

activities involve the local chapter, (2) all levels of the fraternity are recipients of some alumni service, and (3) many of the activities employ skills developed through forensics education. We might also note that nothing about the activities distinguishes them as either maintenance or developmental; each can serve to perpetuate or increase chapter outreach.

Conclusion

This article has grown out of a theme struck in the first installment of the series: that the alumni chapter should take stock of its resources and articulate its object. The current discussion shows the importance of the object in shaping chapter outreach and the importance of outreach as indicative of chapter life. The suggested definition of "chapter life" acknowledges these connections. Like the human organism, the alumni chapter has its own predictive signs of survival. To assist in its work and to facilitate growth, a chapter needs the three identified tools. Beneficial ways that alumni chapters are carrying out their object is the last topic. Considering the present value of and the even greater potential for alumni service, the maintenance and development of alumni chapters should assume a deserved place in PKD's vision, plans, and enactments.

Notes

¹ See Carolyn Keefe, "The Pi Kappa Delta Alumni Chapter: Organizing Itself with a Constitution," *The Forensic* 80.1 (1994): 24-30.

² Caregivers are construed to be chapter leaders, as well as policy makers and enforcers throughout the fraternity.

³ For the content and results of the 1988 and 1992-93 surveys, see Carolyn Keefe, "What Is the History and Current Status of the Pi Kappa Delta Alumni Chapters?" *Proceedings of the Pi Kappa Delta Developmental Conference, March 17, 1993*, ed. Edward S. Inch (Fargo: U of ND, 1993) 12-13. The 1994 Keefe article cited in note #1 above carries further information that includes the 1994 survey.

⁴ From time to time *CASE Currents* runs articles that are applicable to PKD alumni chapter concerns. A magazine for higher education administrators, it is published by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, 11 Dupont Circle, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036. Other helpful sources are: Patricia L. Alberger, *How to Work Effectively with Alumni Boards* (ERIC, 1981, ED 214434); Charles P. Cushman, *The Alumni Program* (ERIC, 1986, ED 269861); and Tana Reiff and Melissa Jamula, *Operation Alumni: Finding Them, Organizing Them, Making the PAACE Connection* (ERIC, 1986, ED 268354).

⁵ *The Constitution of Pi Kappa Delta*, Art. III, 320.4.

⁶ The first article in this series (see Keefe 1994: 27) identified three forms of chapter governance in current use: the Director Model, the Teamwork Model, and the Executive Board Model.

⁷ For advice on keeping the mailing list up-to-date, see Donna Freddolino, "What's Lost Can Be Found," *CASE Currents* May 1993: 8-14.

- ⁸ See Patricia Friesen, "Appeals that Pack a Punch," *CASE Currents* May 1993: 46-50.
- ⁹ Unless an account comes under a tax-exempt number, such as an educational institution can obtain, the signatory is responsible for paying income tax on whatever interest accrues.
- ¹⁰ See Michael R. Evans, "Planning for Results," *CASE Currents* January 1993: 40-42 and Karla Taylor, "Writing and Editing for Results," *CASE Currents* January 1993: 44-49.

CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS TO COACH BURNOUT AND BRAIN DRAIN IN FORENSICS: SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR CREDIBILITY AND ACTIVITY SURVIVAL

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Relaxing over dinner after an intensive summer debate institute, I had a discussion with two close colleagues. One of them said, "I sometimes really get sick of these people who get into forensics for just a couple of years, and then leave their universities without a program." The other replied, "I can understand their problem. You see, I feel burned out myself." The coach had been actively involved and successful for two decades, yet this recurring theme came up in the conversation. It seemed very much a replay of a discussion I encountered in a directing forensics seminar I took twelve years ago at the University of Nebraska—how can an intellectually stimulating and rewarding activity also suffer in some instances from an exodus of its brightest minds? Although forensics remains a vibrant activity, the question remains as applicable today as it was in that graduate seminar.

The discussion of burnout is nothing new—at the 1992 Assessment Conference for CEDA, Hunt (1992) named hiring unqualified persons to direct programs, stressful job situations where the negative burdens outweigh the positive benefits, and an interaction between the two, as some of the culprits for burnout (p. 169). Among his solutions were strengthening the qualification standards for directing forensics and making some reforms in the activity. The current opinion essay shall focus on the latter area and apply its conclusions to NDT, IE, and comprehensive programs that offer an array of research-oriented forensics activities, in addition to the CEDA programs noted in the Hunt study.

This editorial will hopefully spawn some discussion and perhaps some research into the contributory factors of coach burnout and brain drain mentioned in the Hunt study. Although the instances of the sort mentioned herein do occur, any resemblance of any persons to actual coaches (including the author) are purely coincidental, but offered as anecdotal support for using certain variables as possible indicators of burnout. Some factors of burnout are not unique to this activity, and/or there is little we can do about them; however, some factors do come from elements of the activity clearly under either institutional or individual control, pending validation by research. Developing responses to these problems, in addition to hiring persons qualified to cope with them effectively, can hopefully help stem the burnout problem. Therefore, in this editorial I shall first address the uncontrollable burnout factors; second, explain the controllable burnout factors; and, third, offer a starting point for discussing solutions to the soluble problems.

Inevitable Burnout Factors

There are elements contributing to burnout which we cannot control. These can be broken down into at least three areas—personal, logistical, and competitive. First, personal problems—a student gets sick, a coach faces an outside lawsuit for an accident that occurred on a trip, a close friend or relative of a coach or student passes away, or any combination of problems that progress geometrically as a squad grows—are always going to be there. Although coaches primarily train students in communication, they are usually not as trained in helping students cope with certain personal difficulties unrelated to forensics. Second, the logistics and time it takes to plan trips—no matter how few are taken—during the year requires time, and creates stress, but is unavoidable. Moreover, some universities make coaches liable, to a certain degree, when problems resulting from these two factors occur. Third, although competition may contribute to educational stress, it will always be there, even (at least in a psychological sense) if we were to abandon giving hardware. This competition—placing our egos vicariously on the line—is stressful. But neither personal problems of our students or ourselves, the logistics of taking special time for work, or competition are unique to our profession.

Thus, the controllable factors—those that are to a certain extent capable of solution—probably account for most of the excess burnout associated with forensics. I would suggest seven possibilities that beg for study:

Factors of Burnout We Can Control

1. *Length of Season.* There are few activities of any sort that start in September and end in May. As well, few jobs require employees to miss virtually all weekends during this time—and then, summer institutes come around. Many may leave forensics or view it as a stepping stone toward less stressful positions for this reason alone.

2. *Pay.* A survey of virtually any publication disclosing state employee salaries will show that even directors of forensics who have earned the Ph.D. often receive less pay than most professors of equal rank who do not travel weekends. As well, the many institutions which hire non-tenure track personnel at cut-rate salaries (Hunt, 1992) to direct programs contribute to the problem.

3. *University research priorities.* Recently a midwestern professor who led his/her department in national publications was told, "tilt your time more toward research"—after his or her squad broke a school record for awards. Of course, the person in this instance may have contributed unwittingly to this burnout factor by promoting forensics based on trophy count rather than the activity's educational or research-generating value!

4. *The funding/recruitment/retention matrix.* Once many programs invest enough money to provide the practical experience necessary for a student to qualify for nationals, they find it difficult to find the funds to either send the student to a national tournament, or to maintain a more competitive schedule befitting a student with more experience. Also, schools are finding it increasingly difficult to retain students not dealt scholarships after a successful year. The efforts coaches must put into adjusting to these often unexpected and sudden setbacks, especially at research-oriented universities, take time away from career-developing research and coaching activities and contribute to burnout.

5. *Predatory recruitment practices.* Although a relatively small percentage of students transfer colleges just to change forensics programs, rumors concerning transfers—although they cannot be quantified because many are based on confidential discussions—can contribute to stress in situations where a coach is expected to mentor winning students. Sometimes a student will transfer rapidly from one University to another, and whether or not forensics is the reason, the abandoned coach *perceives* that the transfer is for forensics purposes. When a rapid transfer takes place, this stress occurs. When faced with a situation of having to retrain all students-participants rather than a quarter of them year after year, clearly a coach can burn out.

6. *Negative perception of forensics.* Unfortunately, many communication scholars see forensics as a stepping stone to positions where the work-to-pay ratio is more in line with their own financial and weekend social needs. Also, some view forensics as the ghetto of the communication discipline—"if you can't find a rhetoric position, you can always do forensics." "he couldn't do empirical research so he coaches," and "you mean she still coaches debate?" are statements often heard at SCA conventions.¹ Forensic educators might ask themselves, "well what do we do it for?" in light of those comments.

7. *Factionalism.* With apologies to Rodney King, "Can't we all get along?" Is there really a need for an NDT, a CEDA spin-off, a NEDA spin-off from CEDA, a NFA LD spin-off from whatever, and NPDA spin-off from APDA, and both an AFANIET and NFANIET? Why duplicate JV and novice nationals in debate? This dizzying array of options not only burns out coaches, but students—which, in turn, could have a snowball effect on coach burnout.

In sum, not only does the road to success involve pitfalls we can avoid on the way, but we cannot quite agree on where it leads. This lack of direction may create stress, brain drain, and burnout.

So what can we do? Based on these impressions, I would offer the following ideas as a starting point for discussion:

Coping with Burnout: Continuation of the Discussion

Group Problems 1-3. We need to bring our efforts in line with pay. First, we as a community can and should shorten the season. Although it will hurt some programs, there is really no need to attend tournaments every weekend

from September to April to teach students about debate. Let's either not sanction any tournaments before November (Note—even the nationally acclaimed *basketball* season starts after Thanksgiving, and ends before the forensics season ends even for the national champions—and although teams play two games per week, a 2-hour game certainly takes less time than a 3-day tournament involving from 6-10 debates, plus numerous other speeches for some competitors)—or limit the number of tournaments a team may attend. Either the season needs to be shorter or more disbursed. By offering a Spring Sweepstakes, CEDA has demonstrated at least one way to take a step in this direction. Other activities realize the Law of Diminishing Returns—why can't we? The extra time spent on research could not but enhance the quality of forensic journals, as well as our contributions to the general communication journals. Second, we can ameliorate the competitive stress by justifying our programs in terms of their research (especially at research oriented universities) and educational (especially at teaching-oriented universities) value rather than the number of trophies they generate (which is usually rather uncertain and can be seen as padding an annual report when they do come in). Overall, then, by limiting the amount of professional work we are willing to do for nothing, and maximizing the work that reaps rewards, we also stress to others the value of forensics to others in the discipline.

Group Problems 4-5. Clearly, students have the right to change colleges whenever, and certainly the 4-year program of courses from only one school has, for many, gone the way of the horse-and-buggy in today's workaday world. Doubly clearly, coaches should advocate better financial support for their students. But to the extent that coping with the ramifications of transfers creates both organizational and coach stress, I would advocate steps to address these areas of coach burnout without trampling on student rights.

First, coaches as educators should cooperate to the fullest extent about transfers—even if a student is upset with a program, it is not always in the overall academic interest of the student to transfer rapidly for debate purposes. We might apply CEDA's policy on rapid transfers (not counting points until a year has elapsed) to all of forensics in some fashion. As well, when a student approaches a coach about transferring, the coach approached should as rapidly as possible do one of two things: 1) notify the potentially abandoned coach that the student asked about transferring—when I have done this sometimes a coach has been made aware of a problem with a student and has been able to work out that problem to the benefit of all, avoiding the academically and financially troubling transfer, or 2) just say no to rapid and early transfers that take place before a student has finished their tenure at another institution.³

By the same token, a habit of accepting a transfer without preparing the others on a program may be like asking the new student to adapt to a new culture, as well as asking those of the program to accept a different squad culture. Although Borden (1991) describes our need to avoid uncertainty (pp. 121) in his general discussion of cross cultural communication, his notion that uncertainty about oneself produces anxiety (pp. 122-125) certainly would seem to apply to the culture of forensics squads. With this notion in mind, avoiding accepting rapid transfers could also reduce the stress of the coach who would be on the receiving end. One, the program and thus coach avoid creating uncertainty by better demonstrating loyalty to those who have already proven

themselves in a particular program. Increasing uncertainty by telling loyal students that suddenly their position on the team is threatened by a newcomer with two years of college experience can certainly backlash into burnout-inducing stress! Two, the new program might be wise to avoid the stress-producing uncertainty as to whether the new environment will meet the transfer's high expectations—the old adage that “the grass is always greener on the other side of the hill” comes to mind! Three, the program's image remains clean of both valid and invalid ethical charges of talent-raiding, relieving further uncertainty and stress.

Obviously I respect the rights of students to attend where they wish, when they want to attend there—but I do raise this issue as a constructive suggestion to help cope with coach burnout. I would emphasize that these notions apply only to *rapid* transfers—I do not believe that *arranged* transfers (where all are given notice) or *deliberate* transfers (of an academic variety, not involving discontent with a former program, where after a year has passed there is no need to give notice) create burnout-producing stress. When the student has set out a year, then the former program has had ample time to replace and the new program is under no obligation to notify the former coach—the former coach in this case already knows the student has left the program and can adjust accordingly. Furthermore, as long as both transfer and returning students can adapt to the acculturation process noted above, a transfer from a suddenly defunct program should not promote coach burnout.

Group Problems 6-7. As unpopular and paradoxical as it may sound, many forensics organizations need to be abandoned. In terms of perception, when we tear ourselves asunder through splintering (note that nearly every new intercollegiate forensics organization that arose during the past three decades sprang from some sort of protest), how can we expect others but to do likewise? When we cannot agree to at least the dimensions of quality, how can others perceive what skills we are trying to teach, much less respect them? I offer the following modest proposal—except for the honorary societies (Pi Rho Phi, Pi Kappa Delta, and DSR-TKA), disband all forensics organizations.⁴ The honoraries are essential inasmuch as they reward academics, participation in general, and provide good “warm-up” tournaments for nationals as well as culmination tournaments for those who may have worked hard but not qualified for debate or speech nationals. Have one organization—a *reorganized* American Forensics Association—control all aspects of national competition and qualifying tournaments, as well as both *Argumentation and Advocacy* and *The National Forensic Journal*. Have AFA as the only legitimate overall forensics national championship—with two divisions of debate—the NDT (which should embrace the CEDA schools now running policy anyway), and, at the same tournament, the NLDDT (which, following the NFL model, would have changed topics frequently throughout the year) for those who fancy persuasion rather than research as the main objection. Perhaps, as well, there could be an intermediate, quasipolicy division. A week later, AFA could sponsor the NIET—very similarly to the way it does now. Simply put, the format is most cost-effective, is more selective and in line with NFL, and does not run so long that it interferes with exams. But mainly, aside from the venerable Interstate Oratory which should be kept for sentimental as well as cost-effectiveness reasons, we only need one IE nationals, with perhaps NFA principles being incorporated into the at-large qualifying scheme and/or

tournament sweepstakes system. In short, this proposal calls for compromise and merger rather than endorsing the status quo AFA over the status quo NFA.

Furthermore, for the purpose of post-season shortening, either incorporate novice and JV national tournaments into divisions at the major nationals, or give out special awards at nationals for novices and juniors instead. That way, they are encouraged while still being able to compete against the best—what could be a better use of scarce educational time? Of course, as Preston and LaBoon (1995) note, “this would eliminate the need for NFA, CEDA, NEDA, and ‘officiated’ debate” (p. 7) because their positive contributions would be incorporated by the new two-person/one person distinction, and parliamentary would revert back to its audience-oriented, student-run, non-tournament format that works well in SCA’s international debates. And although some may commit the “should-would” fallacy by saying this will never happen (as we also noted earlier), some streamlining will eventually have to take place if coaches are to remain.

The two speculative advantages of the above program would be 1) less student burnout, since the organization follows a format that builds upon the high school experience rather than undermining it, and 2) less coach burnout since the goals become clearer and the students can be taught in a more efficient way. A side benefit would be that fraternal tournaments such as PKD would no longer have to offer so many divisions of debate—if the above were the case, four would do—open, junior, novice, and LD.

Conclusion

Overall, this editorial has identified several sources of coach burnout, indicated which were insoluble, and discussed which should be to a certain extent soluble. Each dimension of burnout and burnout-solution discussed should provide fertile ground for future discussion and/or research. Along with the Hunt (1995) proposals on increasing coach qualifications, I suggested seven dimensions in unity of direction might increase activity credibility enough so that more coaches would be willing to persevere. As well, coach cooperation in curbing predatory recruiting practices, shortening the season, and streamlining the structure of the activity and thus its objectives were seen as ways in which more forensic educators would be more willing to promote, rather than abandon, this worthwhile activity.

Notes

¹ Hunsaker (1993) supports the notion that the types of communication skills emphasized by forensics educators have been discredited by the communication discipline. Citing this attitude as his reason to choose high school over college teaching, he notes, “In a recent *Communication Education* article, Burgoon (1989) argues that ‘in speech there are few active scholars and unwise policy decisions about instructional practice (that) have relegated the discipline to second or third class status at most institutions (p. 303).’ His solution: To divorce the traditional speech pedagogy of performance-oriented courses, to be replaced with the Burgoonian concepts of the discipline of communication! Burgoon, of course, is one of those ‘nationally known scholars’ with whom I might have brushed shoulders had I joined a university faculty (p. 64).” Thus, one of the nation’s most

prominent forensic educators avoided the stress and uncertainty that would have been associated with the dearth of respect he felt he would have received in the collegiate departmental environment.

- ² Preston and LaBoon (1995) developed this idea at the 1995 Developmental Conference of Pi Kappa Delta, March 22, 1995. In their paper concerning the intolerance that divides the forensics community, they argue that splintering threatens the very heart of our activity and that more cooperation will be necessary for the activity to flourish in the next century.
- ³ As in the case of coping with the research priorities noted in *problem area 3*, a coach is better off here to stress the research/educational value of his or her program. That way, transferring becomes less important as long as any student can be found who is willing to learn although experience dictates that they might not win as quickly as the returning student might had they stayed at the original institution. As well, programs that stress numbers of students taught can chalk up another and actually turn a transfer situation into an advantage, assuming they would have to face that challenge.
- ⁴ Once again, Preston and LaBoon (1995), although stressing reasons other than coach burnout for cohesion within the activity, develop the ideas in this paragraph further in their Developmental Conference paper. Although their paper speaks more the cost/benefit advantages of restructuring, the increased interaction between high school and college programs, the lowering of entry barriers for participants, as well as the benefits for outreach, recruitment, and retention of coaches and students alike, these suggestions also appear in this editorial because of their additional potential for relieving coach burnout.

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Video tape models in forensics are available as follows:

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See *National Forensic Journal* for whom to order from
3. American Forensics Association National Individual Events Tournament
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See also for persuasion, informative, extemp, impromptu, after dinner speaking, and communication analysis, the so called platform speaking contests, basic elementary texts on public speaking and rhetoric. *****

See also for dramatic, poetry, prose, humorous, serious, duo interpretation, the oral interpretation of literature contests, basic texts on oral interpretation.*****

Remember *Speech Teacher* becomes *Communication Education*
JAFSA becomes *Argument and Advocacy*