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# The Relationship of Coaching Football and Counseling: Building a Championship System

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The Relationship of Coaching Football & Counseling  
Building a Championship System.

Brent E. Schroeder

A Capstone Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Master of Science Degree  
in Counselor Education at Winona State University

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Has been approved by the faculty advisor and the CE-695 – Capstone Project

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### Abstract

Throughout this paper we will explore how school counselors can help build a championship atmosphere in the school setting. This paper will examine the overlap between coaching football and school counseling. This paper will show how the philosophy of coaching football can create a championship atmosphere in the school system among the students and faculty. The research discussed throughout this paper will show how to build trust, observe leaks in the school system, motivate students and staff, learn how to deal with outside problems, live healthy, and think outside the box to help kids become a leader of themselves. By creating this process in our school systems we as counselors can increase the productivity, and overall health and wellness of our school system, and lead young minds to a successful tomorrow.

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## **Introduction**

If school systems don't tighten up their defense, the leaks in the system are going restrict students from reaching their full potential and cause our communities greater problems in the future. If you look at the consistency across different school districts students and faculty are placed in a system dictated by what has been created before them. By looking at the similarities between coaching football and counseling we can see a severe leak in school systems. The causes of these leaks are many. By patching what has been built before creates new holes that have not been recognized. By identifying these gaps as school counselors we can help students that have fallen through the cracks achieves success. Achieving the correct kind of success for students is the challenge that all school counselors face.

A model for facilitating collaboration between counseling psychology and school counseling that compromised four broad areas: (a) curriculum, (b) research, (c) service, and (d) professional organization. These four areas are basis not only between counseling psychology and school counseling, but can be related to the student's model for success in the school system, Ramono and Kachgal (2004).

Along with collaboration comes one of the biggest key terms to championship success and that is TRUST. Whether on the field or in the school this is the hardest thing to build and the easiest thing to destroy. By definition the key to being successful is being consistent over time. If each level of the school system doesn't trust the other gaps are created. As school counselors we need to work with every member of our team and help students build a trusting relationship with their peers.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Goal**

According to the American School Counseling Association the main role of a school counselor is to guide students with social and career development. Counselors consult with students, teachers and parents to identify developmental needs and design prevention or intervention activities in order to guide students on a healthy path toward adulthood. A Counselor implements guidance according to learning theories and the educational philosophy of the school.

As defined by coachescolleague.com a coach has roles, responsibilities, and characteristics that are similar to that of a school counselor. These characteristics are be personal, a good communicator, open minded, fairness and equality, patient, approachable, occupational, organized, responsible, reliable, positive, presentable, knowledgeable, a fitness trainer of the body and mind, motivator, role model, friend, and finally a disciplinarian manager as well as a life manager.

With all these defined characteristics that create great people, the overall goal is to guide students on a healthy path toward adulthood. Through my 15 year coaching career I have observed students and coaches that have all these characteristics instilled in them. So what is the difference between success and becoming a champion? First off is the system that is created. Second is the belief created in a championship team's heart. Notice I said team. There are many championship type people, but for an entire group, team or organization to continue to work together for one common goal over an extended period of time is rare. My goal as a school

counselor is to bring the similarities from coaching to counseling and build a motivated championship team!

### **Building Trust**

Establishing meaningful partnerships is often more difficult than imagined (McGowan, 2005).

Through trust comes collaboration, and from collaboration comes unity, and from unity comes a strength and bond that is not easily broken. This trust is built by performing group counseling techniques that allow the group freedom to establish plans for resolving their problems (Vernon, 2009). As a school counselor, just like a player or coach, you have to create a trust that allows all gaps in the system you are trying to create to be filled. Trust is built by being consistent over time and being aware of the people around you and their assignments. Using a person centered approach is essential in building this trusting relationship and strength in an organization. Unconditional positive regard, congruence, and empathy-the basic tenets of person-centered therapy (Rogers, 1965). By showing unconditional positive regard you are allowing the student to build trust in you for understanding who they are and why they act the way they do. By showing empathy in this way you begin to build a bond. Showing congruence toward the student you are working with helps to strengthen this bond. Showing strong empathic listening skills is what makes this positive regard such a useful tool. In my coaching career many times all a student needs is a 10 minute walk to realize that you are truly there for them, and through that you can build that trust that the coach or teacher truly does care for their wellbeing. The person centered approach is valuable in any organization in building trust from leaders to people who work with these leaders. The skills that you instill in the client will reflect on the way they treat

others who may not be as experienced in your organization. This is one of the first steps in building championship organizations.

### **Leaks in the school system.**

When this title is typed in the library search section nothing about the leaks of students abilities are brought up. It is only looked upon as something catastrophic that has happened usually due to lack of maintenance and complacency of the school system. If school districts become complacent and comfortable the human intuition to become lazy will affect the outcome of production in that system.

Using an overview of Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy, emotional distress results from dysfunctional cognitions and there is a strong interconnectedness between thinking, feeling, and behaving (Dryden, Digiuseppe, & Neenan, 2003). By using the ABC Model in REBT we have built this trusting relationship between coaches and players in our organization. By initiating disputing we have helped student's self-defeating behaviors become minimal. By teaching self-help techniques we can help our team to experience lasting change over a course of a lifetime. Many former players have come up to me years after playing and said what an impact the things they learned on the football field have had on their life and how they use them consistently for the demands of everyday life.

I feel that this is one of the areas that public school systems have formed a somewhat patchwork philosophy in their goals for helping students reach adulthood. Students are not as reliant on self- help as they use to be. Too many students now days have to push a button in order to get a response. I often joke with people that our children will not know how to turn on a water faucet because everything is always done for them.

I want to focus on the B in the ABC model. The belief is what creates strength in any organization. By creating students that believe in a more positive outcome they are more apt to be able to deal with the rigorous life events that they face. Too many students catastrophize in problems and can't deal with them. Our coaching philosophy in football is to adapt, improvise, and overcome. By using techniques available through REBT such as homework assignments, Bibliotherapy, and various self-help materials a long lasting change can be achieved by students (Ellis & MacCallaren, 1998, Vernon, 2002a).

As a varsity football coach I feel very fortunate to have lived and been mentored by is Carl Fruechte. His philosophy has always been to stay humble and stay hungry. This philosophy was put into place in 2007 after our first state Championship in over 30 years. When I talk about becoming lazy and complacent in our school system I will just shortly reflect on the way that people run as athletes. Upon reaching the pinnacle of success in high school football we reached out to learn more about speed and football movement. Most people believe that it is the legs or stride that control movement. In fact it is the rotation of the shoulder with the arm locked at a 90-degree angle that creates the leg to turn. According to coach Dale Baskett, this relationship creates synchronization between the shoulder joint and the legs, allowing your body to have proper line, sync, and strike with the ground to create more functional movement in less time, thus creating better athletes (personal communication, April, 8, 2007). This specialized speed movement along with Olympic weight lifting techniques and a strong core are key elements in successful teams.

While not to get into a sports performance documentary what is happening throughout our physical education program is our student have been programmed to run lazy and undisciplined. I believe this transference leads the way that people continue through life and

school as well. What this has proved to me since 2007 is that the brain has been conditioned over time to follow the path of least resistance in the system that they have applied themselves. By the brain turning thousands of revolutions of incorrect running form a bad habit in mechanical form has been created. I feel that all too often this same kind of mechanical failure occurs in our school system as well. Students become complacent and teachers find paths of least resistance with the students so they choose to teach in this way. I have a defensive philosophy with my defensive lineman that the hard way is the right way. The game of football is designed so that the offense sets an angle on you and you take the path of least resistance. My goal is to have rules in place to cover gaps according to the system that is in front of them. By system I mean offensive formation. So if all gaps are covered and you take the most difficult path and have the tools to defeat the system in front of you the winning percentage is much greater. In the past 5 years following this philosophy we have achieved a winning percentage greater than 95%.

What about the students who do not fall in the category of needing attention. Such as the already good athlete or A student. These students are often times the ones who receive the least amount of praise and attention to build upon their already God given talents. It often takes a catastrophic event for these students to seek out help in the counseling field. All too often I feel that because of the lack of time and resources in school systems the students that sometimes look successful on top, often have huge problems underneath. This is similar to the iceberg technique use in Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. The traumas that a person faces in their lifetime are often hidden and unrecognized. With the implementation of TF-CBT techniques students are allowed to explore and answer problems under the surface by using these techniques to move forward in a positive way.

## **Motivation**

The key to becoming motivated is to find something positive about the situation and goal you are trying to achieve. One of the most important things I have learned as a coach is that there is a time for everything in life. Football has time to run, a time to pass. Life has a time to rest, and a time to work, and a time to play. Understanding this in your students of where they are at in life is best described by psychological time. Psychological time is a dynamic process that continuously adapts to changes in life circumstances. (Journal of Counseling and Development 2003(81). We as humans are programmed with a sense of urgency to belong to something greater than we are. What we are instilling in people is hope. Hopes and dreams are what truly motivate people to become greater than they are. If you ask a first grader what he learned in school today he will probably say lots of things. If you ask a senior he will probably say nothing. Being aware of the psychological timing a student is living in will help you discover what motivates them. I reflect back on a practicum experience I encountered where I was meeting with all students with failing grades. While trying to help this young student it was brought up that him and his family had been sleeping in their car at the rest area the night before because they lost their home. Without knowing the needs of the student and the circumstances faced this may lead a teacher, coach, or counselor to take different approaches and reactions to the student.

Many times the lack of motivation is due to outside problems. In order to get the most out of students or players you have to build trust and rapport with the student in order to instill hope and motivation in their life. Through using a Solution-Focused Approach we can reflect on the organization attempts to solve a problem is more important than the problem itself (Gunn, Haley, Lyness, 2007). In football I describe blockers as figments and obstacles of my defenses

imagination. These obstacles are avoided by trained techniques on how to defend against any system. By having an entire defense on the same decision making process allows them to make change with quick, concrete, working solutions. While this may sound as simple as tackling the guy with the ball, it sort of is. But the complexity to it is the matrix of speed angles, trust, and motivation within the created system to reach the goal faster than the system in front of you.

School counselors can really benefit from this Solution-Focused Approach as a facilitator of change, the counselor works to find a proper fit between the family's strengths and the therapeutic interventions (Gladding, 2007). The family system is much more disruptive in today's society. The motivation that can be instilled through counseling in families helps relieve them of that feeling of being stuck. Often times in school systems teachers and students are stuck in situations that have evolved over time. As school counselors we need to use directives to help the team of students, families, and teachers get moving again through these problems. Dealing with problems and creating change is often a very uncomfortable feeling for most people. Thinking outside the box on ways to increase change is often difficult. This is why complacency is built in to many organizations.

### **Dealing with outside problems**

Dual relationship offers some unforeseen challenges in regards to coaching football and becoming a school counselor. Challenges include showing equality to all players on the field, yet giving needed attention and care to those student athletes that need help. One of the biggest struggles student athletes have is leaving the baggage of that day at the gym doors when they come out to practice. Practice should be number one a privilege, but also a release that all students need to maintain a healthy lifestyle balance. Same holds true for any person wearing

two hats in the school counseling and coaching or leadership fields in the school system. In a review of leadership theory and research, Chemers (2000) concluded that effective managerial leaders today need to (a) demonstrate trustworthiness and competence, (b) motivate employees so that they understand how accomplishing group objectives helps them achieve individual goals, (c) coach and guide employees in a way that is empowering and helps to develop their skills, and (d) make intelligent decisions while remaining sensitive to employees' values and needs.

Dealing with these problems in a positive and confidential matter will be a trying thing when performing a dual relationship as a coach and a school counselor. On the other hand you can use coaching as a tool to give the student athlete the extra care and attention that may be missing somewhere else in his/her life if they were not part of the program.

Throughout my practicum experience I began to realize in a short period of time that any student that I came in to contact with had a trauma trigger that was affecting them in some sort of way in the school system. I began to keep tally of the many different behaviors students were having in the classroom. After reflecting upon these students with the current school counselor I began to discover trauma triggers that these students had faced in their life. I began exploring more Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy techniques and the benefits it has on students, families, and the school system.

As a coach over the past fifteen years I have seen countless ways in which these past traumatic events affect the way a student develops. As a coaching staff we have seen players come through the program that we can recognize the mental and physical health of a player just by their mental focus and running form. All people deal with outside problems in a different

way. As school counselors I believe that we can look at a student's daily method of operation and realize when something is out of sync with them. The only way that a school counselor would be able to notice this is to have built a trusting relationship with that student ahead of time. I feel all too often students are brought in for counseling long after their problem has come to the surface. Preventative maintenance and training on how to deal with outside problems is something that I feel extracurricular activities has a great impact of teaching young people.

### **Thinking outside the box**

One of the examples I remember from a theories class in my master's program was how most people who have a green card held up in front of their eyes can only see the small green card. They could not look beyond the card at the time and see the large blue wall behind the card. This sort of techniques seems to becoming all the more common for students. They simply cannot think past the first layer of their life, and the consequences things like substance abuse will have on their life. From a developmental perspective, adolescence is a time of gaining independence, experimentation, and taking risks (McGowan 2006). As a counselor and a coach this is one of the largest areas of overlap in which students need the most guidance to make appropriate choices. The difficult task of teaching and not dictating life for them is becoming more and more common problem with parents and students. Parents continue to want their son or daughter to have everything marked out for them. This builds complacency and allows children to develop patterns that they struggle with if an outside circumstance affects them.

### **Don't teach students to be robots to develop leadership**

Use your area of expertise to allow the student to challenge what you already know. By doing this you may learn something or clarify your theory by the different approach the student

uses to find a solution to the problem. *Accountability* has become catchword in today's sociopolitical climate. Since the 1960's, local, state, and federal government spending has been more closely scrutinized and the effectiveness of social programs and initiatives more carefully questioned (Houser, 1998;Kirst, 2000).

This is the area where blame comes into the system to destroy a championship team. Those individuals who hold each other accountable with unconditional positive regard gain trust from one another. Through positivity accountability forces individuals to think for themselves. In today's era of electronics it is harder and harder to find a young person that is programmed to listen the first time a direction is given. These simple tasks are leadership skills that now have to be reprogrammed into the student's brain. While I believe all people have some sort of leadership qualities, circumstances often create negative events to influence their life and turn them into followers. By becoming followers a lot of times people follow down the wrong path. All students are offered this path sometime throughout their school life. I feel it is the morals and work ethic that are instilled in a person at a very young age that keep them on the path of success.

As a counselor or a coach it is the path of success into adulthood that we need to focus our efforts on. I am just as proud of the former players I have in the community that are construction workers, farmer, doctors, or lawyers as I am of the players that have made it in the NFL. I believe the mental toughness that has been instilled in our young people through our program has a direct correlation to building a long lasting championship heart and being willing to fulfill their civil duties in our communities. Throughout all of the hard work and dedication one must remember what it takes to remain at the top, and that is a healthy lifestyle.

## **Living Healthy**

Rest and recovery is the key to success both on and off the football field. Throughout the grueling long season and physical demands of school and athletics it is vital to follow good core nutrition and sleeping habits on a consistent basis. The wheel of wellness (Niels 2008) gives a great theoretical model to follow to balance the rigorous routine of coaching and counseling and help ease the mental strain placed on someone in a dual leadership role. One of the most inspirational messages I heard was from Drew Brees quarterback of the New Orleans Saints. People would ask him how he can balance so many tasks, family, and football. His advice was to be present in whatever situation you are in. I thought this was great advice both as a coach and as a counselor. Truly being present in the situation allows us to fully embrace the people we are working with at the time. Today it is harder than ever with multi-media distractions to be fully present and turn off the outside world.

A healthy lifestyle is a reflection of habits that we create. Society often creates habits unconsciously for us that cause us to follow an unhealthy lifestyle. We need to remember that we are our own leaders and to keep making healthy choices. Our players are often reminded that choices have consequences. By continuing to remind players of this on a consistent basis we have been able to turn the drinking culture to a minimum. One of the biggest things I am proud of in our program is when the players choose to not drink any soda, let alone alcoholic beverages. This choice is made consciously because they know the impact it will have on their team goals of becoming a champion. This teamwork takes the one thing that requires the most will and desire and that is discipline.

## **Discipline**

More recently, the large increases in mandated counseling have resulted from colleges and universities making an effort to more vigorously confront behaviors that are deemed to be inappropriate on the campus (Dannells, 1990). This is in large respect to the lack of discipline that students are given through younger years. Extracurricular activities and discipline have been proven to increase student's ability to succeed at the college level. The habits and skills that can be taught at an early age have a long-term impact on young adult's ability to cope with diversity. I find it true in my own children that when habits like gaming take hold of their thoughts they often have trouble changing tasks and following directions without a meltdown. When I first became a parent one of the best words of advice I had was from a Coach Fruechte, who said that I would highly suggest keeping those distractions out of your home (personal communication, November 30, 2004). I believe he is right. The problem is that society has created such a demand due to revenue from companies that it feels like you are a minority without them. I truly believe that as counselor's society has created a whole new wave of work in helping students to manage addiction from technology. Finding the joy in discipline is what makes champions. Learning to handle the discipline inflicted by others is what makes us stronger.

As counselors I believe the best thing that we can teach is self-discipline. Having clients learn self-discipline is a key in their healing process. It is very hard for them to gain belief in themselves that they can conquer their past and work toward a brighter future. All the things discussed in this paper from a football prospective help in the healing process. This is why I am such a firm believer in the correlation between coaching and counseling. The techniques that

counselors can use are in direct correlation with the influence coaches are trying to instill in their players. By hard work and discipline anything can be accomplished. The thought of believing in oneself to do this is what makes a person successful.

### **Discussion**

The influence that both football coaches and school counselors have on adolescence and the way they impact their future is immeasurable. By giving proper guidance on and off the field a relationship of trust can be created among the student, coaches, parents, and school faculty. By observing areas in which students may be allowed to slide through the cracks in the system we as school counselors can build a strong team to help utilize the full potential of each and every student, and prevent this. As school counselors many of the following approaches can be used both in counseling and in the coaching field: Psychodynamic, Rational Emotive/Behavior Therapy, Adlerian Therapy, Solution-Focused Therapy, Developmental Counseling, and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Through the use of these approaches and characteristics of both school counselors and coach's, students have the opportunity to succeed in whatever endeavor life offers.

Through the use of these approaches both in the coaching world and in school counseling we can work together to build a championship atmosphere in our school systems. A team may be successful because of the players on their team or in their school system, but to build a true championship atmosphere trust has to be created. The overlap of coaching and counseling lies parallel to each other in order of importance about building this trust. Championship teams and systems are not created in one special night. They are created years before by the hard work and dedication of the team members involved.

As school counselors it is essential for us to know what motivates the people in the system we are in. The motivation from a coach is usually in the form of a championship. As school counselors it is through the daily victories of that student being supported through interventions like Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) that champions are made. As a coach I may be very harsh on a student one time throughout the drill, but I must make it a point and a philosophy of mine to praise and be positive and encouraging the next time that player passes buy. The results I have found from my years of coaching are Sundays are a day of rest. Mondays are a reflection on what is to be learned. Tuesday needs to be a day in which the player is brought back down to the base of the mountain or task at hand of the opponent for the week. Wednesday is the day where you start to build and erase any questions a student may have. Thursdays are designed to make your team feel invincible and confident in what they are about to perform. Friday is lead with a smile and pure emotion and desire to adapt, improvise and overcome any situation that is placed in front of them. Saturday's are a day for growth and investment in the young culture that lies behind them in the form of coaching our youth program.

As school counselors it is very important to realize what portion of psychological time the client is in. By doing this and relating to this philosophy you can see what day of the week they are stuck on and help them to build themselves up throughout the week to reach their goal. Throughout time many clients are stuck without a goal and cannot achieve success. It is our goal as a counselor to help them find that inner drive again inside them.

As school counselors it is our obligation to observe any leaks in our school system that affect the outcome potential of our students. To increase the overall structure set forth in a school district you need to be aware of the needs and desires of the district that have been put in place. Remember to always put the student first and not create a patchwork type system just because

the almighty dollar say's so. Stick up for yourself and our profession as school counselors and help increase the productivity and overall health of our school system.

I have spent 15 years of my life learning how to adapt to students and get the most out of them. More importantly was not what I got out of them, but training what they learned about their own limits. The coolest thing in coaching is when you see that imaginary light bulb start to flicker inside someone that is starting to see the path that they are to take. Once the light goes on it is just a matter of plugging themselves in and lighting the path to their future. Counseling should have that same affect. When you can help a client find what lies within themselves the rewards begin.

As I reflect on the future pathway of the school counseling career I can't help but think there is some "It" factor that has possessed me to continue on and do what I do throughout my crazy chaotic lifestyle. I do not claim to be the most knowledgeable counselor in the world, nor do I claim to know more than anyone else. Remember stay humble and stay hungry. What I do possess is an incredible way to relate with youth. It is something I enjoy and am passionate about achieving. I feel that the positivity and warm smile you can give a child is priceless. That care and compassion that you show them in coaching or in counseling may be the only person that day who has looked in their eyes to see what lies inside their heart. It is easy to give a child a dream. The hard part is staying with that child through the journey that awaits them.

All too often I find in my coaching career people who are too quick to judge a person just because of where they are at in life. Our coaching philosophy is to never quit on a young person. Time and time again we have taken the bad athlete and made them good, a good athlete great, and occasionally you have your elite athletes rise up. At the current time, remaining consistent

with them, they find themselves as a starter on a highly successful football team when they are older. I think this is a great reflection on how we as counselors have to meet people where they are at, remain consistent with them and give some belief and stability in their lives.

As I complete this capstone project I find it ironic that another young man I once coached has signed to play in the NFL today. I have watched this young man grow from climbing goal posts in Nebraska when he was five, through the start of a high school football dynasty and two state championships, live a dream as a division one football player, and now reach an unthinkable milestone for a small town boy to enter the NFL. All of this by sticking with the system his father created and living and breathing with a championship heart. While all of this was far from given, the choices were his and he dared to dream. The “it” factor was instilled in him, he just chose to live it.

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