



Why coaches and officials leave

Why do so many clubs have to spend time in finding replacement coaches and officials? The answer can be that they were not able to keep the ones they had from the last season. Satisfied, valued and recognised coaches and officials are less likely to leave the club.

Why do they leave?

1. They only want to be involved for a short time. Clubs need to recognise that signing on to be a coach or official does not have to be a life-long commitment. Too often clubs expect much more time commitment than people are able to give.

An answer: When recruiting new people and outlining their roles, clubs need to be specific about what is required. More people would probably commit to helping if they knew the club would accept them for a short term.

2. They didn't know what they were getting into. In recruiting new coaches and officials clubs often do not reveal all that is involved with the task such as training and match commitments, late night calls from irate players, parent interference, abuse from the sidelines, incidental expenses for ground entry, travel, bandages and medicines etc.

An answer: A job description and induction handbook which is discussed as part of the recruitment process should be provided. Before any new person starts in their role the club should make sure they have all their questions answered and all relevant information made available.

3. They don't want to put up with the abuse. Some players and spectators seem to think that coaches and officials are fair game when it comes to offloading abuse. At any level, this type of poor behaviour is not acceptable but particularly at grass roots level where the coaches and officials are not necessarily capable or trained to deal with this issue.

An answer: Implementing codes of behaviour at club level can help prevent the problem (see further information on the Good Sport Monitor program). Clubs need to consider the various schemes being introduced to protect the officials and coaches and to make a safer sporting environment for all concerned. Contact your state sporting association or state department of sport for information about codes of behaviour, campaign to prevent and reduce abuse, and other tools.

4. The costs of being involved. For most coaches and officials the enjoyment of being involved can be diminished by the significant costs to stay involved. Such costs include travel to training and matches, entry costs to enter the match arena, mobile phone calls and SMSs, emails, fees to attend training courses, purchase of support resources (magazines and books).

An answer: Attracting and retaining coaches and officials requires an investment of time and resources, so the club needs to budget a certain amount to service and support them. Other methods may include subsidising or paying for training courses, providing a small honorarium or payment, offering reduced player subscriptions to people who take on coaching or officiating role, paying for them to attend special events targeting and supporting coaches and officials, and supplying a club uniform free of charge.



5. Lack of club support for coaches and officials. When a new season approaches clubs spend a lot of energy on matters as the numbers of players to make up teams, how many teams to nominate, what colour uniform to provide, what training and match facilities to book. A key ingredient missing relates to the support team of coaches, officials and managers.

An answer: Identify the roles of coaching and officiating that need to be filled prior to nominating teams. It may be a waste of time nominating teams and getting players involved if there are no coaches or officials to work with them. Identify the roles to be filled well before the new season, so coaches and officials can be given support through training, particularly if they are coming into the role as novices. Clubs can also appoint a coordinator to look after the matters relating to coaching and officiating. Another strategy is to assign a mentor to each new coach or official. This mentor may be an experienced coach or official, or a club person who can provide a listening ear. Clubs also need to consider how their most senior coaches and officials might work more closely with those who are commencing their involvement with junior grades. Strategies such as holding clinics, forums and guest presentations will all assist.

6. Poor recognition of coaches and officials. This may come from both internal and external sources. Internally the club may not give any acknowledgement or recognition for efforts of the coaches and officials nor might it provide any reimbursement or cost savings. Externally the coaches and officials might be subject to the poor behaviour of players and spectators and have to suffer constant negative attitudes about the task they are performing.

An answer: The club needs to “look after its coaches and officials” because without them there is no game. By putting in place some strategies to raise the profile and image of their coaches and officials the club can improve its relationship with them.

7. Concerns about legal liability. Many people have become alarmed in recent times by the idea that they may be personally sued in the event of an accident or other mishap taking place.

An answer: The club needs to ensure that there is a risk management plan in place, and adequate training is provided to its coaches and officials in the areas of safety and risk reduction. Clubs should also ensure that they have adequate insurance coverage in place, and/or advise coaches and officials to take out their own insurance.

Case study

During the season the Tennis Club Director of Officiating made at least two follow up phone calls to talk to the new umpires and lines people about any issues they had as well as personally observing their performance in several tournaments.

At the end of the season all the new umpires and linespersons were invited to a special club dinner in recognition of their contribution. At this function opportunity was given through a short forum for the umpires to make any suggestions on how the club could improve on their recruitment and retention of officials in the future.

One month after the season each of the officials who were new to the club received a letter of appreciation from the club president along with a special card signed by the captain from each of the club junior teams.