

Evaluation Supports Excellence

by Tina Syer

Many youth sport organization (YSO) leaders get nervous when the topic of coach evaluation arises. They speak of having trouble getting enough people to volunteer to coach, and the last thing they want to do is upset these valuable coaches with evaluation. As YSO leaders, we need to recognize the substantial value that coach evaluation brings to our organizations. Research by Professor Shari Young Kuchenbecker at Loyola Marymount University in Southern California shows that athletes' and parents' satisfaction with their YSO experience has increased significantly for multiple seasons running when a program of coach evaluation has been implemented.

The task of coach evaluation is a big one, and if you do not already have a head coach or program director in your organization to lead this effort, it may require appointing an "Evaluation Coordinator." This person needs to be passionate about evaluating the effectiveness of your coaches and should be tenacious about getting evaluation forms out to every player and parent (and even more tenacious about getting them back)!

Set Coach Expectations

As YSO leaders, we have certain expectations of our coaches. Some of us may have these expectations clearly stated in a written form that our coaches review when they sign on, and others may simply communicate these expectations verbally at a coaches meeting. Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) recommends having a "Job Description" that all coaches receive before the season starts. [See PCA's "Double-Goal Coach Job Description" at www.positivecoach.org/roadmap/index.html.]

This job description allows coaches to see exactly what is expected of them and makes it clear what points the evaluation will cover. Let your coaches know that players and parents will be surveyed later in the season as to how well each coach met the expectations listed in the job description. Sharing the evaluation forms you plan to hand out to players and parents with your coaches at the start of the season will serve to lessen any anxiety coaches may be feeling about this process.

Survey Players and Parents

The coach evaluation forms for the players and parents should be tightly aligned with the coach's job description. Each survey should be no more than one page (single-sided), and it should take no more than five minutes to complete. Most people see these evaluation forms simply as a means to get feedback about the coaches, but they also play a powerful role in communicating to players and parents what your organization values in its coaches. [See PCA's "Coach Evaluation Forms" at www.positivecoach.org/roadmap/index.html.]

Some organizations choose to distribute these evaluation forms a few weeks before the end of the season, while others do the evaluation mid-season. Decide what will be most helpful to your organization and your coaches. Do you have the resources to do this effectively during the season, so your coaches can get feedback they can utilize immediately, or is it better to wait until the end of the season?

Tabulate Responses and Give Feedback

Work with your Evaluation Coordinator to tabulate and summarize the feedback for each coach. This

part of the evaluation process is always rewarding because the vast majority of the feedback you will receive from the surveys will be positive. Based on the results, send each coach a letter identifying how his or her players and parents rated him or her against the expectations. Again, for the vast majority of coaches, this letter will be very positive and may even include specific quotes from the players and parents (which will encourage this coach to come back next season). Granted, sending each of your coaches a personalized letter is a huge investment of time and energy, but you will see the return on this investment with increased retention of coaches. Increased retention of your best coaches is one of the most effective ways to strengthen the quality of your program, and it means less time spent recruiting and educating new coaches.

In a few cases, you may find certain coaches whose evaluations cause concern. The results of the evaluations for these coaches prove to be helpful because they give you something concrete to discuss with the coach. Players and parents will likely have ranked this coach high in some areas and low in others, so you can talk the coach through the results by reinforcing what he or she did well and by discussing what he or she can do to improve in the other areas. Although these conversations can be tough, they greatly impact the quality of experience you are offering athletes in your program. Also, in extreme cases, evaluation results can support the tough decision of having to let a coach go.

Evaluating Your Organization

This same process can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of your overall league, program or organization. First, using your organization's mission statement as a guide, decide what your organization's major goals are. Build your survey based on these goals, and distribute it to players, parents, coaches, and officials. Tabulate your results, and write a report summarizing the findings and presenting the steps you will take in response to any areas of weakness.

Although implementing an evaluation program can seem like a daunting task, it will give you insight into your program that you cannot find any other way, and it will ensure that your organization is giving the athletes the best experience possible.

* Tina Syer is the Director of Partner Programs for Positive Coaching Alliance (www.positivecoach.org), an ISI partner.