Chris White

3D Case Study

3 Dimensional Coaching (Graduate Course)

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Sioux Center Community Schools -- Warrior Athletics Evaluation

Good coaches change. Any coach or program that stays the same becomes stagnant and loses its sense of purpose. What gets us into coaching at the beginning of our journey is probably not what keeps us in it for the long hall. This pattern is true of me as a teacher and coach, this pattern fits the progression from 1st to 3rd dimension coaching, and this same pattern has been true for Mark Hulshof, Activities Director for Sioux Center Community Schools in northwest Iowa.

As Mark has progressed from a coaching and teaching role to now his present leadership role, he recognizes that athletics always used to be about winning. But as he has continued his own coaching journey, he has realized that coaching needs to center on fostering relationships--both with student athletes, each other, and with leadership. What he points to as the one factor in that shift is having his own children go through athletics and seeing a parent’s viewpoint on what really matters, as well as talking with former athletes in the community about what they remember most from their experience -- the relationships and life lessons that come with them.

When asked about where he thinks his program is in terms of the 2nd and 3rd dimension elements of coaching, he sees a similar progression in seasoned coaches away from 1st dimension priorities toward values of character development and a transcendent purpose beyond self and individual performance on the field. He referenced a retired farmer that coaches the basketball team that no longer has family members playing, doesn’t work at the school, and doesn’t need the money. This coach began his career focused solely on 1st dimension concerns, but would not have stuck with coaching this long if his priorities didn’t shift toward a relational focus and more 3rd dimension concerns.

One hindrance to the training of his coaches in the 2nd & 3rd dimensions is when coaches are not teachers at the school. He sees a lot of overlap between the professional development teachers receive and how those teachers coach or what their priorities are. For example, teachers have focused a lot lately on social emotional learning (the 2nd dimension) and also authentic assessment and value beyond school (the 3rd dimension). So when coaches within the school talk to each other and share ideas, those concepts filter in. But if a coach in this district doesn’t teach at the school, they are in some ways hung out to dry and don’t have that base to work from. So although some coaches are very strong in the 3rd dimension, this lack of integration would be a weakness in the program. One solution we talked about is to ask especially the non-teaching coaches to take the 3D Coaching course and meet briefly regarding the 2nd & 3rd dimensions so that he could establish expectation with his focus on fostering relationships, and also share resources from other programs that implement those elements well.

Another way to improve this lack of continuity would be to write a district-wide purpose statement of activities programs, and for Mark to use his position as director to foster mentor relationships between coaches so that there could be more sharing of approaches to the 2nd and 3rd dimensions. One example he noted that should be shared is how the volleyball coach leads small-group discussions for her players’ 2nd dimension needs, and how the football coach has his players serve elementary students by reading once a week. These ideas should not just be expectations for isolated sports, but expectations for all Warriors.

Good coaching, for Mark and for the 3D framework, hinges on the power of relationships. The program could go to the next level for its athletes by capitalizing on relationships within the district to craft a purpose statement with the input of its coaches and implement that across its programs through mentor relationships between coaches. If the athlete experience is going to be about more than winning, that larger purpose should be clearly articulated and embodied by those who lead it.