

NADIIIAA

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When Life Gives you Corona

Jersey designs were at the top of the March 11 problem list. March 12 cancellations rocked our world and we're still feeling the aftershock. The way we worked immediately needed to change and I found myself looking to some of my youngest and brightest for help solving our new problems. For years, many of my brilliant graduates would head out to Silicon Valley or New York to work for up and comers I never heard of. Their passion paralleled our young coaches. Helping a startup solve problems wasn't their interest, it was their mission. With our uncommon workspaces and a need to seek and test new ideas, I find us feeling a lot like a start-up. There's actually a lot we can learn from them. I'll share three start-up characteristics that are helping us thrive from a distance.

Got Culture?

Start-ups are known for their unique cultures. They also find creative ways to reinforce the values and the mission or "main thing." Right now recruitment and retention is the "main thing" for all of us. Unfortunately, virtual work spaces make it easier to forget the words on the wall (values) and the feeling of togetherness that comes from sharing space. No matter if it's a virtual happy hour or a chat room for water cooler moments, we must create space for connectivity. It's also important that our core values continue to be the north star that directs us towards the "main thing" and the many tough decisions ahead.

Old dogs learn new tricks

Virtual campus visits, virtual recruiting events, virtual interviews, virtual practices, virtual chalk talks, virtual camps, virtual banquets, and dare I say it ... esports. I admit I was resistant. I'm evolving and so are NCAA rules. Test your assumptions, fail fast, correct and repeat. It's a key to start-up success and it's working for us, too. Our strength coaches and their programs are loved on Instagram. We had 400 juniors attend our virtual prospect day, far more than we would have had on campus. Funny how change can help you realize that you may have been wrong the whole time.

Flatten the structure

How are those Microsoft Teams and Slack channels working out? I credit our young assistants and administrators for leading the way. Grassroot development and implementation of ideas are keeping our staff motivated and revealing their value. This is also a great time to invest in your staff. Although budgets are lean, book groups and guest speakers are low to no cost initiatives. Our retention goals should not only be established for athletes.

I never thought I could thrive in the uncertainty of start-ups, now I live it. Jerseys don't seem to matter much today. Today we tackle big problems, broadcasted live on Zoom. We're playing from behind, but we've got time. Some are playing with the additional pressure that if we don't succeed, we risk much more than a sports season. Collaboration-based work methods aren't just good for us, they're showing people across our campuses what's possible. Good luck at tackling your next big problems. May the best ideas win!

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