



Retention of coaches and officials

Any club that is able to retain its pool of coaches and officials must be doing something right, as it is very difficult in the current environment to get a long term commitment from people to coach and officiate at club level.

Those clubs that are successful have found the best way to retain is to ensure these three key words are a significant part of their club's philosophy regarding coaching and officiating:

- **Acknowledge**
- **Recognise**
- **Reward**

As with other things in life (such as our career and our community involvement) if we feel valued and appreciated for what we do we are more likely to stay involved and our enjoyment factor is increased. So it is with our club volunteers. We need to give them a sense of being valued and appreciated and the hopeful outcome is continued involvement and commitment to the club.

How can clubs do this?

In understanding what motivates people to get involved as a coach or official it is important to realise that most do not get involved because of the rewards and recognition, but without it most people will not stay involved.

Retaining Coaches and Officials through Management and Succession Planning

The most successful clubs off the field are those with a strong volunteer support base, a healthy following of supporters, parents and friends, links with strong corporate support and sponsorship opportunities and good standing in their community. It is important to work closely with the coaches and officials to develop a positive culture surrounding a club. Coaches and officials need to feel they are part of the club. The key ingredient of working with these people is about "managing your coaches and officials".

Retention Strategies

1. **Oversight** - someone needs to have the role of overseeing and supporting the coaches and officials. This may be a club coaching or officiating coordinator whose job is to manage the activities of this team of people. It may involve sourcing new information and resources for them, providing a listening ear for any issues they might have, and representing their concerns to the club administrators.
2. **Feedback and review** - a process needs to be put in place where coaches and officials have an opportunity to review their performance and others are able to offer comment on their performance (eg players under their care). Without this process, it may not be possible for a club to find out about how to improve its performance and the performance of its coaches and officials.
3. **Appropriate job roles** - clubs must make sure that the tasks given to the coaches and officials are appropriate to their level of skill and experience. If this does not occur, then conflict may arise and so the club needs to monitor this to ensure the safety and enjoyment of players and others is maintained.



4. **Recruitment** - where good recruitment processes are in place the most suitable coaches and officials are chosen. Where poor recruitment or no recruitment practices are in place, clubs will often have to deal with major issues because they have inappropriate coaches in charge of teams and poor practices are being accepted.
5. **Letter of offer** - on appointing any new coach or official to the club it is important from the very beginning to recognise the importance of their role. This can be done in the form of an official letter of offer or welcome to the club.
6. **Induction** - it is a good idea to link any new coach/official with an experienced person within the club whose role is to mentor the new person and to induct them in the policies, rules and behaviours of the club. Another valuable resource is to provide the new person with a handbook detailing all relevant information about the club and their role.
7. **Training and education** - up skilling coaches and officials is an important part of the support that clubs can provide. Sometimes clubs need to take on novice coaches and officials who lack experience, skills and often knowledge about the sport. By supporting these novices with training and education, it is possible for the club to develop a highly skilled and more competent team. Even experienced coaches and officials can benefit from ongoing development, and this is also a requirement for accredited coaches and officials to maintain their accreditation. Generally state associations or State Departments of Sport offer courses for coaches and officials. These should be promoted and financial support given to attend.
8. **Designated page on club website** - more and more clubs are now developing their own website. Consideration needs to be given to the inclusion of a designated section for coaches and officials. This section could be used for information, handy hints, coaching and officiating tips, highlighting special achievements, rule and policy changes etc.
9. **Recognition** - it is vital that a club recognises the efforts and contribution of its coaches and officials. There are many ways in which clubs can do this as a means of showing the coaches and officials they are appreciated and valued. A person who is valued is more likely to continue their involvement with an organisation and they will see this as being well managed.
10. **Exit interviews** - When a coach or official has decided to give it away, it is important that time is spent discussing with them any areas of improvement that can be made by the club to ensure coaches and officials are being acknowledged, recognised and rewarded.

The value of planning for the future (succession planning)

Another measure of a successful club is its ability to hold on to volunteers, and the planning it puts in place when a new pool of volunteers is required. This is called succession planning. A succession plan is a way of making sure all the good work a club puts into practice is not wasted. It is a way of planning for the future by putting in steps and processes to “keep the good work kicking on”.

It is too late just prior to the beginning of a new season for a club to start thinking about the pool of coaches and officials that will be required for the season. Clubs should get into the habit of planning at least three to six months prior to any new season. Once a review is conducted at the end of a season club management should know which coaches and officials will not be continuing. This is where the club begins its recruitment process to allow plenty of time to attract, appoint and induct new people.

Clubs need to understand there will always be a turnover of coaches and officials no matter how well the club tries to protect against it. This is also a healthy way of keeping the club and its people fresh, as new ideas and methods are explored.



Good succession planning strategies

- **Develop a plan for the future** - this is an opportunity for key club people to discuss and document the important areas within the club. Through this plan the club will be able to see how its playing numbers will grow or decline and in turn the impact this will have on areas related to coaching and officiating. The plan will also provide a means of determining what resources the club can commit to such aspects as recruitment and retention, training and development, recognition and reimbursement of the coaches and officials. For further help with developing a plan contact your state sporting association or department of sport and recreation.
- **Develop job roles for coaches and officials** - this should be a clear description of what is required by the club for these roles. It will also assist the club in its recruitment of new persons as it will be very clear what is required. Use the opportunity to talk to senior coaches and officials about what should be contained in these job roles.
- **Policies and procedures** -developing an induction and information handbook for use in its recruitment of new coaches and officials is one example. Information about all aspects of the club, the tasks involved and all relevant information that will assist a person in taking up a new role with the club needs to be included. Other matters to be addressed need to relate to issues impacting upon these roles such as insurance cover, legal issues, child protection, codes of conduct and harassment free sport.
- **Review and evaluation** - the club needs to implement a review and evaluation process to provide coaches and officials with an avenue to raise issues or concerns about any aspect of their role or the club administration. This process will also contribute to the club remaining informed about how it can improve in all aspects relating to coaching and officiating. Through this process the club will be able to hopefully identify any major problems and deal with them in a timely manner.

Case study

The local pony club had always suffered from a huge turnover of volunteers as they found the only interest in coaching came through the parents of new pony riders joining the club. It seemed the club also had little idea why many of these parents stopped their involvement after only one year. The club president had been to a training course where the guest speaker addressed the participants about the need to manage club resources which included "looking after the club volunteers". It was after this presentation that the Pony Club President realised that his club had never followed up on why these volunteers had not continued their involvement.

He immediately decided upon implementing a scheme where at the end of each pony club season all volunteers were asked to complete a survey on how their involvement in the club had been managed, how it could have been improved and what the club needed to do to retain their involvement.

From the feedback offered with the first group of volunteers who were surveyed the pony club has now introduced a recognition dinner for all its volunteers and provided all new volunteers with a job description on exactly what the club is seeking from their involvement.