

Mentoring Experiences of Female Athletic Administrators: Practical Mentoring Model for Future Women in Sport Industry

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Since the inception of Title IX in 1972 women's participation in sport has progressed dramatically. Although the participation of females in intercollegiate sport is increasing, the amount of female coaches, athletic directors, and other athletic administrators has decreased significantly (Acosta & Carpenter, 2006). Exploring the lived career experiences of female athletic administrators, especially in regards to mentoring, will help demonstrate what, in the area of mentoring, is lacking for females who are looking for future careers in sport. Allowing administrators' voices to be heard, and allowing them to bring up the important aspects of mentoring that are needed to succeed, will hopefully bring about a change in educating female administrators with the ultimate goal of increasing females' longevity in athletic administrative positions.

Throughout the ages, women have had some part in sport; beginning as mere supporters of athlete participants and evolving into participants, coaches and administrators themselves (Gems, 1993). The examination of women's careers in sport can be split into three phases: entry, retention, and exit (Danylchuk & Pastore, 1996). Pastore, Inglis and Danylchuk (1996), began assessing the retention phase of women's careers in the sport industry. These authors identified work recognition, collegial support and inclusivity as dimensions for success in retaining women in sport administrative positions. These findings suggest that mentoring and networking may play a significant role in retaining women in administrative positions in the sport industry as they are related to the aforementioned dimensions.

Literature in both the sports and business realms have provided evidence that one reason for the lack of females in managerial positions lies in a lack of a female networking system, particularly in the male-dominated sport industry. One building block of networking for professionals comes from mentoring relationships, both formal and informal. Weaver and Chelladurai (1999) defined mentoring as a relationship in which a more experienced person acts as a role model while providing guidance and support to a developing professional. Noe (1988) pointed out that there are not enough mentoring relationships available to the women who are in need of them. Thus, it would stand to reason that opportunities for women to develop networks are also limited.

Without a social network and adequate references, women may get overlooked for a position or promotion in exchange for a man who knows the right people. Furthermore, socialization into a profession is a large determinant of a person's success, or retention, within that profession (Pitney, Ilsey, & Rintala, 2002). Socialization also comes into play when measuring success. Essentially, who one knows is more beneficial than what one knows when it comes to promotions in sport business settings (Sagas & Cunningham, 2004). While much research has been done on the benefits of mentoring in the sport industry (Sisley & Steigelman, 1994; Danylchuk & Pastore, 1996; Judd, 1996), little has been done to link the benefits of mentoring to retention and career progression of women in athletic administration positions.

The purpose of this study was to outline the most beneficial mentoring functions and outcomes experienced by female athletic administrators. Furthermore, this study will go one step further in looking at mentoring relationships and determine why both formal and informal mentoring relationships and networking were perceived as effective in retaining women in the sport industry. Using individual feedback from women who are currently working as athletic administrators, the researchers will propose a model for mentoring and networking to increase retention of women in the sport industry. Ultimately, emergent themes from this study will lay a foundation for the "real-life" examples needed to help young professional women advance in this career.

All female athletic administrators in member institutions of Divisions I, II, and III of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) were identified and surveyed via an online questionnaire. For the purpose of this study, athletic administrators were defined as those holding positions as athletic directors, assistant or associate athletic directors, and senior women's athletic administrators. The majority of the data was in the form of open-ended questions related to women's appraisal of their mentoring and networking experience. Women were asked to report on both formal and informal mentoring relationships and networks that they participated in throughout their careers.

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Results from the completed surveys indicate that some type of mentoring or networking has been vital in enhancing women's careers in intercollegiate athletics. These results along with the participants' descriptions of functions and benefits provided by mentors will be discussed in great detail. For instance, 75% of those who had been formally mentored and 85% of those who had been informally mentored identified role modeling as a function of mentors. Qualitative analysis of the data demonstrates the importance female athletic administrators have placed on both their career progression and retention. Mentees discussed the importance of receiving guidance from a more experienced professional (mentor), regardless of the gender of the mentor. Another strong emotion apparent throughout the data was mentees having someone who can help "fight the battles" throughout their career development. Finally, the female athletic administrators mentioned the importance of informal mentoring more frequently than formal mentoring programs. The data suggests that these women are treating these mentoring relationships as friendships and finding a role model as they build a network of their own.

Dr. Christine Lash (2002) outlined a mentoring program model that was a better fit for women based on multiple simultaneous mentoring relationships that are usually more informal and shorter lived. The data and emerging themes from the qualitative data reviewed in this study supports this "emerging" type of mentoring. The importance of Dr. Lash's mentoring model lies in the types of interactions that women use to develop networks and form mentoring relationships. Both women and men who are currently serving in athletic administration positions must foster all daily interactions (i.e. phone conversations, trips for coffee and lengthy emails) as a part of mentees' growth and development and as beneficial to both parties.

The data presented in this session will be used to suggest a practical model for mentoring to increase women's retention in athletic administration positions in the sport industry. Additionally, organizations' hierarchal superior-subordinate model will be compared to the multiple, equal mentoring relationship model to determine if the latter is a viable option for retaining women in the male-dominated sport industry. Feedback from women who have experienced formal and informal mentoring programs will be used to develop a mentoring framework that will truly affect women's retention in the sport industry.