



Leading from Home
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Our emergency game-management documents were originally intended to provide guidance for anyone to help cover for me while I was out attending a conference or having a severe case of the flu.

Little did I realize that we were going to have an even greater need of the documents. About two years ago, I was going to have my first-ever surgery. It would not only entail my first visit to a hospital but would also invalidate me for several weeks at home.

I was hoping that it would only be a three-week stay at home, but the surgeon insisted on six. It raised a major question: How could I lead the athletic program from a hospital sick room?

It was very clear that my replacement couldn't be one of our teacher-coaches. With a full teaching and coaching schedule, there was no way that one of those individuals could also perform my duties.

The only logical solution was to break down my position into 3-4 components and look for someone for each.

Fortunately, we had a teacher on staff who had served as an AD at his previous school and whom we could pay to manage our stadium contests. With his administrative experience, no coaching duties at our school, and having a copy of our game-management document, he was a perfect fit for us.

In our archaic system, I have to teach one class per day in addition to my administrative responsibilities. But it also provides me with non-teacher coaches to serve as substitutes. We can always hire one of them to handle a contest postponement, officials, bus schedules, and the other daily tasks that occur with contest management.

He also can take care of depositing the gate receipts, getting change for the next contest, completing the accounting forms, and collecting score sheets and officials' vouchers.

While the emergency game management guidelines are very necessary in conducting contests in our stadium, on our fields or in the gym, it is very obvious that whoever covers for me will also need much more guidance. After all, like all athletic directors, I do much more than merely supervise the venues of our various contests.

For each person who covers a specific responsibility during my absence, I type out step-by-step directions and have them read through before I leave. In this manner, they are able to ask questions and receive the answers that will enable them to take over.

Following are some of the considerations and steps that proved very useful in the development of our system of coverage while I was out. Since all situations are different, we suggest that you take whatever you can use and adapt to your setting.

1. Notify other AD's, assignors of officials, and other individuals whom you regularly deal with, that you are going to be out. Provide them with the name and number of the person who will be taking your place at school.
2. Have one of the individuals covering for you sort your incoming mail into three boxes on your desk. In one box, place all of the catalogs that arrive daily; in the second box, put all of your junk

mail that you can deal upon returning; in the third (and most important) box, place all bills, tourney entries, and mail that requires immediate attention.

3. Send home all the mail that needs your attention and requires your signature. In my case, this task can be done by sending it via interschool mail to my wife, who is a middle school teacher and can bring it home for me to complete and then return to her. She could then re-address the envelope and bring it to the interoffice mail.

Since you may not have this advantage, try to find someone who lives close by your home or perhaps drives past on his way home. This person could drop a load of mail off and pick up everything that is finished. Obviously, someone at school can, as a last resort, collect everything that needs your attention. Use large envelopes and mail these items via the U.S. Postal system.

4. Check your office e-mail at home, if you have this capability. All Inboxes have limited capacity, and if you don't try to keep up with your electronic mail, you won't be able to receive new messages at your office. At the very least, post an "Out of Office Notice" on your e-mail address so that anyone sending you a message will realize that you may not be able to respond as quickly as normal.

5. Prep your coaches before you actually leave. Explain that those covering your various responsibilities will need their understanding and cooperation. After all, these substitute individuals do not have the experience that you do and most tasks will naturally take more time.

6. Give your substitute AD a window in which he can call with questions. During my first week or two at home following surgery, it would literally take me 1.5 hours to shave, shower, brush my teeth, and eat. Everything took a long time and expended a lot of energy. I would often need a morning nap to recover. I therefore suggest that between 10:30 a.m. and noon would be a good time to call.

Since I also did not want to be bombarded with phone calls throughout the day, my wife or daughter would answer the phone initially and screen the calls. For emergencies or important questions, I would call back whenever I could.

7. Try to work ahead. Don't wait until your return, or you may find your desk so loaded that it will take months to wade through it. You know what has to be done in the next couple of weeks. If you will tackle small segments of these tasks at a time, you won't be totally overwhelmed when you do return. This is important because your energy level will not be 100% when you first arrive at your office.

For example, I knew that the following would have to be completed shortly after I got back, or even due while I was out:

Start the narrative section of your coaching evaluations. These can be thought out and written before you return.

Edit and prepare the agendas for the Winter Coaches' and Pre-Season Parents' Meetings. These documents are on my computer and laptop and would have to be done soon after returning.

8. Accept offers of help whenever someone says, "If there is anything that I can do to help, please let me know." Obviously, you will want to match their strengths and abilities with what has to be accomplished, but do take them up on their offers. Not only can this divide up some of your duties and make it easier for everything to be accomplished, but also the individuals making these offers can come away with a positive feeling of contributing.

9. Use some of your time at home to plan and think! During your normal week at school, you will be so busy that you won't have a chance to project into the future. But even between your naps, eating and doing a little paperwork, you will have some time to explore ideas and be creative.

10. Be careful. Do not to over-schedule the amount of work that you want to do at home. Your primary responsibility is to recover, so that you are physically and mentally prepared to return to your position.

This must remain your first and most important priority!

In the long run, one positive outcome of being out of school for several weeks will be the development of coaches, teachers and administrators, enabling them to have a better understanding of what you actually do. While I don't recommend surgery or a serious illness, something can be gained by the AD's absence.

There is no doubt that missing several weeks will be a strain on everyone associated with the program. It is always desirable to be on-site, to make the necessary decisions first-hand, and to use your experience, insight and skills gained over the years.

However, with a little thought, planning, and cooperation, the disruptions can be kept to the minimum and it is possible for your program to continue as usual.

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