Finding Coaching Help

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Abstract

Coaching a forensics program on your own can cause burnout at a rapid rate. With students often competing in a half-dozen events each, the time it takes a coach to work on each event accumulates quickly. This article deals with ways to find competent outside help in ways that enhance student learning and coaching sanity.

Being a director of a forensics program can be a stressful juggling act. The demands of academic teaching, course preparation work, research projects, and Committee or department meetings are difficult to balance by themselves. Workman (1997) identifies six areas of competency that forensics directors must possess in order to succeed in their role of leading their forensics program. Workman notes that a director must be competent in the instruction of events, financial management, all areas of leadership, being an administrator, professionalism and as an interpersonal mentor for students.

The idea that coaches experience "burnout" from the excessive demands of collegiate forensics has received a fair share of critical attention. (Billings, 2002; Burnett, 2002; Holm & Miller, 2004). The majority of forensics teams do not have internal institutional assistance with department faculty or graduate students aiding in the running of their programs. The director is the sole individual responsible for all aspects of team management. This task can be extremely overwhelming, especially for the newly hired director of forensics.

However, help is available. This article will focus on how newly hired directors of forensics programs can find coaching assistance outside of their respective collegiate institution. This article will argue that coaching and judging help can be found by contacting and working with area high schools, thereby, reducing at least some of the overwhelming stresses a new director will feel.

Brand (1996) and Snider (1994) both argue that better bonds need to be established between high school and collegiate programs. Holm & Miller (2004) clearly articulate that college programs must have a "strong and healthy outreach" program with area high schools. Programs are built on the strength of high school recruits. These students have competitive experience and can comprehend the time, energy and discipline needed to compete in forensics. College directors, however, must be cautious of their approach in working with high school directors. In many states and regional areas, animosity often exists between high school and collegiate forensic programs. Billings (2002) clearly stipulates how high schools are often perceived by some college programs as merely "feeder programs." Inherent differences in competition events on both levels can also create this animosity. Both levels often don't understand these differences. Both levels assume their way of performing is superior. Unfortunately, when this assertion is challenged, strained relationships are often the result.
Dayton and Kay (2002) suggest that college coaches need to be aware of the structural differences between the arenas of competition. If college coaches realize these differences and are willing to work with them, then getting coaching and sharing in the resources of high school programs is a strong possibility.

**High School Help**

There are numerous ways to locate help on the high school level. Placing a call to a state's Board of Education office should provide the college director with a list of schools in the state that have speech and debate teams. Another option would be to contact the admissions office of one's collegiate institution for a list of all high schools in their respective geographical area. Then, through a process of phone calls, letters or E-mail, the director can discover which high schools have a forensics program.

The college director can also utilize the help of colleagues in locating high school coaching assistance. Department members may already have pre-established professional contacts and networks within the high school community. Conferring with faculty members in the institution's education training department will also provide informational access to high schools in the area.

After locating and contacting high school speech and debate directors, college directors can then tap into some very useful coaching resources. The primary way that high school programs can aid their college/university counterparts is through their networking capabilities. One high school director can introduce the college director to other high school coaches. Attending and judging a local high school tournament would allow for these introductions and networks to be established.

Finding enough qualified hired judges is always a difficult task for any tournament director on the high school or college level. If the college director is expected or desires to run a tournament, then tapping into the list of judges who work at high school competitions is extremely important for a successful and smooth tournament. Coaching help for the college director's program could be found in these individuals who frequently judge at high school tournaments. Additionally, the college director could use their college students to help provide judges for any high school tournament.

High school directors could also help the new college director with the logistics of running their college tournament. High school coaches are familiar with the area and can provide assistance in selecting local hotels, restaurants and/or entertainment options for the college tournament.

High school directors can also assist the college director with coaching help by providing names of students who are attending the college director's institution. Directors of forensics have often heard the painful sound of students admitting, "Oh, I didn't know we had a speech team on campus." Despite the most planned out recruitment strategies, plastering the campus with posters and advertising in classes, college forensics teams usually never encounter let alone even get to meet the vast majority of students who have high school speech experience.
High school directors are more than likely aware of which colleges or universities their former students are currently attending. Simply given a list of names can help the college director in their recruitment or coaching needs.

Finally, one of the biggest demands of any college coach is finding literature and topic ideas for the students on their team. While events will vary between college and high school speech, some literature and topic choices could be used on both levels. Many high school programs probably have some form of library or file of literature and topics. Just getting a start or exposure to ideas can aid the college director in organizing ideas for his or her team. Perhaps an agreement could be arranged where literature and topics are traded depending on the appropriateness of the student and their competitive level.

Conclusion

Being a director of a speech team can seem overwhelming. A new director has a large collection of coaching help at their disposal. If the new director is at an institution with a rich history in speech competition then contacting alumni for coaching help and assistance would seem a logical and prudent course of action.

However, getting in touch with area high schools can also provide the director with a wealth of coaching help. Differences clearly exist between the two levels. But these differences are only on the surface and with clear communication can be approached and worked out smoothly. Regardless of the level, high school and college competitors and coaches both share a common bond in that they participate in an activity that they love. Helping each other out with coaching or any other form of assistance can only strengthen that bond.
References


