



Professional Management and Advancement Best Practices for the Collegiate Athletic Trainer

The NATA Intercollegiate Council for Sports Medicine, NATA Career Advancement Committee and NATA Early Professionals Committee have created a guide for collegiate athletic training staffs to promote staff growth and value regardless of experience, responsibility or career aspirations.

Alternative Employment Organization and Structure

It is important to recognize many institutions have unique organizational strategies to enhance employment. These might include contractual agreements with other health organizations, sponsorships, philanthropy, endowment and fundraising that may be involved in decision-making and policy development. For these reasons, it may be important to include language to help define those structures.

- Identify each investor and their influence in delineation of responsibilities, work expectations, reporting structures, policy and decision-making processes and how they may overlap.
- Identify what career advancement looks like within these structures and who is involved in the decision process (medical system, institution or both).
- Define the job description, supervisory structure and communication plans when staff are not employed directly through the institution.
- In the event there is a hybridized model that includes institutional and system employees, how does this relationship influence structure, organization, communication and decision-making within a sports medicine department?

Create Your Program

- Create a process so the sports medicine staff is involved in the developmental process.
 - Vision Statement: Broad language that describes the goals of the department
 - Does not offer details on how to meet these goals.
 - Example: "X University is a student athlete centered, educationally driven and administrator assisted."
 - Mission Statement: Explains in simple and concise terms the organization's purpose, access and delivery of services.
 - Example: "X University Sports Medicine Department exists to provide high-quality health care to all intercollegiate student athletes. This includes the prevention, assessment and care of athletic injuries and illnesses. The sports medicine staff seeks to enhance the student athlete experience by providing a safe and healthy environment for athletic activity."
 - May also include any special institutional-related entities. such as religious affiliations, etc.
 - Culture and Core Values: Define the metrics of your sports medicine department that promotes a healthy and enjoyable working environment that assists in reaching your department's goals



- Examples: Ways in promoting a diverse environment, team-oriented care, time-off, student athlete centered care, evidence-based practice, etc.
- Once developed, share this with your senior leadership for their endorsement and understanding.

Communicating the Vision, Mission and Values

- Athletic training and other sports medicine staff
 - Considering covering this annually as it needs to become part of the fabric of a cohesive staff.
 - Considering creating a sign for the athletic training facility as a reminder to staff, student athletes and others on your operational guiding principles.
- Athlete department staff/coaches
 - Consider covering this at the beginning of the year during an all-staff meeting.
 - Begin broad based but get more specific during sport specific coaches and/or student athlete meetings.

Ideas to Enhance Your Vision, Mission and Values

- Know your staff members
 - Plan regular staff meetings and foster staff engagement both professional and personal.
 - Working group or sub-committees to work on projects
 - Celebrate birthdays, achievements, awards
 - Encourage staff social gatherings
- Spend time with other department managers
 - Get to know administrators, strength and conditioning coaches, coaches you don't directly work with.
 - Support projects and collaborate where needed.
 - Overlap is inherent and being seen as approachable is a great way to promote teamwork.
- Gather a broader understanding of the "big picture"
 - Attend meetings, when possible, to ensure a complete understanding of athletics and/or your supporting organization's operational and financial philosophy.
 - Regardless the level of athletics, sports medicine is one department of many competing for limited financial funds.
 - Share this philosophy with employees of the sports medicine department so they understand how and why decisions are made.
- Create a collaborative environment
 - Encourage dialogue and participation from coaches and other departments to learn about your services, personnel and assist with policy and procedural development when appropriate.
 - Establishes buy-in and information gathering



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- Across campus and community
 - Meet with institutional stakeholders to enhance services for student athletes and sports medicine department.
 - Engineering, exercise science, biomechanics, mental health, nutrition, residential services, facilities, dining hall, custodial staff, etc.
 - Identify if there are partnerships available within the community.
 - Attend community service projects organized by teams, student athlete advisory committee and the athletic department in an effort to increase awareness.
- Sports Medicine Community
 - Be an active leader with your conference sports medicine groups.
 - Volunteer for state, district and national committees.
 - Be proactive in bringing back materials to enhance the services at your institution.
- Facts vs. Emotion
 - Use evidence-based approach whenever possible.
 - Support decisions with research and minimize the use of anecdotal information when possible.
 - Take time to listen and explain the process and procedures to each stakeholder.
 - Remain calm and professional during times of conflict.

Career Advancement to a Head Athletic Trainer

- Identify those on staff who have an ambition to become a head athletic trainer.
 - Evaluate criteria: years of experience, work quality, ability to evolve, skill advancement, problem-solving, conflict resolution, an understanding of the “big picture” and adaptability
 - Determine how to progress this person to make them more attractive for this type of position.
 - Increased responsibilities
 - More inclusive in decision-making
 - Involvement with higher level projects that include senior administration, if possible
 - Sit in on departmentwide meetings, such as budget, team physician meetings, etc.
 - Current sports medicine structure: title changes and promotions possible within your own organization
 - Opportunity for staff supervision and performance evaluation
 - Mentor individuals, specifically gearing them toward this role



Career Advancement as a Staff Athletic Trainer

- Retention efforts
 - Create a culture that values professionals and their work.
 - Reinforce positive work to the entire staff.
 - Support individual goals and work-life balance.
 - Culture within sports medicine should exist where staff members are equally important and valued.
 - Not based on a particular sport assignment
 - Promote a team environment within the sports medicine department.
 - Regular and consistent interaction of the entire staff can lead to an increased connection to the vision as a whole.
 - Reduces apathy, which can set in when an AT is isolated within a specific sport, location or facility.
 - A teamwork approach allows for more staff flexibility and days off.
 - Support ATs in their work and decision-making during routine and critical scenarios.
 - Adherence to the policies and procedures that have been developed helps the AT make timely, clear and confident decisions that will be supported by their director and administration.
 - The director and AT leadership need to pay attention to warning signs of burnout and apathy in their staff.
 - Overwork, underutilization in professional decision-making and lack of value and support from coaches and administration can also lead to apathy.
 - Emphasize professional development.
 - Educate administration on the importance of staff professional growth as a benefit of servicing the student athlete population.
 - Encourage staff to learn new techniques or travel to conferences as funding allows.
 - Bring conferences or ability to acquire new certifications to campus.
 - Engagement efforts
 - Staff collaboration in development of policies and procedures and other projects
 - Small group work helps lead direction of the department and keeps everyone more engaged in the advancement of the department's vision and mission.
 - In-house development of social media or dedicated website
 - Communicates skills and services delivered to student athletes, coaches, administrators and other stakeholders.
 - Allows staff to promote their own work and accomplishments.
 - Administrative responsibilities



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- Assign specific responsibilities to ATs.
- Annual review and allow for changes and collaborations to advance an ATs development
 - Mid-year and end of year reflections
 - Gather feedback from mentor and mentee on whether both entities feel appropriate progress is being made.

Development/Transitioning to a Role of Health Care Administrator

- Facilitate input from team physicians, athletic trainers and other allied health care professionals who may be part of the sports medicine department
- Understand the role of the health care administrator (HCA), [NCAA Athletics Health Care Administrator Handbook](#)
- HCA can be a staff AT, not specified to be a head AT or director of sports medicine
- HCA needs to have their responsibility clearly defined in the following areas:
 - Annual performance reviews
 - Hiring/promotions
 - Inclusion/diversity
 - Budget
 - Service deliverables
 - Policies and procedures

Development/Transition as a CAATE Preceptor

- Understand responsibilities defined by the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education as a preceptor:
 - Supervise students during clinical education; and provide instruction and assessment of the current knowledge, skills and clinical abilities designated by CAATE
- Pursue contractual agreements with local, state and national colleges/universities.
 - This typically requires risk management or general council approval.
- Fulfill necessary preceptor training requirements from college/university you have developed agreements with
- Insurance requirements and contact with minor's policy should be closely reviewed.

Mentorship/Development of Early Professional Athletic Trainers

- Create a growth-minded environment
 - Learn from each other
 - Each person has valuable information to share
 - Open discussions as good ways to practice this while also covering nuances of the department
- Promote networking experiences
 - Make a point to introduce staff at meetings, on the sidelines, etc.



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- Encourage early career and career advancing professionals to engage in committees within your organization and/or at the local, state and national levels,
- Development of a mentorship program within your organization,
 - Regular meetings for early professionals to ask questions and discuss daily work issues
 - Provide feedback and guidance to grow the skill set of early professionals in organization, communication, documentation and clinical skills
 - The mentor and mentee should get to know each other on a personal level.
 - It is helpful if the mentor is not a supervisor, but sometimes, based on staff arrangements, this isn't avoidable.
- Encourage staff to volunteer on committees that offer value, experience, professional development and networking.

Human Resources

Each staff member should go through a formal review process as defined by the hiring organizational authority. Often, there are standard “competencies” or “proficiencies” used that are not completely applicable to athletic training. Time should be taken to add language that is specific to the athletic trainer's duties.

- **Accountability:** Demonstrates a high level of dependability in all aspects of the job. The employee is responsible for their words and actions.
- **Adaptability:** Responds to change with a willingness to learn new ways to accomplish work objectives and with a positive attitude.
- **Analytical thinking/problem solving:** Works systematically and logically to resolve problems, identify causation and anticipate unexpected results. Manages issues by drawing on own experience and knowledge and calls on other resources, as necessary.
- **Student focus/service:** Always keeps the student in mind. Strives to proactively address student concerns and needs.
- **Effectiveness:** Makes a commitment to accomplish task efficiently and with detail.
- **Initiative:** Evaluates, selects and acts on strategies for solving problems and meeting objectives before being asked to do so. Begins actions to influence events and/or to achieve goals. Sees opportunities for action and acts on them.
- **Planning and organization:** Establishes a systematic course of action for self and others to accomplish objectives that includes determining priorities and effectively allocating resources.
- **Professional/technical/procedural expertise:** Applies specialized knowledge, skills and judgement to accomplish desired results and/or provide an excellent student experience.
- **Project management:** Assures successful project completion by establishing a systematic course of action for self and other members of the team. This includes the ability to monitor progress toward a goal and adjust accordingly.

Team participation: Promotes a team atmosphere and willingness cooperates with others to achieve organizational objectives.



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- Daily tasks: Demonstrates the ability to performs task correctly, efficiently and without supervisory follow up.
- Verbal communication: Effectively expresses ideas and thoughts verbally in individual or group situations to bring about understanding.
- Written communication: Expresses thoughts and ideas clearly in writing using correct grammar, organization and structure.