

Do More with Less: Preparing for the Unknown Season

The economy is affecting your season and coaching responsibilities. High school sports are facing shortened seasons, elimination of junior varsity sports, reduced scrimmages, and shrinking transportation funds¹. Athletic programs consider “pay to play”^{2,3} as expected drops in gate receipts¹ add to the problem. Your budget may be fragile, yet you must plan the season for your athletes. How do you lead when you don’t know where you’re going?

The answer is: **Control the controllables**. As a leader, you control your communication style. You control your reaction to the anxiety of the unknown and stay focused on what is critical for success. You control the balance in your life which will replenish your energy for the long season ahead.

Communication. The natural tendency in these situations is to complain and focus on the negative. However, this brings down the morale of those around you.

You will find your administration may be more inclined to work with you if communications with them are proactive and cooperative:

- *Understand their perspective*, even if you don’t agree. It keeps you as an ally.
- When discussing a problem, *present it with one or two possible solutions*. They will appreciate your practical approach.
- *Keep your cool*. If you approach them in anger, your emotion will overshadow your message.

Other coaches, and particularly your players, follow your lead:

- *Be realistically positive*. Understanding and accepting the reality of the season, and having a plan to get through it successfully, will keep your team focused and optimistic.
- *This is a teachable moment*. Mentally tough athletes remain determined, focused, confident, and in-control under pressure. Talk about mental toughness as it applies to this economic challenge and in their sport performance.

Anxiety about the future is normal. Here are a few things you can do to perform under the pressure:

- *Breathe deeply*. I know you’ve heard this before – but here is why it works: Your breathing regulates your intensity. A few slow, diaphragmatic breaths throughout the day will give your body a brief rest and clear your mind so you can refocus on what’s essential.
- *Identify what’s essential*. One of my most effective interventions when helping an athlete perform under pressure is to focus on the answers to these four questions:
 - What’s my job? (2-3 key things you can control)
 - Do I know how to do my job? (Get the information if you don’t)
 - Can I do my job? (If you don’t have the skills to be successful, where can you get assistance?)
 - Will I do my job? (Commit and take action)
- *Be prepared*. When we are nervous, we ask ourselves a lot of “What if ...” questions. Rather than ruminate on these, take time to answer them.

Find balance. As important as sport is, there are other areas of your life to attend to such as family and health. Stay balanced for your best performance in all areas.

Keep these ideas in mind as you prepare for your season and you’ll bring your team through this economic crunch successfully.

References

1. Dunn, K. (2009, June 6). Ailing economy taking toll on high school sports. *The Baltimore Sun*, Pg. 1D.
2. <http://www.gazettes.com/articles/2009/07/29/opinion/editorials/doc4a7099c4ba137947160280.txt>
3. <http://www.baltimoresun.com/features/parenting/bal-payforsports-0716.0.2435547.story>