



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the AzFOA Officials Mentorship Program is to provide a formal, structured system to develop new and inexperienced AzFOA officials through mentorship by veteran AzFOA officials.

The goals of the AzFOA Officials Mentorship Program are:

- To offer officials guidance and direction early in their officiating careers
- To promote individual development through the transfer of skills, knowledge, and insight
- To provide an added resource for officials' feedback
- To contribute to official satisfaction and retention
- Developing an internal pipeline for succession planning
- To create a mechanism for the development of future leaders in officiating

Mentoring is critical to a new or inexperienced official's development and involves much more than critiquing their performance in a contest. Rather, mentoring requires time, effort, and a desire to make others better. Mentoring in the right way, and for the right reasons, reinforces officiating fundamentals, creates an ongoing support system that allows mentees to better face the challenges of the sport and strengthens recruitment and retention efforts.

The mentor/mentee relationship is crucial for keeping new officials in the avocation and reinvigorating veteran officials. A formal mentoring program creates positive outcomes on both ends of the officiating spectrum. It is often said, "The best way to learn is to teach." This is the vision for the AzFOA Officials Mentorship Program.

ROLE OF THE ASSOCIATION

Associations have the best ability to provide education and guidance through the development of an effective mentor program. Associations should encourage mentorship and use it to recruit new officials to their group. They should reach out to the community to find people that would qualify as officials and might receive help from learning under the direction of experienced association members. They should actively take part in the pairing of mentors and mentees, set standards and benchmarks for success, and periodically review performance with participants to decide the effectiveness of the program.

This may include:

- Requiring a before, during and after season evaluation form
- Providing pregame and postgame topic lists for discussion
- Developing a mentor-mentee committee where assessments of the program can be discussed, and improvement ideas can be presented.

Pairing Officials

Pairing the right mentor with the right mentee is essential to a new official's success. Individuals that take on the mentor role should do so for the right reasons.

Their motivation should be:

- **To develop a new generation of officials.** There may be no better honor than the ability to point to successful officials knowing that you played a significant role in their growth and advancement.
- **To improve their own game.** Mentoring forces you to stay up to date on rules and mechanics and getting into those rulebooks and manuals might remind you of something you've forgotten or overlooked.
- **To rediscover their passion.** Working with someone new and not-yet-jaded may give you a newly inspired and refreshing outlook on officiating.

6 Steps to Success

Step 1 – Set a Path

Jumping into a program without preparation is a recipe for failure. After making the decision to formalize a mentor program, associations should first figure out what goals they have for their group and how the development of a mentor program will help to achieve them.

Look at the makeup and health of the association. Ask yourselves how the mentor program will change or reinforce these areas. Then, set goals. Whether it be growth, diversity, or just recruiting “young blood”, have an idea in mind of the expectations moving forward – one year, five years, and ten years down the road.

Step 2 – Gather Information

Associations first must know what the issues are they face and why the issues exist before they can tailor a program on how to address their needs. This means looking to other associations, state, and national data, and – most importantly – the association membership to answer questions of recruiting, training, and retention. Use other’s methods for success and learn to avoid other’s mistakes.

Step 3 – Develop a Team

The “Recruiting and Mentorship Coordinator” position is a required position in the association’s leadership. This is a position dedicated to the recruitment and mentorship of new officials. But this position, alone, cannot sustain a workable mentor program. It requires the support and participation of the board and the membership at large. This support may include earmarked funds, allocation of resources, or hosting unique events.

Step 4 – Identify Good People

The first thing an association must do to find good mentor candidates. Not everyone is suited to mentor new officials. This can be because they don’t have the time to give to mentor; or it could be because they clearly aren’t qualified because of their own relative inexperience, their officiating skill level, or because they don’t have the necessary disposition. It is better for a new official to have no mentor than to have a bad mentor.

The people you look for as mentors must consist of the whole package:

- They must have the time and willingness to put in the effort needed. This often entails working with the mentee, a significant aspect of mentoring comes while seeing them from outside of the contest. This also includes staying in regular contact even when a game or contest is not being played. Mentors often include current officials, but retired officials within the association may also be valuable resources. Lean on these experienced people and offer incentives for them to still be with the association in a mentor capacity.
- The process cannot be beneath them. Officiating mentorship programs require close, in-person guidance and supervision. Mentors may skip assignments to attend sub-varsity contests with mentees, allowing them to gain experience and receive immediate feedback from a seasoned official. Officials should be willing to leave their regular partner/crew or work at a level lower than they traditionally work for the benefit of the overall officiating community.
- They must be patient and approachable. Mentors should expect basic questions about officiating methods. They must be willing to encourage, listen to and answer questions fully without displaying frustration or annoyance at the ignorance of the mentee.
- They must be leaders. Mentors should consist of people that are distinguished and revered by the membership. They don’t need to hold leadership positions but should be an authoritative figure.
- They must have extensive skills and knowledge about the sport for which they mentor, and they should be able to provide insights into the “dos and don’ts” within the association and officiating.
- They must be able to teach. Teaching is about finding the right combination of style and substance to provide quality, correct information to the student (the mentee). Effective communication skills are vital to offering mentees beneficial information and feedback. Providing all the information in the world doesn’t do any good if it can’t be understood by the person receiving it.

Step 5 – Be Fixed but Flexible

Realize that recruiting and retention efforts are a slow, deliberate process. Don’t expect to hit your recruiting goals overnight and be willing to see the process through. Set benchmarks at the outset to discuss whether major revision considerations need to be addressed but always consider the purpose of the program in any changes made. It is important to still be focused on the goals and expectations set during program development, but associations should also feel comfortable to adjust when necessary – even midstream when an urgent need arises.

Step 6 – Reevaluate

Regular evaluation is important as noted in Step 5, but a full and complete reevaluation of the program is critical to ensure that the association is on the right path, that goals are being achieved and needs are being met. The association should

set up a time when the committee or board examines whether the program is meeting the predetermined criteria for “success.” This can be at a regular or ad hoc meeting, but it is suggested that this is done at the conclusion of each football season.

The association should collect data through questionnaires and surveys and get anecdotal information through interviews and discussions. Have mentors and mentees provide feedback from their experiences. Offer them the ability to tell you what they think works, what doesn’t and what areas can be improved. Assemble this information and create recommendations for changing the program moving forward.

ROLE OF THE MENTOR

Mentors have various duties in the program. Before the season begins, mentors should discuss with their mentee(s) the importance of quality officiating for the development of student athletes and programs and the values and philosophies an official should have. They should discuss the human element of officiating and prepare the mentee for instances when mistakes in judgment are made. The mentor should have a comprehensive review of the rules and technical aspects of the position. The mentor handles helping the mentee in setting up goals for the current season, the next season, and the future.

Mentors can take on any number of mentees as long as they can put in the required time and effort necessary to meet the standards and goals of the AzFOA Officials Mentorship Program. Mentors will pair with a mentee for the entire season and a mentor-mentee pairing may continue for any number of seasons (sub-varsity crew for example). The traits of good mentors can be focused on the E.P.I.C. mentor method.

Engage - *Being available and involved are the most important aspects of quality mentorship.*

A mentee should be comfortable discussing all sides of officiating with the mentor. Of course, this includes complicated rule sections, practical enforcement and mechanics; but they should also be able to discuss with the mentor game compensation, administrative/coach relationships and the effect officiating has on their family life.

The mentee should also recognize this program is designed to ultimately make them better officials, and that may require they be told some things that are tough to hear. This may include that they need to be more committed, that they misapplied a rule, or even that they need to improve their health and wellness. A key to a quality mentor-mentee relationship is that communication be open and honest.

Mentors and mentees should speak regularly, including meeting in person to have lunch or a cup of coffee when possible. They should go beyond the smallest requirements of the program and develop a personal bond – not just a professional colleague relationship.

Protect – *Officials can’t please everyone all the time.*

Criticism is a natural part of an official’s job, but for a new official, extreme (and often unwarranted) criticism out of the gate can be discouraging and detrimental. In the short term, this often leads to the official becoming rattled and unable to recover – which leads to further potential officiating problems or errors. Officials have left prematurely due to concerns about credibility and the possibility of making mistakes.

Part of a mentor’s job is to give the mentee the ability to work without this fear. This doesn’t mean they need to be coddled; but especially early on, they should feel they have the freedom to work on the technical aspects of the job without having to jump right into handling situations with coaches and players. Early in a mentee’s development, a mentor should be looking for ways to insulate them from these unnecessary pressures. When the mentor and mentee are working together and a coach begins yelling at the mentee, the mentor should step in and stop it. When a coach wants to discuss a disagreement with the mentee, the mentor should be present. And when a coach wants to complain to the mentor about the mentee’s performance, the mentor should deflect the criticism and emphasize his protégé’s hard work and effort.

Inspiration - *It’s all about the team.*

It takes a special person with the desire and dedication it takes to be a sports official. Without encouragement from time to time, this desire can be extinguished. Part of being a mentor is the ability to provide reassurance and support. The fruits of a mentor’s labor are directly reflected in their mentee’s desire, attitude, and behavior.

A good mentor motivates those around him to want to be their absolute best. This requires providing both constructive criticism and uplifting praise. A mentor should not shy away from providing a mentee with areas of improvement but should do so in a way that offers teaching moments and gives them the tools to progress and develop. Mentors should provide compliments in the areas where the mentee excels and teach them to build on their weaknesses through those strengths. Finally, a mentor should encourage the mentee to reciprocate this same feedback on the mentor’s performance. Often, mentors are so focused on encouraging the development of others, they may not concentrate on

continuing to work on their own shortcomings. Allowing the mentee to provide give-and-take helps to keep the mentor motivated and starts the mentee on the path to becoming a mentor themselves.

Counsel — *Officials are expected to be perfect in their first game and only get better.*

We understand that the first part of this adage is impossible, but the second half is essential. Nothing can take the place of experience, but wise advice from a mentor helps to mitigate the mentee's on-the-job learning. Mentors should give sound advice, strong reasoning, and valuable feedback. For a mentor's words to be meaningful, though, the individual must be credible. While a part of credibility is the experience a mentor has, a larger part is seen in the example they set.

A mentor should be known as honest and forthright. They shouldn't criticize other officials maliciously or behind their backs. This candid approach lets the mentee know the information they receive is dependable because the person they receive from is dependable. A quality mentor has a "practice what you preach" mentality. They don't expect anything from their mentees they don't model themselves.

Following the completion of a contest, the mentor should debrief with the mentee on issues they experienced, things they did well and suggestions for improvement. They should allow the mentee to provide a self-evaluation of their work and provide at least one takeaway for the next contest.

Recommendations and Guidelines for Mentors:

- Take mentee officials to other contests (professional, college and high school) to see and study other officials.
- Discuss with the mentee the importance of a good personality and disposition.
- Discuss arrival and departure from a contest facility.
- Help the mentee understand the importance of well-placed no-calls and using common sense and fair play.
- Teach them how to avoid being a "rule book lawyer" or someone that over-officiates.
- Discuss the importance of communication and reliance on crewmates.
- Explain how to manage situations with coaches and players, and how and when to manage unruly spectators.
- Show the mentee how to keep his/her composure and keep emotion out of officiating.
- Talk about what an official's responsibility is during physical altercation or fights.
- Maintain a log that includes running comments about the mentee's development and encourage him/her to keep a log of notes and comments of his/her own.

ROLE OF THE MENTEE

Mentees should look at their participation in the AzFOA Officials Mentorship Program as a privilege and an opportunity to seek guidance from a trusted and experienced confidant. Seeking advice from your mentor displays a level of respect that encourages further participation by our veteran officials and reinforces the goals the program looks to conduct.

Mentees have various roles in this partnership and should fulfill these responsibilities diligently. They stand for the mentor, the association, and the officiating community at large; and as such, the mentee should work diligently and express desire to improve their knowledge and competence. They should be willing to accept constructive criticism and incorporate suggestions into their work. A mentee should develop self-awareness of their skills and abilities and set realistic goals for their progress.

Ideal mentees will show the following characteristics and traits:

- Eagerness to learn.
- Willingness to work as part of a team.
- Displays patience.
- Take calculated risks.
- Maintains a positive attitude.

While the mentor is primarily responsible for the content of the mentor-mentee interactions, it is the mentee that decides the quantity, frequency, and ability of the relationship. The quality information a mentor provides is only as useful as is accepted by the mentee. In this respect, it is the mentee that decides the amount of guidance and direction he or she receives. A good mentee will take the initiative to ask for help or advice and seek out more challenging opportunities and assignments. The mentee doesn't just receive feedback and implement suggestions — they should actively take part in the mentor-mentee relationship so that they can help the mentor today and their own mentees in the future.

Recommendations and Guidelines for Mentees:

- Allow the mentor to take the first lead in setting the structure of the relationship. Accept and respect the opportunities, limits, and course he or she provides you with. Act with courtesy toward your mentor and respect their plan for your progress.
- Do not automatically expect to be involved in the mentor's personal life or become close friends. Be your authentic self but treat the mentor-mentee relationship as strictly professional until the mentor shows a more friendship-based connection. Be considerate of intruding in personal or sensitive areas of the mentor's own life.

- Be considerate and respectful of the mentor's time. Make sure that you are punctual and try to stay within predetermined time limits when outside of contest settings. Be prompt in responding to phone calls or emails. This shows that you are respectful of time considerations and prevents you from missing time-sensitive messages.
- Set clear aims and attainable goals for your officiating career. Seek guidance and advice on aims, plans and strategic ideas for achievable results.
- Be an "active listener". Ask for clarifications and examples when needed and avoid unnecessary interruptions. Take notes and ask good, purposeful questions.
- Remain open to feedback and take the initiative to request it. Constructive feedback is critical to an official's personal and professional growth and development. Show that you are open to innovative ideas and suggestions to reach your greatest potential. Individuals prefer feedback in separate ways. Talk to your mentor about your preferred feedback style, but don't be offended if it's not what you expected.
- Seriously consider all the advice you receive. Don't brush off suggestions as "irrelevant" or "beneath" you. Don't be a "Yeah...but" official – one that accepts the mentor's suggestions but then dismisses them with an explanation or excuse. Arguing your case only makes you look closed-minded and unwilling to accept criticism.
- Express appreciation to/for the people that provide you with mentorship (formal and informal). Give warranted praise and thank them directly and avoid negative comments to others. Disagreements with the mentor's values, behaviors and attitudes should first be discussed with the mentor and then with the sponsoring association, if needed. Keep these issues in-house.
- Be prepared to move beyond the mentor-mentee relationship. Although mentorship relationships may last years, mentees should be prepared to transition to other mentors or assume mentoring roles themselves when the relationship has fulfilled its goals. Stay in touch with the mentor to share your progress and express your gratitude. Be certain to end on a positive note and lean on former mentors to aid you in the future.