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Managing Volunteers

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According to the Nonprofit Risk Management Center, approximately 90 million Americans perform volunteer service each year. Private schools, like other organizations, utilize volunteers to enhance educational programs that are offered to students and at times to the public. In addition, school boards and committees are comprised of volunteers willing to give of their time to improve the level of educational services provided to the students.

Like other nonprofits, schools want to attract and retain qualified volunteers. However, there is a price tag when making a serious commitment to properly manage volunteers and volunteer programs. Staff time spent for screening, assigning, training and managing volunteers can add up, depending on the type of program and roles the volunteers are assigned.

The level of risk a volunteer presents to an organization is relative to the volunteer's assignment. Although litigation against schools (as the sponsoring organization)

and individual volunteers is minimal, retaining a volunteer is not unlike hiring a full-time employee – the organization assumes a level of vicarious liability for the actions of its agents, which a volunteer can very well be. In addition – and perhaps more likely – is an injury claim from the volunteer.

Risk Control Methods

There are several steps a school can take to reduce liability:

1. Assess the assignment. Look at the volunteer positions that exist within the school. Identify the exposures – both to the volunteer and others – and decide if the function is one that should be performed by a volunteer. If the function is satisfactory, look for ways to improve the overall safety of the assignment. For example, persons helping with outdoor clean-up programs should be provided with the same personal protective equipment and training for the assignment as paid employees.

Volunteers should not engage in certain activities, given the nature of the task – such as a high-risk activity that involves the use of tools or machin-

ery, one-on-one contact with children or those that occur in isolated locations.

2. Create a written description of the essential duties required of the position.
3. Screening is critical. A general guideline to consider: the greater the opportunity for violations of trust, the more intensive the screening process should be. Make sure every applicant is interviewed in person.
4. Maintain an evaluation system. Schools should have the ability to counsel, correct and terminate a volunteer as needed. Keep records as you would with full-time employees.
5. Do not discriminate. The school's recruiting efforts and final appointments should be without regard to race, religion, national origin, gender and other characteristics.
6. Determine the experience, background, education and credentials that the position requires. For example, the American Red Cross routinely uses nurses and social workers as part of their Disaster Action Programs. These individuals must be properly

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licensed and certified. Emergency response vehicle drivers must have an unblemished license and attend a defensive driving course.

7. Use an application. An application requires potential volunteers to provide information that can be evaluated and verified. Applicants with ulterior motives, such as pedophiles and others with criminal records, may discontinue their efforts once they are asked to provide background information or references. While each school has different concerns and needs, applications typically include the following:

- Employment history
- Prior volunteer experience
- Education
- List of references
- Do you have a valid drivers license?
- What are your skills, hobbies, interest and experiences?
- Why do you want to volunteer?
- Have you ever been convicted of a crime? (If so, please explain – do not include traffic violations)

In addition, most written applications end with a statement that the applicant recognizes that criminal background; Department of Motor Vehicle records and other references may be checked. Please consult with your attorney while drafting and before using a volunteer application.

Good questions for references are:

- In what capacity have you known

the applicant and for how long?

- Would you rehire the applicant? If no, why not?
- Was the candidate punctual?
- How well did the candidate work with others?
- Why did they leave your organization?

There are differences of opinion concerning the feasibility (along with several legal questions) concerning background checks. These include concerns such as: can they be conducted? What type and to what extent should backgrounds be checked? How economical are they? Do local and/or state background checks suffice? What happens if a check isn't done, or a violation goes unnoticed? Lastly, what types of violations should bar a person from volunteering? To this end, we recommend conducting at least state background checks.

8. Conduct an orientation. This gives you the opportunity to introduce supervisors and administrators and reinforce responsibilities, duties and performance expectations. Orientation can also address what behavior is prohibited and how to handle a crisis or emergency. Knowing how to do things and what is expected helps to strengthen the experience. Follow-up with additional training as needed. This is especially true when the school is changing the volunteer's assignment.

9. Recognize good work. An annual volunteer appreciation

event or some other type of recognition demonstrates the school's gratitude towards volunteers and their efforts. Also – be respectful of the volunteer's individual abilities and time commitments.

10. Consider using a volunteer handbook. A handbook should be drafted with input from the school attorney, HR manager and the administrator or manager in the school who has ultimate responsibility over the volunteers. Handbook topics include:

- Mission and history of the organization
- Description of the educational and related programs
- Overview of volunteer steering process
- Expectations of volunteers and the code of conduct
- Volunteer evaluation process
- Prohibited conduct/behavior
- Termination or end-of-relationship
- Grievance policy for volunteers
- Operational guidance/ management structure
- What to do in the event of an emergency

Management and planning is needed and involvement by administrators is essential. Attention to recruitment, screening, appointment, assignments, training, evaluation and recordkeeping will reduce risk and ensure a positive volunteer experience. ■



Fair Play

By Donna A. Lopiano, Ph.D., President, Sports Management Resources

Abuse and Bullying in Athletics: Does Your School Have a Policy?

The development and implementation of policies regarding abuse in sport, whether sexual or not, will help create a more civil school and athletics department climate in which sexual harassment or other forms of verbal, physical or psychological abuse are less likely to occur.

Whether the school or athletics administrator intends to address coach-athlete or athlete-athlete interactions, good policies and procedures for reporting and responding to abuse should apply to all school personnel. The gym and the playing field are sport classrooms. We must have the same expectations for civility and the physical, emotional and psychological safety of students in all school environments.

What is Abuse?

Abuse is defined as the willful infliction of injury, pain, mental anguish, unreasonable confinement, intimidation or punishment through physical, verbal, emotional or sexual means. Sexual harassment consists of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Moreover, romantic and/

or sexual relationships between coaches and athletes are regarded as an abuse of professional status and power.

The most ignored and commonly accepted form of abuse in sport is verbal. Sport environments often tolerate coaches yelling at players, officials or fans. Our society regularly allows coaches to demean a player's integrity or to call players names from "You're playing like girls!" to "You stink!" or "You are terrible!" or even the use of expletives. Many coaches are also artful in the practice of psychological or emotional abuse; from threatening to kick players off a team or removing their athletic scholarship, to belittling the slowest or weakest player, or putting the responsibility for the success of a team on the very best player.

While we are getting better at warning coaches, teachers and other school personnel not to touch or put their hands on students or players, it is not uncommon to see a coach roughly yanking a player by the arm or



jersey into a different position on the court or field. It is also common practice for many coaches to put a hand on a player's shoulder and then painfully apply pressure above the collar bone to make a point without appearing to engage in aggressive behavior. And there are still too many coaches slapping, shoving, or hitting players on helmets or pads or throwing balls or equipment at players. Some coaches use physical abuse as a method of team discipline from demanding push-ups when a player makes a mistake, the use of excessive exercise to the point where players vomit or collapse or even the denial of fluids when performance doesn't measure up to expectations. It isn't right for a team to play an exhausting contest and then be forced into practice immediately after a game in response to poor play. All of these forms of abuse endanger the health and well-being of student-athletes.

But perhaps the most abhorrent mechanism of abuse is bullying – when a coach or more powerful player verbally, physically or psychologically mistreats a weaker or more passive player, seeking to control, belittle or dominate that player. When this bullying is taken to an extreme and applied to a group of players or an entire team, it is commonly referred to as "hazing". Hazing is any activity intended to embarrass, degrade or humiliate a person with the expect-

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tation that the subjects of such activity are expected to accept and even welcome the ritual as a rite of passage or acceptance. Whether the activity is apparently harmless as requiring barefoot walking in cooked spaghetti or more harmful such as having to stand on one leg for ten minutes or health endangering such as chugging shots of alcohol, hazing is a form of abuse.

All of these examples in some way compromise the professional integrity of the academic institution, the athletics program and the educational mission of athletics.

Good Policy and Practice

School athletics departments should have a clearly written policy statement that prohibits the verbal, physical or psychological abuse of athletes. The policy should be distributed annually to all athletics department personnel and athletes and posted in the locker room. Required coaches meetings and educational programs for athletes should be conducted to address these issues and provide examples of the myriad forms of abuse that could be encountered. During educational programs for student-athletes, administrators must emphasize that there is no difference between coaches abusing student-athletes and student-athletes abusing each other. Abuse should not only be defined as unacceptable student or employee professional conduct, but the penalty for demonstrat-

ing such behavior should be significant. Consider suspension/termination of employment in the case of coaches and suspension or the removal from a team in the case of student-athletes.

Abuse prohibition policies should also detail a confidential procedure for athletes to report such activity to neutral parties (non-athletics department personnel) including guidance counselors, the school principal, the health center or school nurse, teachers or other student affairs personnel, either formally through written complaints or informally. All of these professionals should either have or receive the necessary training to handle such complaints and additional counseling services should be provided to those who have been the targets of abuse. Formal complaint procedures should ensure confidentiality and the legal rights of coaches and student-athletes must be protected. An appeal procedure should also be in place for situations that are not resolved to the satisfaction of involved parties. Remember that neither coaches nor athletes can be denied their rights to pursue legal action in a court of law. In addition, policies prohibiting retaliatory behavior must be in place and such behavior should be treated separately and as stringently as the original instance of abuse.

Every school is obligated to take immediate action to ensure the educational environment is free of abuse and to investigate any

allegations of abuse in a timely and efficient manner.

Schools should also have a policy in place to conduct background checks on prospective employees and coaches to ensure that individuals with a history of abusive behavior in the workplace are eliminated from consideration. In addition to screening the anti-abuse policy should be explained and new employees should be asked to sign a statement indicated that they have received and fully understand the policy during the orientation of all new employees.

Every effort should be made to create a climate in which coaches and student-athletes feel comfortable with their individual obligation to report the occurrence of abusive behaviors as part of their responsibility to create a safe educational environment where all student-athletes can flourish. ■

Reference: See an excellent reference on this topic, "Addressing the Issue of Verbal, Physical and Psychological Abuse of Athletes: The Foundation Position", a position paper of the Women's Sports Foundation, East Meadow, NY, that can be located at www.womenssportsfoundation.org



How I See It

By Donald McPherson, President of Don McPherson Enterprises, LLC

Celebrate our Civility

A member of Congress shouts 'You lie' at the President of the United States during an address to a joint session of Congress

A world class athlete openly threatens a line judge during the US Open tennis championship match at a venue steeped with vaunted tradition and etiquette

During an acceptance speech at the MTV Video Music Awards, a recipient is interrupted by someone in the audience who grabs the microphone from her hand to protest to the crowd that another performer should have received the honor

Is our society less civil today, or are we simply exposed to such acts because of a vast, scrutinizing media culture? This is the vexing question posed in the aftermath of each egregious act. Pundits and "experts" trivialize and debate the issue in the echo chamber of talk radio and television panels. The provocative debate provides "news outlets" with solid programming for a few days and then...we're on to the next one. The reality of the aforementioned incidents is that none of them are illegal acts. Sanctions can only come from a governing body (e.g. Congress, the USTA or MTV from the examples above) and are typically symbolic gestures of admonishment. Furthermore, they demonstrate a



growing acceptance of how far the boundaries of decency and civility have stretched.

Caught in the middle of the debate are children who witness the behavior and, more profoundly, our lack of outrage and action. Our lack of dialogue is matched by our inability to render any meaningful consequences. And, as we debate and take sides, the behavior becomes relative to a particular moment. If the perpetrator has other redeemable qualities, the behavior is ultimately excused as a result of "extenuating circumstances." All of our analysis and political maneuvering are viewed as tacit approval in the eyes of the general public and most especially children.

In January of 2004, a "wardrobe malfunction" that lasted no more

than one second, on national television, seemed to rock our nation. Within months the Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act of 2004 was written and passed, governing "decency," or the lack thereof, in the media. Still, the behavior we witness, especially in the media, seems to deteriorate daily. This is proof that legislation and harsh consequences are not the answer.

As I have lectured across the nation over the past 23 years and talked with young people about these issues, I'm challenged with the fact that exposing and discussing bad behavior is not the way to prevent it from happening again in the future. However, it does provide a platform for a healthy debate. What is often lacking in the subsequent discourse is a collective celebration of the positive. Our acts of kind-

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ness need not be random. Rather they should be the norm and we should acknowledge them with the same deliberation as we do the negative behavior.

For every rude, boorish public figure, there are, fortunately, countless more doing the right thing; behaving in admirable, positive ways that contribute to

to model their own behavior on, which will foster new leadership from existing groups.

In 1987 I played on an undefeated college football team that took a pledge before the start of the season to be “alcohol free.” It was a decision we were encouraged to make by our head coach. While it was not an official school policy,

on Saturday night? Where do you hang out?’ In the process, new and positive relationships were formed and my presence as a “leader” on the team was dramatically enhanced.

In 2008 I was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame. The two most important factors in my selection were the successful 1987 season and the work I’ve done over the years as a “positive role model.” For the latter, I don’t consider myself unique. Many young people, including student-athletes, engage each day to make their communities and schools a better, safer place. Yet, they do not always receive the same recognition or attention of the traditional “high profile” individuals. As much as we seek to identify those who do wrong, we must celebrate those who do it right.

I do believe we are a more civil society today than in years past. However, as we nurture a future generation we must resist the trend where decency and civility are trumped by political relativity, athletic prowess or celebrity. This is true in the larger culture as well as our schools. We must also allow a platform for students who are doing things the right way to be celebrated. Then, we will ask, are we a more peaceful, loving society...or are we just seeing it more because of the media? ■



the greater good. They deserve the same recognition and scrutiny as those who demonstrate poor behavior. Likewise, when we address issues like hazing or bullying, we often reflect on the negative, citing previous acts and predators as examples of “what not to do.” However, a focus on positive examples provides actionable behavior for students

the pledge dramatically impacted our social behavior. The (hazing) pressure to drink was replaced with encouragement not to drink. And, as alternative, “bonding” behaviors were sought, new leaders and a different kind of leadership emerged. I was never much of a partier in college. So, when we took the pledge many teammates would ask me, ‘what do you do



Know Your Helmets!

Head protection is essential (and required in many jurisdictions) for different types of recreational activities. A “one size fits all” approach towards helmets does not work – helmets are designed to offer protection against head injuries for specific types of activities.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) provides information about helmets, along with other safety and recreational equipment.

The following chart was taken from the CPSC web site at:

www.cpsc.gov. Go to CPSC Publications, then to Recreational and Sports Safety and select document 349. ■

Activity	Helmet Type	Applicable Standard(s)
Individual Activities – Wheeled		
Bicycling (including low speed, motor assisted) Roller & In-line Skating – Recreational Scooter Riding (including low speed, motor assisted)	Bicycle	CPSC, ASTM F1447, Snell B-90/95, Snell N-94†
BMX Cycling	BMX	CPSC, ASTM F2032
Downhill Mountain Bike Racing	Downhill	CPSC, ASTM F1952
Roller & In-line Skating – Aggressive/Trick Skateboarding	Skateboard	ASTM F1492†, Snell N-94†
Individual Activities – Wheeled Large Motor		
ATV Riding Dirt- & Mini-Bike Riding Motocrossing	Motocross or Motorcycle	DOT FMVSS 218, Snell M-2005
Karting/Go-Karting	Karting or Motorcycle	DOT FMVSS 218, Snell K-98, Snell M-2005
Moped Riding Powered Scooter Riding	Moped or Motorcycle	DOT FMVSS 218, Snell L-98, Snell M-2005
Individual Activities – Non-Wheeled		
Horseback Riding	Equestrian	ASTM F1163, Snell E-2001
Rock- & Wall-Climbing	Mountaineering	EN 12492†, Snell N-94†
Team Sport Activities ‡		
Baseball, Softball & T-Ball	Baseball Batter's	NOCSAE ND022
	Baseball Catcher's	NOCSAE ND024
Football	Football	NOCSAE ND002, ASTM F717
Ice Hockey	Hockey	NOCSAE ND030, ASTM F1045
Lacrosse	Lacrosse	NOCSAE ND041
Winter Activities		
Skiing Snowboarding	Ski	ASTM F2040, CEN 1077, Snell RS-98 or S-98
Snowmobiling	Snowmobile	DOT FMVSS 218, Snell M-2000
Although a helmet has not yet been designed for the following two activities, until such helmets exist, wearing one of the three listed types of helmets may be preferable to wearing no helmet at all.		
Ice Skating Sledding	Bicycle	CPSC, ASTM F1447, Snell B-90/95 or N-94†
	Skateboard	ASTM F1492†, Snell N-94†
	Ski	ASTM F2040, CEN 1077, Snell RS-98 or S-98

The federal CPSC Safety Standard for Bicycle Helmets is mandatory for those helmets indicated by **CPSC**.

† This helmet is designed to withstand more than one moderate impact, but protection is provided for only a limited number of impacts. Replace if visibly damaged (e.g., a cracked shell or crushed liner) and/or when directed by the manufacturer.

‡ Team sport helmets are designed to protect against multiple head impacts typically occurring in the sport (e.g., ball, puck, or stick impacts; player contact; etc.), and, generally, can continue to be used after such impacts. Follow manufacturer's recommendations for replacement or reconditioning.

Definitions: ASTM - ASTM International; CEN - European Committee for Standardization; DOT - Dept. of Transportation; EN - Euro-norm or European Standard; NOCSAE - National Operating Committee on Standards in Athletic Equipment; Snell - Snell Memorial Foundation.



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