials "as of" helps to maintain clarity and assure successful communication.

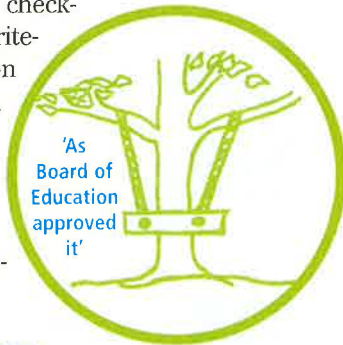


CONCISENESS

Long enough to cover the subject but short enough to be

interesting is the vintage guideline English instructors once used to describe the length of a writing assignment. In the same way, communicating athletic department coaching requests, such as equipment purchases, facility usage or schedule adjustments should be in writing and include a thorough, yet concise, description of the request.

Announcing various program changes, namely event dates, times, locations, cancellations, postponements and reschedule information must be succinct and to the point. Designing a concise and efficient "Event Change Sheet" composed mainly of informational check-off and circle-items, minimal write-in spaces and a notification check-off list to include officials, workers, trainers, transportation and others is indispensable. Also, the Event Change Sheet creates a paper trail, and in-house staff becomes accustomed to great organization.



COMMITMENT

Successful communication also requires commitment. Athletic administrators must exhibit leadership by role modeling a firm commitment to successful communication.

Communication commitment begins by being early to schedule meeting dates, issue event and transportation schedules, and distribute returnable items, such as rosters, awards forms, inventory and tournament entry sheets. Has it been mentioned that successful communication is a two-way street? An athletic director who requires coaches to submit and return items to the athletic office in a timely manner is doing his or her job to promote communication. Soon, the trickle-down effect occurs and coaches, athletes and parents recognize the advantages of making a commitment to successful communication. Lombardi said, "Individual commitment to a group effort – that is what makes a team work." Individual commitment and teamwork is what makes communication work!



CONSISTENCY

Last but not least, athletic administrators must be consistently persistent in demonstrating and promoting communication throughout the department. In general, one continues to do what has worked successfully in the past or until it no longer serves a purpose, similar to a baseball pitcher who continues to throw the same pitches until the opponent figures out the sequence.

Unlike pitching, the advantage of using winning communication repeatedly is that everyone recognizes what is coming next, knows what to expect, and is appreciated by all universally.

Lombardi said, "Winning is not a sometime thing; it's an all-time thing. You don't win once in awhile, you don't do things right once in awhile, you do them right all the time." Likewise, communication is not a sometime thing; it's an all-time thing!

As a foundational cornerstone of an athletic department, successful communication requires connecting, caring, clarity, conciseness, commitment, and consistency. Lombardi was right about the will to win, individual commitment to team effort, and winning being an all-time thing, just as caring to communicate, individual commitment to communication and communication being an all-time thing is important. **CQ**



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