

"How to Win Friends and Influence People" - Or, How to be a Popular Official

NFHS Officials' Quarterly Publications Committee Jenni Malsam notes that there are several tenets in the book, "How to Win Friends and Influence People" that could easily be applied to the avocation of officiating.

By Jenni Malsam

There are several tenets listed in the book, "How to Win Friends and Influence People" that are easily applied to the avocation of officiating. Let's look at a few of the rules of the game for ascending into the ranks of the popular, well-liked and successful.

1) Become interested in others It seems obvious how showing an interest in the lives and actions of other people helps an individual to be well-liked and accepted. Having excellent people skills is one of the best attributes a new official can have. Not only is this important for dealing with coaches, administrators and players, but it's a key component to being a good partner. A rookie official with good people skills, an interest in others and an eagerness to learn the craft of officiating will zoom up the ranks, because he or she becomes a "favored" partner – someone who the veteran officials are willing to work with and assist in their career. A strong ego is necessary to have the courage to even consider becoming an official. A healthy self-confidence and a positive attitude are beneficial to all officials. But, the new official should work at allowing the seasoned officials to share their stories and give advice. The rookie who is a good listener and a learner will be readily accepted and supported by the veteran officials.

2) Smile Officiating can be rife with conflict and confrontation. Emotions run high and competition leads people to lose their temper when things don't always go their way. Keeping a cool head and even having a winning smile can defuse an ugly situation and calm the storm. Being approachable, reassuring and actively listening, while using that smile, will win the confidence and trust of the players and coaches. No one relates to a grinning fool, so remember to be balanced in your friendliness and serious about your duties as manager of the contest. But, never underestimate the power of a friendly smile of encouragement and accessibility.

3) Learn Names Officials who identify the bench personnel, chain crew, clock operators, scorekeepers and event managers as part of the officiating crew and acknowledge their contributions to a smoothly run contest are welcomed, respected and even admired by these folks. The official who respectfully addresses these assistants by name will help form a bond of support and teamwork in managing the contest.

4) Stay in touch The most sought-after officials are the ones who are known as being prompt, dependable and efficient in managing the contest. Communication with the administrators, coaches and the event management is crucial to laying the groundwork for being accepted as a good and reputable official.

5) Check your appearance Every officiating manual, every officiating clinic and every veteran official stresses this aspect of officiating – to be treated as a fine official, you must look like a fine official! If you look a little "scattered" in your appearance, you will be treated as though your calls are a bit "scattered." Appearance IS important to establishing a professional and skilled demeanor with the coaches, teams and the fans. You can screech all you want about your rights to personal expression, but if you want to be taken seriously as an official, you must shave the beard, trim the hair, wear clean and pressed officiating gear in the proper size, remove the jewelry and do everything you can to look slick and polished.

6) Be yourself To be successful at anything, it is so important to be yourself and not to try so hard that you put people off. Many officials who are desperate to advance become their own worst enemies. They try so hard to secure games for themselves that they make the mistake of ingratiating themselves and they become greedy, grasping, self-promoting buffoons. They may succeed in getting lots of games because they make so many contacts and they are usually a bit pushy. But, they soon earn a reputation for being less than professional. They may be well-known ... but they're not well-known in a GOOD way. They're hired and they work a lot of games, but they're not respected or established in officiating circles. While they may be hard-working officials, they've worked too hard at promoting themselves and they will likely never achieve the esteem that they are craving.

So, BE YOURSELF and let things happen for you. If you work hard and learn the craft, the games will come to you. You'll find success and satisfaction in officiating and you might even win friends and influence people while becoming one of the POPULAR officials! OQ

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Jenni Malsam, who is a registered official with both the Iowa High School Athletic Association and the Iowa Girls' High School Athletic Union, formerly served on the NFOA Board of Directors and was president in 1998-99. A resident of Sioux City, Iowa, Malsam graduated from Morningside (Iowa) College in 1975, and has officiated girls volleyball as well as boys and girls basketball since 1979. Malsam is a member of the NFHS Officials' Quarterly Publications Committee.