

*This theoretical article explores the implications of the informally trained coach/judge on the future of forensics. Issues addressed are those involving the relationship between informal training and the financial stability of the forensic program; the perceived professional standards associated with the forensic educator; and the impact on the educational facilitator role played by the coach/judge in the forensic community. The analysis of this paper suggests that the forensic community is placing the forensic professional and the activity itself at risk in the future, if informal training becomes the main means of preparing the next generation of coach/judge participants.*

## Telling the Story of the Informally Trained Coach/Judge

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The future of competitive forensics in the context of the modern university is a story whose ending is yet unwritten. This developmental conference, as well as others in the future, may help shape the writing of those uncharted conclusions. The issue of what are the implications of the informal training procedures for coaches/judges in individual events is an issue which will help tell the rest of the story. Charles Garfield wrote in *Peak Performers* (1986, p. 136) that:

The business world is full of goal-directed individuals who are not sure why they do what they do. I am thinking of people who focus on money as their primary goal, work very hard to get it, and have little ideas of a real mission - a larger context for that goal. . . . They are examples of a larger category of well-intentioned yet over-zealous people who incessantly try to prove themselves by launching powerfully toward a goal with no conscious mission behind it. Frequently they produce; often they achieve a modicum of success; but, charging from goal to goal with no mission to guide them, they live with the disquieting feeling that they are not really going in a direction they find personally fulfilling.

When one begins to anticipate what kind of conclusion will be written for the story of forensics in relation to the issue of living in a world of informal training, several concerns are identifiable. This theoretical paper will explore three possible

consequences of living in a world dominated by the informal training of coaches/judges in the forensic community. Specifically, the potential consequences of informal training on the variables of fiscal management of the forensic program, the status of the coach/judge as a professionally regarded individual, and the role of the coach/judge as facilitator of student growth and development will be explored.

### *Fiscal Management*

The forensic program in the modern day university is often perceived as an expensive experiment. Budgets of \$20,000 to \$30,000 are frequently not uncommon travel budgets for competitive programs. If one added to those figures the salary dollars of the traveling coaches and judges, the budget figures become much larger. The question administrators seem to be asking with more frequency is what are we getting for our money? Is the forensic program a valuable asset to the institution? The old days of the forensic program being justified as an educational enrichment via travel for the student are rapidly becoming a thing of the past. If the forensic program is left in the hands of an individual not formally acquainted with the budgetary process in the university, the forensic program might soon die on the vine. Tucker (1981) indicated that a program administrator needs to understand more than just what is relevant to her/his unit:

The chairperson, then, should take a more global view of the budget process and learn as much as possible about financial conditions and priorities at all levels . . . the chairperson should be aware of the system's technique for distributing funds among the institutions; he or she should be especially familiar with the procedures used to derive the resources that concern academic areas . . . The [budget] process provides one of the few opportunities for the department to describe its past successes and future objectives (226-227).

As Tucker suggests, a program administrator must possess a sense of the whole in the budgeting process. Having a forensic director in the position of lacking a sophisticated understanding of the budgeting process is probably one quick means of letting a program die on the vine. The need for moving beyond informal training

for the coach/program director is further underscored when one realizes that most forensic budgets employ a "program" approach to the budgeting process. The need to be able to clearly articulate essential program components, under a program budget system, is critical for the coach:

A program is defined as a collection of related activities and services that together constitute the achievement of the goal. Theoretically, PPBS involves identifying objectives, listing alternative courses of action (showing cost benefit), choosing one alternative, and, finally, implementing the alternative through funding . . . reaching a consensus on what constitutes a program is difficult . . . Basically, PPBS incorporates the ideas of the zero-base system that an organization's goals and objectives should determine its budget; in addition, however, it includes a long-range planning component . . . The selection and number of component activities contained in a program depend on the scope of the stated goal and the preferences of the person who is developing the system (Tucker, pp. 231-233).

Providing for the long-term development of a forensic program in the future years of forensics will require a coach/director to need more than an informal training with the budgeting process used in the university. Indeed, it is likely that directors who change schools, or have new administrators take charge at their current institutions, are going to need to undertake some additional training in the new budgeting process. A casual visit with the Dean or Department Chair to request money for the forensic program will probably not be a part of the rest of the story in the next generation of forensic administrators. The coach/program director will not only need an understanding of the budgeting process within the university, but will need a clear sense of mission. The coach/program director will need to be in a position to articulate the mission and what elements will need to be a part of the program to achieve the mission. In all probability, the well-intentioned, informally trained program director will not survive in a future world of sophisticated forensic budgeting systems.

The forensic program of the future will not only need an individual schooled in resource management, but an individual also capable of developing an endowment fund for the program. The forensic program of tomorrow will, in all

probability, need to develop a means of self-generated funding. Outside funding will probably be needed to provide student scholarships and provide a substantial portion of the team's operating budget. However, as Edward J. Harris Jr. (1988, p. 81) has cautioned:

If individual events seeks to establish a university identity, then it should also seek direct financial support from a formal university source. Given the vagueness of student budgetary decisions and the concomitant loss of control of the program when students control the purse strings, it seems wise to seek a more neutral and consistent funding source.

If one places the longevity of the forensic program as a top priority, the responsibility for the management of the fiscal resources of the program ought not be left in the hands of an amateur who may be well-intentioned and informally trained but underprepared to deal with forensic finances of tomorrow. The assumption that any person can manage a forensic program is not a particularly realistic notion of the demands that will be placed on programs in the future.

#### Professional Status

Another issue which arises from the notion of the informally trained forensic coach/judge is the idea of the professional standing of the forensic person. As a profession, the forensic community will need to articulate its views on what standards should be reflected in the credentials of the forensic professional. The concept that a forensic professional can be an individual informally trained is, in reality, a dated notion. The Second National Conference on Forensics (1984, p. 28) articulated its position on the degree of professionalism expected of the forensic coach:

Forensic educators should be evaluated according to the same standards as other faculty -- teaching, scholarly and creative activity, and service, to the degree to which each is appropriate to the mission of the individual college or university. They should satisfy each standard at the same level of quality expected of other faculty. Typically, forensic responsibilities do not fit neatly into any one of these traditional categories but cut across all three. Therefore, forensics educators may differ from other faculty in the amounts of teaching, scholarly and creative activity, and service. Moreover, the criteria

for determining whether standards are met may distinguish forensic educators from other faculty.

The expectation that the forensic coach can be an informally trained individual simply does not meet the forensic community's own standard of professionalism.

Arguing from a similar position at the First Developmental Conference on Individual Events, Kostoff and McKeever (1988) maintained that training was an essential element for students making the transition from competitor to coach. Specifically, Kostoff and McKeever noted:

Coaching forensics is an experience that can be overwhelming at times even to those "seasoned" professionals. Day to day challenges encountered by the forensic educator can be both intellectually rewarding and problematic. In order to deal with such challenges, the forensics community needs leaders who are well-trained, educated, and dedicated to the field. Such leaders could only enhance the scholastic excellence and healthy competitiveness of the forensic activity (p. 102).

The forensic coach as a professional person is expected to manage a variety of functions. Without some professional training, the individual places her/himself and the forensic program at risk. The forensic coach of tomorrow will need professional training to meet the teaching, research, and scholarship demands placed on him/her by one's academic institution. Having an avid interest in forensics will not alone suffice for the forensic professional of tomorrow.

### ***Educational Competency***

A third major implication of the informal approach to training the forensic professional involves the competency of that person to fulfill the role of facilitator of the students' educational growth. If, by inference, we mean that the informally trained person is one whose background is principally built solely upon the individual's past involvement with tournament activities, then have we adequately discharged our educational responsibilities to our students? Don Swanson (1989) underscored the importance of professional training for the forensic coach/judge. Swanson argued:

Contemporary forensic practice is largely a result of modeling behavior. Students model the behavior of other competitors and of their judges. We serve as powerful models in many of our coaching techniques. . . . All of us who are members of the Order of Instruction and serve as judges in our national tournament, bear a responsibility by virtue of our designation as members of the Order of Instruction. I do not believe that as we enter a round we are just a "judge" placed in the competition to render a technical decision. We are forensic educators placed in a critic/judge position in order to foster the personal growth of the student competitors. If I am serious about my designation as a member of the Order of Instruction, the implications are: I cannot function as a tabula rasa judge. If I am to fulfill my moral responsibility as a member of the Order of Instruction, I must function as an interventionist educator. . . . If you remember the pledge you will not just play judge, you will instruct (p. 7).

As the Swanson position suggests, one cannot ethically fulfill one's responsibilities as a critic/judge if there is little more than a sense of conventional practice as opposed to theoretical insight behind the evaluation. The forensic professional needs to be well versed in the theory of communication before rendering evaluative judgments of the student's performance in the competitive tournament. Unless the forensic community is willing to embrace sophistry as its standard, the coach/judge needs more than an informal training as part of one's professional background.

If one is willing to embrace an educational perspective as being the principal focus of the forensic professional, then the need for the coach/judge to have more than an informal training becomes even more pronounced. Zarefsky articulated a perspective on what constitutes the nature of an educational mindset for the activity and for the forensic professional when he stated:

I'm not sure we have a clear notion of what an educational community is. To start with, education is not the consolation prize of unsuccessful programs; it's not true that some of us promote winning and others, education. Rather, I think that an educational community is premised on a belief about the goal of the enterprise. It is not just to implant a set of techniques or a body of content, but to enable students to learn how to think analytically and creatively and, hence, how to continue learning. In this respect forensics shares the virtues of the liberal arts. But to value education is to make some tradeoffs. An educational approach is inefficient; it is always far faster and easier to do something for another person than to wait patiently while the other develops the needed skill. An educational approach requires a long-run perspective, with thought to what will be best next month and next year, not just the next round. An educational approach requires self-restraint on the part of teachers and coaches, most of whom are so committed to what they do that it is difficult for them to see their art not performed well. An

educational approach requires coaches consciously to think of themselves as teachers, whether or not in the classroom, and whether by profession or avocation. And an educational approach leads inherently to the tension between providing structured environments – formats, rules, standards, guidelines, and the like – to maximize the chances of positive results, and providing freedom and guidance to students as they learn to make difficult choices for themselves. No one has a monopoly on educational insight, but a common commitment to the belief that this is an educational community shapes what issues we address and how we go about them (p. 22).

The role of critic/judge in the forensic community is a role that is best served by those having a professional background in the discipline of communication. The people who pass themselves off as forensic professionals but lack proper grounding in education and communication do the students and the forensic community a disservice.

The forensic educator is responsible for more than just the communication development of the student in the tournament setting. The coach/judge serves as a social, psychological and physical model for her/his students. President Reagan's debate coach, Roger Ailes, characterized his candidate by saying:

'You are the message.' What does that mean, exactly? It means that when you communicate with someone, it's not just the words you choose to send to the other person that make up the message. You're also sending signals about what kind of person you are – by your eyes, your facial expression, your body movement, your vocal pitch, tone, volume, and intensity, your commitment to your message, your sense of humor, and many other factors. The receiving person is bombarded with symbols and signals from you. Everything you do in relation to the other people causes them to make judgments about what you stand for and what your message is. 'You are the message' comes down to the fact that unless you identify yourself as a walking, talking message, you miss that critical point . . . The total you affects how others feel about you and respond to you (p. 25).

Ailes' message for his candidate is an applicable message for those in the forensic community: one's behavior becomes a messenger for one's values. When the coach/judge is afforded a superior position in a superior/subordinate relationship with students, the behavior of the coach/judge also provides a frame of reference for behavior on the part of students. Consequently, if the background of the coach/judge is one in which there has been no professional development of the concept of modeling behavior, a serious concern regarding the dissemination of

inappropriate behaviors may emerge. In that context, students may come to confuse behaviors such as aggression with competitiveness, substance abuse with relaxation, exhaustion with marathonomism, and so forth.

Carl Rogers (1983) argued that the education of the student ought to be person-centered. In the context of competitive forensics and the over-riding issue of this paper, to engage in person-centered education with our students would require some professional background and training in the process of facilitating student learning. To hope that students would gain meaningful insights and have positive learning experiences by having the forensic contestants interact with adjudicators who were only informally trained seems a little like leaving too much to chance.

This writer believes that the major implication of having the training of the forensic professional be only informal in nature is one which invites disaster. Projecting the story of forensics in the world of tomorrow is obviously only a guess. Nevertheless, to assume that the forensic coach/judge will be able to functionally survive without formal training in finance; or assume that the research, teaching, and service expectations will not be a part of the accountability of the forensic coach; or also to assume that the coach can meet the personal growth needs of the students without an understanding of the educational process, would be to make a serious mistake about the future world of forensics. The forensic educator of tomorrow will require a background structured on something more than chance happenings. If the forensic community is left in the hands of those who are only informally trained, the activity which is at the heart of it all may readily die on the vine. Forensic programs of tomorrow will need program administrators [coach/judge] who are well-prepared and not just well-intentioned. The forensic educators will need a clear sense of mission and the tools that it takes to accomplish that mission.

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