

Leadership and Management: Techniques and Principles for Athletic Training

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Abstract: *Leadership and management have become topics of recent interest in athletic training. These skills are distinct from each other and are vital to a successful and efficient athletic training room. Leadership is an influence relationship, while management is an authority relationship. Leadership is concerned with knowing yourself, your staff, your profession, and how to apply people skills. Management is concerned with organization, communication, and the development of your athletic training facility's mission. By applying good management and leadership skills, you can implement your mission statement, evaluate your results, and improve the performance of your athletic training facility.*

Recently, a growing interest in the topics of Leadership and Management as they pertain to the profession of Athletic Training has developed. Having experienced and studied each skill, in both a military setting and an educational setting for 15 years, I feel I may be able to share some basic observations and lessons learned with those who may not have had the opportunity to gain insight into these topics.

We, in the world of athletic training, realize the work is hard. Rewards must often come from intrinsic satisfaction, and change has been fairly continuous and rapid. All of

these factors combine to create an environment where good leadership and management skills are vital to maintain esprit de corps, teamwork, and efficiency in the modern athletic training room. Before you can delve into the intricacies of these two skills, you must gain a basic understanding of their definitions. Many people will consider leadership and management the same thing. I and others who have studied and practiced them realize that they are not. Some courses of study will lead you to believe that management is bad leadership. This also is not true. Both are separate skills, either of which can be conducted poorly or with excellence. With these concepts in mind, I will present definitions for each.

Leadership

*“Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth.”*² In an in-depth study of the definition of the word “leadership,” Rost discovered no less than 200 separate definitions. For this writing, I will use the definition developed by Rost: *“Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes.”*¹⁰ Not all will agree with this definition (after all, there are already at least 200 others with a different idea), but it will provide a starting point for this article.

To lend credibility and congruence to this study, a definition of management must also be provided. Rost was also kind enough to develop one of these, and it will fit nicely with this

topic. *“Management is an authority relationship between at least one manager and one subordinate who coordinate their activities to produce and sell particular goods and or services.”*¹⁰ Again not everyone will agree with this definition. In fact, there are volumes written by some who do not. Further reflection on this point is another topic. This definition will provide a starting point.

The main points to be taken from this writing so far are that leadership and management are not the same skill. Leadership is an influence relationship, and management is an authority relationship. Leadership is concerned with real change, and management is concerned with goods and services. Both skills are mutually exclusive but are often practiced simultaneously. An athletic trainer who is knowledgeable and proficient in both will maintain a highly motivated and efficient athletic training room.

Assuming that your athletic training room is committing to a new paradigm, to continued progress, or to a change of any type, leadership will be required to ensure success. The application of leadership in a practical versus a theoretical manner requires the application of a few basic techniques and principles.

Know Yourself

The best place to begin leadership is with yourself.⁵ A leader must have a realistic, pragmatic understanding of his or her best-developed skills, underdeveloped skills, physical abilities, personal biases, and particular irritants which may cloud any judgments or affect any actions he or she may take. A good understanding of yourself will allow you to know when you must give extra consideration to a decision and how you will react under stress. It will allow self-confidence in those skill domains in which you are proficient. This knowledge is not easy to obtain, but through evaluation from others and by constant introspection, you can learn to know yourself.

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Lead by Example

Once you are secure with yourself, you may begin to lead others. An excellent way to begin is by example. Example often becomes contagious. If you desire commitment, you must display commitment. There are a number of ways to set an example. What type of presence do you project? Are you professional in your dress, demeanor, and display of athletic training skills? Do you maintain your judgment and bearing during times of stress? Actions I consider to be of greatest importance include exemplifying initiative, enthusiasm, dependability, and moral courage. Moral courage is extremely important. All athletic trainers must establish a set of values for their athletic training domain which they will not allow to be violated. There will be times when you will be asked to make compromises when it is not appropriate. Compromise may be instigated by a parent, athlete, coach, or even fellow athletic trainer, and it is often very difficult not to give in. It is at these times that a leader rises above the circumstances, does the right thing, and exemplifies moral courage.

There are some methods of "example" which will quickly undermine all good efforts you may attempt. Many of these examples originate from the "I've done my time" attitude. Seniority definitely should carry some privilege, but this must be used with judgment. For example, a Head Athletic Trainer should not be the person sweeping floors and wiping tables. Obviously his or her valuable time could be used more efficiently. But when it comes to sharing long hours and covering inconvenient practice times, leadership from the front will reap many future rewards.

Know Your Profession

Another dictum of leadership is: know your profession.⁶ If you wish to develop competence in your staff, you must maintain it in yourself. Anyone who has worked in this profession for even a modicum of time should be able to testify that you will

not deceive coaches, student athletic trainers, or athletes for very long. You cannot allow yourself to stagnate. You must participate in and promote continuous education. Many times the old way may work, but it will not provide the athlete with the best care, the coach with the best service, or the athletic training room with its peak operating efficiency.

Know Your People

A third principle of leadership is: know your people.⁶ In athletic training, "people" embodies staff, athletes, coaches, and anyone who conducts business with the athletic training facility. All individuals maintain certain personality quirks. To develop teamwork and efficiency, everyone in the team must have a basic understanding of how the other team members will react to different circumstances.¹² It is especially important to understand the personalities of the athletes in your care. Quality performance in rehabilitation is crucial in determining the final outcome of recovery. Some athletes require very little external motivation and assistance, while others may require substantial assistance in many areas. An understanding of each athlete's particular needs is integral to the success of his/her recovery.

Knowledge of your staff is also important. Knowing what motivates each individual, who needs close supervision, who has initiative and judgment, and whose personality works well in conjunction with another personality will allow a better deployment of your staff resources for higher quality service.¹² An area of understanding that is especially important to leading your staff is knowing how they react to pressure. As a wise friend (KR Kelly, Major, USMC) once wrote to me while he was sitting in an especially unfriendly part of the world in January 1990, "Stress does funny things to people." The complexity of this simple statement cannot be overlooked. Athletic training does provide some very stressful situations. The only way to know how people will react to stress is by exposure to real stress or

to a very real simulation. Creating a real cervical fracture, cardiac distress, or unconscious athlete has unacceptable ethical and legal drawbacks. A leader must strive for realism in drills, create stress by controlled means, and note and critique individual responses when real situations do occur. This will benefit all staff members by increasing confidence in themselves and in other members of the team. Getting to know and understand others requires adaptability and effort, but the end results are worth it.

Loyalty Encouragement Reprimand

Besides knowing your people, there are three other people skills which are vital to successful leadership or management. These skills are enacting loyalty, encouragement, and reprimand.

All organizations require loyalty if they are going to be successful. The key notion to remember is that loyalty is a two-way street.^{5,6} Staff members are expected to work hard and promote a positive portrayal of the organization. At the same time, the organization should provide positive opportunities for each staff member. Examples of positive opportunities include allowing time for educational and professional development, ensuring exposure to all facets of athletic training, and providing adequate pay for the level of work, experience, and education.

The dictum "Praise in public and reprimand in private"⁶ will encompass the concepts contained in the next two principles. It is very easy to become myopic and see only the bad results. It is more of a tendency of human nature to correct than to congratulate. A constant awareness of this will develop the habit of providing rewards, awards, and gratitude. There are times, after many hours in an athletic training room, that a bright spot is hard to find. At these times, the voicing of a simple "thank you" may go a long way. As a leader you should ensure that rewards are seen and keep a log of good performances. This will remind you and others that good things do happen

and that they are appreciated. Some people may show embarrassment when rewarded in public, but most are proud of the recognition. If staff members earn prestigious awards, ensure that they receive some public recognition. This is good, not only for them, but also for your program.

As we all know, there are times when a reprimand is required. The key is that it must be conducted properly to produce the most positive result. First, the reprimand should occur as soon after the infraction as possible. This reduces friction created by the situation and decreases the chance of further misconduct. Second, conduct the reprimand in private. Public belittlement rarely achieves any type of positive result. Third, be sure to get all sides of the story and as many facts as possible. It is all too easy to incriminate someone through rumor and innuendo. The absolute truth is often elusive, but getting as many facts as possible will limit most unwarranted reprimands. If a reprimand is indeed warranted, be honest, direct, and provide the correct action that should have been performed. Do not fall into the trap of bluffing or making idle

threats of punishment. Often your bluff will be called. If you cannot enforce your stated punishment, your credibility will be damaged. Document all infractions thoroughly. If the infraction is serious in nature, have the individual being reprimanded sign a form detailing the infraction and the fact that he or she was counseled. You may wish to sign the form also. Employing these simple steps will create a situation where all parties are aware of what the other is communicating. If the unfortunate circumstance arises where a suspension or termination is required, it can be administered without confusion or guilt.

Application of these leadership concepts will allow the execution of a more efficient management process and garner more support from those whom it affects.

Management

I will now present management tools and principles which have proven successful in the past. Application of these and the leadership concepts above will provide a solid base for organizational success.

Communication is very important when increased efficiency and sound management practices are desired. Communication must occur horizontally as well as vertically. Key individuals will include the athletic director, doctors, coaches, staff, athletes, parents, and possibly a principal or the Dean of Students.

Mission Statement

The first step in developing a communication network is to create a vision of what your athletic training room is to stand for, whom it will serve, and what will constitute its mission. This is accomplished by issuing a Mission Statement. A Mission Statement may range from a short paragraph to a single page. It is a statement which outlines the philosophy of the institution and its goals.^{4,7} It is developed with a long-range perspective but is not an edict written in stone. For an organization to ensure it is progressing and maintaining its desired objectives, a Mission Statement is updated every 1 to 5 years. A Mission Statement for an athletic training room can easily be developed by referring to the Mission Statement of the parent organization, the Domains of Athletic Training as defined by the NATA, state regulations and guidelines, and by confering with staff members and administrators. Include as many as possible of those who will be affected by the statement in its development.⁸ This will prove beneficial when it is time to support and implement the plan. A well-designed Mission Statement will set the tone of the athletic training room, establish moral guidance, set the mission of the athletic training room, and delineate roles and priorities (Table 1).

Evaluation

Once the mission statement is created, you have established the standards the athletic training room should fulfill. Next you must discover if these standards are being met or not. There are a number of tests designed to do this and they may be obtained through a professional evaluation services company.

Table 1.—Mission Statement Examples

1. Lockheed:

“Our mission is to meet the needs of our United States and foreign customers with high-quality products and services and, in so doing, produce superior returns for our shareholders and foster growth and achievement for our employees.”³

2. Bread Loaf Construction Company:

“We are Bread Loaf, a family of building professionals dedicated to and empowered by the strength of our people.

We seek challenges to create innovative solutions which make statements demonstrating our commitment to excellence.

As we grow into the 21st century, we shall continually focus upon employee wellness, community responsibility and a sensitive balance between personal and professional fulfillment.”³

3. Generic Athletic Training Department:

The Athletic Training Department, under the supervision of the Team Physician, will provide support for all athletes through the prevention, recognition, treatment, and rehabilitation of all athletic injuries. The department will assist in the education of the athlete by providing and coordinating educational and counseling programs which reflect the holistic approach to education established by the university.³

Help may also be obtained through the instructors of evaluation and statistics at the nearest educational institution. Some situations may not require a formal evaluation test. An informal questioning of staff members, coaches, athletes, and administrators may provide adequate feedback concerning the success of the athletic training room. Topics that may be of concern might include: 1) How does your facility meet your needs? 2) What is your patient population and how are their demands being met? 3) What services are required of your facility and how are they met? 4) What human resources are available and how may they be utilized to meet your needs? 5) How well does your present mode of operation meet the vision as established by your Mission Statement?

After your initial evaluation is complete, the Mission Statement will provide the guidance for two other crucial documents: a job description and a Policy and Procedures Manual. While the Mission Statement is fairly general and philosophical in nature, the job description and Policy and Procedures Manual are specific by design.

Job Description

A job description should be specific enough to ensure a complete understanding of the responsibilities associated with a position, yet leave enough latitude that the employee can exercise initiative and judgment in the conduct of the job. The job description protects both the employer and the employee by communicating the scope of the job in question in a precise and efficient manner. The topics included in the job description will vary depending upon your institution, so refer to examples from similar institutions to get a start on your job description (Table 2).

Policy and Procedures Manual

The Policy and Procedures Manual is the second vital document. It is designed to communicate the rules and guidelines of an organization in a clear and concise manner in order to minimize confusion within the organization. Many topics may be included in such a manual. These will vary according to the type of institution with which your athletic training room is associated. A few topics germane to many athletic training room scenarios are listed in Table 3.

A chain of responsibility and role delineations should be established. This will help eliminate redundancies in areas such as communication with coaches and doctors and performance of administrative chores. It will ensure that everyone knows what his/her primary responsibilities are, and with whom to coordinate other tasks. This should not restrict creativity or limit coworker assistance, but it should be concise enough to leave no doubt as to individual responsibilities.

Event-coverage standards should also be established. These will allow the coach to know what level of coverage he or she can expect, and the athletic trainer can avoid work overload by establishing what sports and hours he or she is expected to work. Things to consider here are: 1) What sports need covered? 2) When are student athletic trainers allowed to provide coverage? 3) Is away-match coverage required, as well as home coverage?

Athlete physicals are another important topic which should be discussed. Some concerns here are: 1) Who will perform them? 2) What qualification standards are required for each sport? 3) Who has the final authority as to disqualification or return to play? 4) Who is required to receive a physical examination?

Student athletic trainer guidelines should be established. Prerequisites for acceptance to the program should be established, progress and continuing education requirements outlined, and roles and responsibilities detailed. These guidelines are of special importance because they will often create the first impression of athletic training to the student. Imprinting the proper moral and professional standards at this initial exposure will be integral to the success of the student in the future.

Medical insurance coverage requirements should also be explained. The insurance quagmire has become a large factor in sports today. Most institutions can no longer afford to cover the whole cost of athlete insurance coverage. It should be made very clear as to what type of insur-

Table 2.—Job Description Example

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1. **The Head Athletic Trainer, under the supervision of the University Team Physician and reporting to the Director of Athletics, is responsible for all aspects of health care in the athletic environment, to include, but not limited to, the six domains, as outlined by National Athletic Trainers' Association.**
 - Prevention of Athletic Injuries (describe in detail).
 - Recognition and Evaluation of Injuries (describe in detail).
 - Management, Treatment and Disposition of Athletic Injuries (describe in detail).
 - Rehabilitation of Athletic Injuries (describe in detail).
 - Organization and Administration of the Athletic Training Program (describe in detail).
 - Education and Counseling of Athletes (describe in detail).

The Head Athletic Trainer must also maintain on-going NATA certification by satisfying the requirements for obtaining Continuing Education Units.⁹
 2. **Assistant Trainers will assist the Head Athletic Trainer in the prevention, immediate care, management, and rehabilitation of athletic injuries to the intercollegiate athletic teams. Assistants must be currently certified with the NATA and fulfill the continuing educational requirements to maintain certification.⁹**
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ance the institution provides, what type of coverage the athlete is required to provide, and what exceptions will be allowed.

Media communications is a vital area of concern. The elimination of confusion and misinformation in this area is critical to an institution. Special areas of concern are the topics of athlete death or serious injury. The damage to institutional credibility and the emotional pain that can ensue when incorrect information is released or improper lines of notification are followed is incalculable and inexcusable. Liaison with the parent institution is recommended, because it often has guidelines concerning student mishaps and media relations. Related to this concern is the notification of parents. The guidelines for this will be different, depending on the institutional situation. For example, a high school athletic trainer may be required to contact parents in many more cases than a college ath-

letic trainer whose athletes are not minors.

Emergency procedures should also be outlined. Topics of concern are: 1) When is ambulance coverage required? 2) When and how should the EMS system be activated? 3) Who should be notified of an emergency? 4) Where is the nearest phone to each venue that is used located?

Drug education and screening have also become important topics for athletic trainers to address. There are a number of resources which provide insight into the conduct of these programs. A good place to start is by contacting the NCAA (6201 College Boulevard, Overland Park, KS 66211-2422; telephone: 913-339-1906). The NCAA will readily provide information materials outlining drug testing legislation, student athlete consent forms, NCAA-banned drug classes, testing protocol, and guidelines for a drug screening program.¹ Your parent institution may

have established policies which must be considered in the development of a program. Many universities have a drug and alcohol counselor who may provide helpful advice and resource materials. Other resources include the legal advisors for the institution and the United States Olympic Committee Sports Medicine and Science Division (1750 East Boulder Street, Colorado Springs, CO 80909-5760; telephone: 800-233-0393).

Other topics that may require consideration are medical file handling procedures, OSHA requirements compliance guidance, and standards concerning the handling of medications.

Implementation

You are now ready to begin an organized implementation of your plan. The first basic decision to consider for implementation is whether to phase in the changes by stages or to employ a single overhaul. Either strategy may be viable, depending upon your situation.

Leadership and communication will again be key elements to employ. During the creation of your Mission Statement and Policy and Procedures Manual, you will have developed changes you wish to implement. Change represents the unknown, and few things will cause fear and rebellion like the unknown. By applying the leadership concepts previously established and ensuring clear communication, many obstacles to success may be avoided. If people understand what you are trying to accomplish and how it will benefit them, support will be much more forthcoming. If leadership and communication are not employed, rumors will develop and grudges and jealousy will create destructive inter-office politics.

The next important part of implementation will be education. You should start by ensuring that everyone involved has the same understanding of your Mission Statement. This should be easy if the proper liaisons were made during its creation. Once this is accomplished, you must provide the tools that will allow oth-

Table 3.—Table of Contents for a Policy and Procedures Manual⁹

I. Mission Statement for the Department of Athletic Training
II. Athletic Training Organization and Responsibilities
A. Organizational chart
B. Job descriptions
III. Medical
A. Physical exam procedures
B. Clearance to participate
C. Physician referral
D. Individuals eligible to use the athletic training facility
E. Event coverage
IV. Insurance Requirements and Coverage
A. Insurance required of all athletes
B. Insurance provided by the university
V. Student Athletic Trainer Guidelines
A. Job description
B. Qualification criteria
C. Professional standards
VI. Media Policies and Guidelines
A. Lines of communications chart
B. Media access to the athletic training facility
C. Parental notification
D. Serious injury/athlete death notification
VII. Emergency Procedures/Conditions

ers to help you implement your plans. This may be done in a number of ways. Examples include: establishing scheduled in-services, providing constant practical application in the athletic training room, encouraging initiative and innovation, promoting the reading of professional journals, delegating responsibility, and supporting and providing time for outside continuing education. By employing these methods, you will discover the development of intellectual interchange, better coordinated teamwork, and improved performance.^{8,11,13}

Education should be external as well as internal. By educating people outside of your department, you may gain surprise financial support or a political ally who will support and promote your cause in influential circles. Groups that should be included in your educational campaign are: alumni board members, faculty members, other health groups on campus or in the area, and community boosters. Many of the individuals in these organizations may have little knowledge of athletic trainer certification requirements or of the magnitude of services that the athletic trainer can provide.

Later, you will need to reevaluate your program. Some of your results will be excellent, and, in most cases, other results will require further refinement. The key to this evaluation is to not be concerned with placing blame for any failures, but to concentrate on developing a better solution. Once again, ensure that you obtain input from all levels horizontally and vertically. Employ the use of flow charts, graphs, and statistical methods. These will give you a better

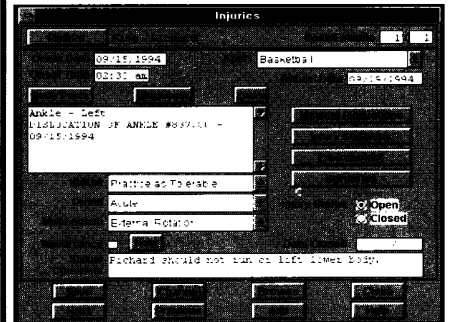
view of your results, delineate between good methods and good luck, and provide good tools to use to sell your plans and gain more support. Your evaluation should develop new ideas and methods for implementation which will allow you to start the process all over again.

Time-tested results of the above leadership and management techniques have repeatedly proven their applicability and dependability.^{5,6,8,12} They have created an atmosphere which allowed an increase in work quality, increased morale, decreased costs, and developed a proactive response capability. All of these may be combined to help an athletic training room progress toward its ultimate goal, the improved health care of our athletes.

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