

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION



OF SPORTS OFFICIALS

HOW TO KEEP GOOD OFFICIALS

RETENTION STRATEGIES IN OFFICIATING

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“I quit!” As an association leader, those are two words you usually never want to hear from a member. It may be fair to say that quitting is almost always a failure on someone’s part. OK, sometimes people leave because they’re moving or have had a life event dictating that they pull back. But for the most part Officials quit because something wasn’t turning out the way they wanted or wasn’t what they thought it would be like. You can often trace the issue to some lack of understanding or undue expectation, which might have been avoided through better communication or more practicable policies and programs.

So what are the factors causing officials to leave? The first thing to realize is that there are some factors that are realistically “uncontrollable,” in that there’s not much anyone can do to mitigate the cause. The first is age, followed by physical limitation or health. That is a simple part of your association’s natural life cycle. Another uncontrollable causal factor is work. Associations lose several officials to the demands of their full-time jobs – including relocation. Hopefully, in the case of relocation, a new association can benefit from the loss experienced by the old association.

Some causal factors may not be “uncontrollable,” but they also can’t be fixed easily. One such factor is disillusionment, a loss of the initial enjoyment that accompanied officiating. That could result from poor relationships with other members, poor behavior by other game/contest participants or unmet expectations – regardless of the reasonableness of those expectations.

Often, the issues come down to things well in control of local officials associations or even state associations. Far too often, officials get launched into the officiating world and they’re largely on their own – a sink-or-swim environment. Let’s consider some of the things that are needed to address retention issues:

BETTER TRAINING AFTER THE INITIAL ROUND

One and done won't cut it. Officiating isn't an avocation where you can learn everything you need to know in one round of training. And even if you try to give officials everything you think they'll need to know, it's not realistic that they'll absorb everything in one phase of training. It takes time and continual effort to master the rules and skills needed to be successful on the field or court. Some associations recognize that by creating tiered levels of training. Many local associations, for example, has a level one class and a level two class, bringing back the second-year students to refine their umpiring. But there also needs to be opportunities for continuing education for officials at all levels at association meetings and camps and clinics.

BETTER FEEDBACK

Especially when we're first starting out, good feedback – other than inane comments from coaches, players and fans – can often be hard to get. Sure, you can self-evaluate. But when you're new, you don't know what you don't know. It's helpful to have a system in place where new officials will get solid feedback that will help them improve – which can make the overall experience of officiating better, which will logically lead to more officials sticking around longer. The challenge is getting experienced officials, who have their own busy schedule full of games, to give their time. Some states have found creative ways to make this work, such as varsity officials taking some time before their game to watch the JV officials and offer input.

BETTER MENTORING

Make sure your new officials have channels to get important feedback. And make sure someone is there to give new officials the needed encouragement when the road gets a little rough. That does require some time on the part of veteran officials, but in every association there are people willing to give back to fellow officials if they're only asked.

BETTER SPORTSMANSHIP

This one is largely out of the hands of local associations. But at the state and league levels, efforts need to be made to ensure environments where sports officials aren't being run out by bad behavior. Taking criticism comes with the territory of being a sports official, but at a certain point a line is crossed and it's understandable that some people will have had enough. Local officials and associations can, through appropriate channels, encourage state associations and youth sports leagues to stay on top of encouraging good sportsmanship. After all, it's in their best interest, too, to make sure there's an adequate supply of officials. When officials quit for sportsmanship reasons, officiating leaders have to ask themselves whether we've invested enough time in the politics of officiating -- do we do enough to make the officiating avocation safe and compelling? Is your state or the leagues you serve really doing enough to curb the antics of belligerent parents, fans, players and coaches? Leaders have a huge responsibility to preserve the ethos of sportsmanship by sticking together and pushing back unacceptable behavior.

Other reasons are numerous (see pg.25), but among the more popular have to do with local association culture, and training (or the lack thereof). Unlike sportsmanship and outsized expectations, both of those reasons can be dealt with directly by officiating leaders since officiating leaders and associations are fully responsible. Read on for strategies and concepts to address all aspects of the retention puzzle.

HOW TO KEEP FRUSTRATED OFFICIALS FROM QUITTING

If your association is like most, you can't afford to lose even a single active official. When you sense or are told that a member is fed up and ready to walk away, it's time to spring into action. Here are some tips for changing that member from disgruntled to satisfied.

1. FIND OUT WHAT'S WRONG

An obvious first step, but a necessary one. The member's complaint could run the gamut from the meetings are too long to he or she is not getting enough games. If you have the power to fix whatever is wrong without upsetting other apple carts, do it. Give the member your assurance that the concern will be addressed in the quickest time possible. If it's something deeper – a disagreement with another member, a feeling of abandonment – get others involved.

2. SLOW 'EM DOWN

Some officials think they should be rising up the ladder more quickly when that is not the case. As gently as you can, let them know they need just a bit more seasoning before moving up. "I know you think you're ready for bigger games, but I'd hate to see you get in a bad situation. That might hinder the rest of your career. It's not easy to be patient, but I think you'd be better off in the long run." You may get an argument. Don't let things degenerate into a shouting match, which will only make matters worse.

3. EMPATHIZE

Officials have shared experiences. We've all been verbally abused by coaches and fans and we've been disrespected, underpaid and treated like serfs. That frustrated official on the brink of hanging it up might just need to vent to someone who understands what he or she is going through. Don't hijack the conversation with, "Yeah, I know the feeling. There was this one game ..." It's their stage; don't make them share it.

4. TALK UP THE AVOCATION

While there are many frustrations in our industry, there are also plenty of joys. Ask the upset official to relate some of his or her favorite experiences. The time the crew got a flat tire and played Rock Paper Scissors to decide who had to put on the spare. Working the rivalry game before the sellout crowd. The first time he or she worked a televised game. Accentuate the positive.

EMBRACE NEW FACES AT ASSOCIATION MEETINGS

First Impressions are Key to Keeping Officials

REMEMBER WHAT IT FELT LIKE TO BE THE NEW KID ON THE BLOCK?

It can be awkward and uncomfortable. The same is true for a new official to an association. One of the marks of any strong officials association is the favorable impression that its leaders project on their environment. A leader,

in that context, is not necessarily any member of the executive board, but rather anyone who, through his or her actions and behavior, compels others to cooperate and lend support. Without leadership, any organization stands to become ineffective or irrelevant and risks going the way of the dodo.

Imagine you are a new member and you have just walked into the meeting room and everyone is in their little clichés of friends laughing and carrying on. The awkwardness of the event is already making you uncomfortable. Most new members come to the organization with more or less the same list of concerns: Am I cut out to be an official? Will I fit in with these people? Will this association help me become a better official? Remembering your own experiences as a new official and understanding their potential discomfort is the first step toward making a great first impression – and eventually keeping that prospect around for many years to come.

BE THE FIRST FRIENDLY FACE THE NEWBIE ENCOUNTERS.

Before meeting time, assume that there will be new faces in the meeting room and keep an eye out for them. Often enough, they might come along with another member whom they know, but that should never stop you from making a beeline for them, introducing yourself, telling them what you do and welcoming them. You never get a second chance to make a first impression and a good one to make on someone is that they mattered from the very first day.

HAVE A MECHANISM IN PLACE TO ORIENTATE NEW MEMBERS.

New members are typically full of questions, some of which they are hesitant to ask at the risk of seeming stupid and creating the wrong first impression themselves. Depending on the size of your group, plan a way of giving them some orientation and teaming them up with someone who is knowledgeable of how to get a uniform, who to contact for games, what is required for registration and so on. If you don't put the effort into that, without coming on so strongly

that they feel like they're being swept up by a press band, two bad things might happen. First, they might feel alienated and then drift away and quit.

WELCOME THE NEW MEMBERS IN ON YOUR ACTIVITIES.

One veteran official and association leader offered this remembrance: "I remember when one of the officers of my football officials association gave me a ride to the banquet at the end of my first year as a member. That was 24 years ago. They didn't have to do that, but I sure remember." Think about what memories you want your new people to have of your group and demonstrate to them that it's as much about them as it is about you.

REMEMBER CONTEXT DURING YOUR MEETINGS.

When new people attend your meetings, take a little time to give them some background on issues as you discuss them. The issue still might have no meaning to them for a year, but at least they'll agree that you gave them a chance to participate.

ADJUST YOUR TRAINING EFFORTS TO THE EXPERIENCE OF YOUR AUDIENCE.

The best way to blow away a new member is to bury him or her in the dreariest, most esoteric part of the rulebook in their first meeting. First of all, most new officials are surprised, if not thoroughly intimidated, by the thickness of the rulebook, let alone the wording it contains. If you then throw them in at the deep end of a training session about some fine points of the rules, you can succeed in polishing off whatever enthusiasm they still have.

THE BEST WAY TO HANDLE NEW PEOPLE IN YOUR ORGANIZATION IS TO INITIALLY DO THEIR THINKING FOR THEM.

The important thing is to take the lead in drawing in new members rather than leaving them to figure out things for themselves. You want their first impression

of you and your association to be the one that compels them to stay around and then start giving back to your organization.

MANAGE EXPECTATIONS EARLY

Many state associations have found that the best way to retain officials is to give them a better introduction to what they face. When they do it that way, the people who might be getting into it for the wrong reasons think better of it and back off. Meanwhile, more of the rest persevere and get to reach their full potential, which helps everyone. That's great for associations and assigners because the gene pool gets deeper and they get more long-term payoff for their investment in training and development. So, let's cover some of the things we want new officials to know.

“YOU’LL PROBABLY NEVER MAKE SIX FIGURES AT THIS.”

Everyone knows that experienced pro officials now make hundreds of thousands per year in return for being abused in 30 different cities. Even a good college basketball official can pull down that much. That sounds like pretty good cash for someone who doesn't want to work at the foundry for the rest of his or her life. These people shouldn't have to have their ambitions crushed, but it helps to remind them that the guy gazing out from beneath a white hat on Sunday afternoon is a rarity. He (or she) is perhaps one in 10,000 of all those people who first decided to try their hand at Pop Warner for \$25. Tell them to set reasonable expectations and treat anything beyond that as a bonus, born of equal parts uncommon ability and serendipity.

“SOMEWHERE, THERE WILL BE SACRIFICES TO MAKE.”

As an official, it would be nice to pick and choose where you work and then turn back assignments with impunity if you have something better to do some nights. It would be great if they could schedule the games for 8:30 pm in a town nearby

so you don't have to cut work early or miss dinner (again) with your spouse and kids. It would be special if you could ignore your assigner's pleas to help with last-minute changes and if you could work the game without having to think about that aching hamstring you have. Becoming a successful official with a full schedule requires commitment and being prepared to work outside what might be your comfort zone. Assigners, spouses, bosses and children will contribute to your failure if you're not prepared to think of them, too, every time you click another "Accept" button. To whom more is given, more is expected.

"IT TAKES MORE TIME THAN YOU THINK."

We've already talked about the obligations connected with just getting to the game. It's important to add that you can't really become a busy official unless you put a lot of "personal" time into it, too. Keeping yourself in condition is rapidly becoming a qualifier for climbing the ladder. Where you could once pack a few extra pounds under your buckle or start getting in shape three weeks before the season, those days are really gone, now. Even at a high school or club level, coaches and ADs want to see physical evidence that officials take it as seriously as they do; seeing you puffing when you should be on the exact blade of grass where should be, is becoming more of a no-go for future assignments. Further, assigners and governing bodies want to see people putting some of their offseason time into keeping up with their avocation. You should be working at your rules regularly and attending a camp when requested instead of finding reasons not to.

"NOT EVERYONE WILL HAVE YOUR ETHICS."

Many newer officials aren't quite prepared for the treatment they get from what should be responsible people, like teachers, parents, and even friends. They are wired to try to rationalize the hysteria that has taken over wide swaths of sport instead of dealing with it and moving on. The biggest thing that drives officials away from officiating is the ongoing cacophony of poor sportsmanship in all its

facets, combined with their inability to not take it personally. If you don't think you'd make a good cop, bouncer or army medic, you'll have trouble being a good official. The best officials are often the ones who are best at protecting their souls. Association leaders have to invest time in supporting the rest, until they get used to the environment.

“THE SYSTEM WILL BE TOUGH ON INDIVIDUALISTS.”

There are many walks of life where a person who makes him- or herself stand out benefits; individuality and having a noticeable persona can sometime be a benefit: It isn't in officiating. New officials have to understand that the sooner they learn to fit in and embrace the crew-first culture, the more successful they stand to be. Almost paradoxically, they will draw more favorable attention to themselves by blending in to crew chemistry and sharing in its success. That's hard for some new, ambitious officials to swallow.

HOW TO INTEGRATE NEW OFFICIALS

It isn't easy these days to find new officials. So when you get rookies in your group, the last thing you want to do is alienate them or make them feel adrift by themselves. Here are some tips to ensure you keep newcomers coming back for more.

STEP 1 WELCOME THEM TO THE GROUP

If a new member is attending his or her first meeting, make sure you greet that individual as soon as possible at arrival. Introduce the new member to other members as well. Make sure the individual feels as included as possible. Related to that, make sure the newbie is given a copy of the association's constitution

and bylaws, as well as a directory of the association. New officials should also be informed about registering with the state and taking required exams. New members should be provided a list of assigning authorities and be told the necessary steps for being assigned to games.

STEP 2

KEEP THE MATERIAL SIMPLE.

Many groups have separate training sessions for first- or second-year officials. As a result, the material isn't over their heads and they become more comfortable with the basics of officiating. It also give them an atmosphere in which they feel comfortable asking questions. If your association isn't big enough to provide a completely separate training session, give new members time following the normal session to get together and ask questions to a designated veteran.

STEP 3

OFFER MENTORING.

A formal mentoring program is a great benefit associations can provide to new officials. Even if your association doesn't have a formal program in place, veterans in your group can take newcomers under their wings in their first year. Assign a veteran to a new official on day one. It should be someone who is willing to watch the official work and possibly even work a game or two with the newer officials. The veteran should be available to the new official any time for guidance and support.

STEP 4

GIVE THEM OPPORTUNITIES.

Depending on your assigning procedures, you may have an opportunity to get the rookie onto the court or field for a scrimmage or two. Whenever possible, find opportunities for the newcomers to apply what they have learned. It is

important, however, to have veterans on hand either working with the rookies or observing so they aren't flying without a safety net. Mentors or observers must provide feedback to the new officials. Keep it as positive as possible but don't fail to point out what areas need attention.

SEVEN WAYS TO MAKE RECRUITS FEEL WELCOME

1. MAKE YOUR MEETINGS EXCITING AND INFORMATIVE.

That is especially important for the first meeting of the year. Capture their attention to keep them coming back. Create an agenda and stick to it. Avoid "war stories" at your meetings. Save them for the pub afterward.

2. SPECIFIC APPLICANT TRAINING.

Hold separate sessions for the new members in addition to your regular meetings. Start discussing the "momentum exception" with new members and they'll start stampeding for the nearest exit. Likewise, start talking to veterans about keeping their flag as unobtrusive as possible and their eyes will glaze over.

3. DEVELOP A MENTOR PROGRAM.

That will have a two-fold effect on your organization. First, your new members will have someone to turn to for advice and counseling. Secondly, it will give some of your veteran officials a newfound sense of responsibility and may serve to revitalize their careers. It helps to keep them on their toes when a rookie starts asking rules questions. When asked what could have been done better when they started, veterans often suggest having a mentor program.

4. BREAK NEW MEMBERS IN GENTLY.

Schedule them with easygoing veteran officials who like to teach. Your best officials are not necessarily the best to pair up with rookies. Sometimes they've forgotten what it's like to work their first game or have their first confrontation with a coach.

5. FOLLOW THROUGH ON YOUR PROMISES.

Give realistic expectations so as not to discourage new members or to disparage your credibility.

6. PROVIDE FEEDBACK.

Let new members know where they stand and give them realistic expectations. If it is your policy that first-year officials don't get varsity or playoff assignments, make them aware so that no one is unduly disappointed. If they are excelling in a particular area but not in another, let them know. Also, give them the necessary information and training to correct any and all deficiencies.

7. KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN.

Many officials work more than one sport, but some don't. Keep them all involved. An association newsletter is a great way to accomplish that. Solicit some of your members to write articles for the newsletter. Keep them informed to whet their appetite for the next season. Don't let them become complacent and too comfortable with those Friday nights off.

INTERVIEW:

APPRENTICE PROGRAM OFFERS MENTORING

For the last 30 years, the Vermont Football Officials Association has helped prepare new officials through its apprentice program. The program offers fee waivers for recruits, one-on-one mentorship and hands-on officiating experience in high school football games. Jon Reed, the Southern Commissioner for the association, has worked as a mentor in the program during his officiating career.

NASO: How did the apprentice program first come about?

REED: Our efforts to recruit have been around in some form since 1986. We started to formalize the apprentice program when we realized that we were getting fewer recruits. Our program began waiving member fees, providing guidance from mentors and connecting recruits with game assigners.

NASO: What kind of issues have your association had with recruiting, and how does this program address them?

REED: A lot of people think they can easily be officials until they are actually on the field. Other guys go through our rulebooks and manuals and think, "I'm not going to be able to do that. That's too complicated." I understand that those books can be a real burden, but I try to show our recruits that it is not as complicated as it seems.

NASO: What is the role of the mentor in the program?

REED: As a mentor, I provide my apprentices with film and other visual aids to study, as well as providing guidance while we are on the field. If an apprentice lives in an area near a game that I'm working, I'll try to get them on the field with me. Mentors will put in reports about their apprentices that will be reviewed to track their progress.

NASO: How are the apprentices incorporated into officiating games?

REED: When the apprentices first start working games, we try to teach them to manage the game, not to try and find penalties. It's like hunting for deer; you're only going to see it if you're observant of everything around it. Occasionally guys don't make it because they just don't catch on. For the most part, guys enjoy the experience of working games and learn a lot.

NASO: What steps can other associations take to set up similar programs?

REED: The key is getting the word out about the program. We've tried different forms of advertising to promote the apprentice program to mixed results. Usually, people sign up either because their kids were involved in our leagues or because they've watched our work firsthand. Going forward, I think that we could incorporate more social media.

HOW TO RUN A CLINIC FOR NEW OFFICIALS

A great way to keep new recruits in officiating is to tailor training directly to them. Hosting a clinic can provide that training for a large number of rookie officials at the same time. Not all clinics have to be formal, high-tech affairs. You can run your own one-day camp packed with good training and information that is low-cost and even fun for all concerned.

The easiest version is an all-classroom camp. You can use any combination of video, PowerPoint, guest speakers and handouts for education. In between those varieties is an oncourt or onfield camp using clinicians to act as players and officials. Attendees can observe officiating techniques in a more relaxed atmosphere than one involving live play.

STEP 1 **CHOOSE YOUR CLINICIANS CAREFULLY**

Be sure the people you choose to serve as clinicians understand what you're trying to accomplish. A local official who works in the pro or college ranks adds star power to your event, but if he or she tries to teach advanced techniques to novice officials, the campers will quickly feel lost. Also, avoid instructors who offer only war stories as a means of instruction. Real-life experience is valuable, but is not a substitute for actual instruction.

STEP 2 **GET NECESSARY APPROVALS**

If your state association, conference or other governing body requires officials to attend a camp, or if camp attendance improves an official's chances of receiving

assignments, be sure to obtain the proper certification from that group. Send them a copy of your agenda so they can see exactly what subjects are being covered in the camp. If the governing body has paperwork that you need to fill out to certify a camper's attendance, be sure you get it and return it as soon as possible after the event.

STEP 3

DON'T FORGET INSURANCE

Even if you don't plan on setting foot outside a classroom, you should spend the few dollars it takes to insure yourself and your association. If an official were to be injured participating in a drill, liability would be a concern. Associations can purchase insurance coverage for a day or for an entire year's worth of meetings. For rates and information, check the American Specialty Insurance website, amerspec.com, and click on the Applications link.

STEP 4

GET THE WORD OUT

Use email lists and local media to announce your event. If you aren't restricting your camp to members of your own association, let other area associations know about your camp. Don't forget to let area schools know of the camp. Former players often make great officials. Your camp may prove to be your association's most successful recruitment tool.

STEP 5

SIZE MATTERS

Bigger isn't always better. You may have to put a limit on how many attendees you can serve. Know how many people will fit comfortably in whatever meeting room you'll be using. If possible, aim for a one-clinician-to-five-student ratio.

REAL TALK:

RETENTION STRATEGIES IN ASSOCIATIONS

Three association members took time to answer questions about how their association retains officials. They include: William Webb, president of the Northeast Nevada Officials Association, Elko, Nev.; Bruce Hook, secretary of the St. Louis Officials Association; and Mike Nissenbaum, secretary-treasurer of the Delaware County Basketball Officials Association. All three are active or former longtime sports officials.

1. How does your association try to retain officials?

WEBB: That's a major problem we have. If we can keep new officials for a year, they'll usually stay. We don't have any special gimmicks to try to retain them. But something we have worked on is to try to make sure that newer officials in the association get games and don't sit idle on any given weekend during the season. We try to assign them to at least one or two ballgames on the weekend. We're trying to keep them working and hopefully that will help us keep them.

HOOK: We've created what we call the Officials Development Program (ODP). It is geared to the newer official. The training curriculum is designed for the first- through third-year official and we set up mentors for each. We are working with the local assigners to have both the mentee and mentors at the same basketball game site and we are looking for a way to film new officials and have the mentors critique their onfield/oncourt mechanics.

We also purchased HUDL (game film exchange with local high school) this past year for football and we are in the process of expanding it to basketball. That will give us the capability for film review of onfield/court mechanics for each newer official.

Additionally, we are using Survey Monkey to get feedback from our new officials on our programs. We want to understand what they like or don't like about our program, meeting times and any other information. Attendance last year for the ODP was outstanding and we are looking forward to reviewing the numbers this year.

NISSENBAUM: Many associations in Ohio, ours included, are setting up mentoring programs. When I came onboard as an official 30 years ago, you took a class and kind of got thrown out there to the wolves in a sink or swim situation where you didn't know how to navigate through the assigner process, or didn't have a seasoned official to not only help you with game assignments but to improve your presence on the court and working knowledge of the rulebooks. Over the years we've tried to find ways to take that sink or swim situation out of the picture more and more these days, so people don't get frustrated and leave because nobody is supporting them.

2. Has your association tried unique methods or does it currently use a unique method to retain officials?

WEBB: A few years ago we helped football and basketball officials purchase their first uniform, but that didn't work well. If there was a certain football or basketball official that needed help, we would help them purchase the uniform. But we had guys who would get the uniforms, then disappear.

HOOK: We use real game video to aid in mechanics and rules with film review. We have football administer whose responsibility is to make sure game film is emailed to St. Louis Officials Association crews for their critique. We ask each crew chief to send us good and bad mechanics and interesting rule situations. Those are shared with all 180 football officials. We are looking to expand next year to the mentee/mentor relationship.

We will add basketball next year and members who are basketball officials will have the capability to review/critique their games.

NISSENBAUM: Several of the associations throughout central Ohio have talked to the assigners and league commissioners about setting up mentoring programs. What we'll try to do under those programs is have a seasoned varsity crew of three officials. We have convinced many assigners and leagues to used three-person crews at the freshman and JV levels. We then reach out and look for varsity officials to work with those crews. The senior officials often ride to the game with the junior officials and sit in and participate not only in their pregame but have the junior officials sit in on the varsity pregame. They'll join them at the end of the varsity game to talk about what was done well and what could have been improved. It starts a dialogue and teaches them through the eyes of a senior official, which helps them get a better grasp of what to do and how to do it.

3. Why is it such a challenge to retain officials?

WEBB: We're not finding younger officials who will commit. The economy is one thing. We have several of the largest gold mines in the U.S. They work those guys 12 hours a day, six days straight, then give them four days off. It's a challenge to get them to training meetings and to assign them, because they are only available after 5 p.m. It takes them out of a lot of non-varsity games.

Plus, we travel long distances, more than 100-150 miles one way to get to many games, so it's difficult to get off of work to get there. It's tough to maintain and keep them.

HOOK: Retention is an issue, especially with the newer officials. Our first- to second-year loss ratio was nearly 50 percent. We needed a way for newer officials to see a way to advancement from grade school to high school. St. Louis is a training-only association and we don't assign games, so developing and training officials is what we do. We have to keep improving our meetings. No one is required to belong and training is what we have to offer. Our programs have to be top notch with the latest technology and finding the best speakers in our organization.

NISSENBAUM: I think over the years, particularly in certain sports, we've put so many requirements on the officials. It's getting to the point these days that to be available and do all the things that you have to do to move up through the ranks, you need the type of lifestyle that allows you to do that. For most of us who hold full-time jobs, we can't easily take time off during the day to attend clinics and things like that. It becomes tougher and tougher to get involved. The assigners are expecting more of the officials in preparing and being more available. We've sort of put up some roadblocks. We've got to find ways to get the everyday Joe or everyday Jane, who lives a normal life, and isn't someone who can get off of work at 3:30 in the afternoon, and get them into that participation.

HOW TO CONDUCT SIMPLE AND EFFECTIVE EXIT INTERVIEWS

When all efforts at retention fail, you can still glean valuable insight from officials who quit. As an officiating leader, it's in your best interest to reach out to the departed and find out what happened: Is it something you've done? Is it something you haven't done? The idea is to dig down and see if there's a pattern to the departures that might shed some light on some needed changes.

DON'T GET HUNG UP ON FORMALITIES.

There's no need to have a face-to-face meeting or invite them to sit down with the entire board. Simply find a convenient way to contact the member, ask for a minute or two of their time and pick their brain.

ACCEPT THE OUTCOME.

If you ask the individual what's on his or her mind, be prepared for the result. Some will vent. Others will clam up (or worse), but many will have some sort of story to tell if you give them the opportunity. Keep the discussion professional and gently ask some questions to get down to a root cause for their departure.

IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU.

Give them the opportunity to put into their own words what's caused them to leave. Avoid, "I bet you're leaving because ..." or, "What was it I did?" because then you've put them on the defensive. A better alternative is, "We've noticed you didn't join up again and were wondering if there's something we need to

know?" or, "We've been missing you at the meetings. Anything going on we should know about?" Be prepared for the occasional proverbial flip-off, but take a whole lot of flip-offs or the same sort of response as what it is: a message.

TAKE CORRECTIVE ACTION.

If everyone's telling you they're going to a new association, take a long look at what might be wrong with yours. If they don't see enough value in the training sessions you offer, see what you can improve, and so on. But don't discount out of hand a recurring point of view that you don't happen to agree with. Where there's smoke, there's fire.

PART ON GOOD TERMS.

Sometimes, an exit interview can become an "un-exit" interview. More often, however, the case is closed. In those cases, let their parting memory be of you still welcoming them rather than reaffirming their point of view. You've still got a roomful of people who want to be proud to be associated with you.

11 COMMON REASONS OFFICIALS LEAVE OFFICIATING

1. Orientation was either ineffective or lacking altogether.
2. They received the cold shoulder at meetings.
3. They couldn't get games.
4. When they did get games, they were stuck with another newcomer, and it was like the blind leading the blind.
5. They encountered a closed society that wasn't really receptive to "new blood."
6. They didn't get adequate support when they made key (and disputed) decisions in games.
7. The compensation was inadequate.
8. They discovered they just weren't cut out for the pressure.
9. Family or job obligations pulled them away.
10. They are worn out and can't cut it anymore.
11. Poor sportsmanship drove them out.