

NAIA-ADA



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Diversity & Inclusion is Everybody's Business

Our organization is no stranger to responding to crises. In June 2006, NACDA was one of the first to host a Convention in New Orleans following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. The outpouring of service throughout this nation helped the city to survive and make it to its 300th year celebration.

Well, here we are again faced with a crisis that threatens our very existence. Dr. Toya Barnes-Teamer, Principal, HCM Strategists, LLC and former Vice President for Student Success at Dillard University, used the phrase, "Student Success is Everybody's Business" as a rallying cry to focus the campus community on developing and aligning our divisional/departmental goals, strategies and tasks with the foundation of the institution's existence. As we examined the transition of our student-athletes to online

learning, we quickly realized that diversity in economic status gravely affected some students more than others. Some student-athletes had to return to their homes where there was no internet access or a computer. Some student-athletes have access to work-out equipment in their home, but others don't. When you examine the number of unintended consequences, like a student-athlete potentially not being eligible because they don't have access to resources to participate in online learning, you quickly realize that a failure to have no strategies and goals centered on diversity and inclusion is a disaster waiting to happen. I am here to tell you that DIVERSITY & INCLUSION IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS.

In 2019, I was asked to deliver remarks on behalf of the Under Armour Athletics Director of the Year honorees at the annual awards luncheon at the NACDA & Affiliates Convention. As I pondered the gravity of what it would mean to speak on behalf of others; to be an advocate or to be a VOICE, I thought, how can I effectively express sentiments on behalf of people of whom I have limited knowledge? As a result, I reached out to my colleagues and asked them to provide me with one word to describe what receiving this award meant to them and secondly to share one word describing what membership in NACDA means to them. Inclusion requires that we not

only ask and communicate, but that we also listen and act with intention. In the spirit of inclusion and intentionality, I crafted my statement to incorporate my colleagues' one word responses. This is what it looks like when we not only ASK, but that we also LISTEN and take ACTION.

Dr. China Jude, MOAA President and Senior Associate Athletics Director and Senior Woman Administrator at the University of Wyoming, shared that we will need to look deeper and that "diversity in thought will be required to navigate these uncharted waters." Mahatma Gandhi says that "the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in service." As we work through this crisis, it is important that we center diversity and inclusion initiatives at the core of our work because DIVERSITY & INCLUSION IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS.

NATYCAA



Marco Azurdia

Northwest Athletic Conference
Executive Director

Athletics Leadership: React or Respond to Adversity?

We all know a common denominator of successful teams is handling adversity. COVID-19 has challenged us when it comes to our preparedness to deal with adversity. This situation is not something we learned from a textbook in our graduate programs. When preparing for competition, you have some indication of what your opponent does. This opponent is unlike any opponent or competitor any of us has ever faced. Regardless of adversity or what the adversity is, your principles of leadership either burns like ashes, or are forged by the fire.

When things tend to go sideways, the ability to stay true to the fundamentals (core principles) of what you believe, simply execute the details effectively (doing ordinary things extraordinarily well), and planning must focus on the short and

long term. It is important as athletics administrators that your leadership be steady, simple, and sound. People will follow those who exude peace in the midst of the storm, clear direction when the road is filled with curves and wisdom when all around are questioning. Those whom you serve and lead need leaders who respond to adversity, not react to it. To a true leader, adversity elicits a response not a reaction.

The fruition of those principles mentioned above are expressed in the following ways:

1) Decisions need to be timely and more importantly, thoughtful. We were not going to rush with a decision just because we have coaches, presidents, student-athletes, staff or parents wanting a decision yesterday. We were not going to cave to the pressure of anxiousness, but rather be timely and extremely thoughtful when making decisions.

2) Do what is in the best interest of the team (in this case, our student-athletes). Obviously this is a dilemma no one could control. Our student-athletes had no control over this, though they were not the only ones who were left with doubt, confusion and anxiousness. It is our job to help them learn how to navigate through extremely difficult times. Talk about real teachable moments.

3) Listen first, then communicate clearly and consistently. Often times in a situation such as this, people want to speak first and then regret and/or have to change what they said. The message needs to be simple, clear, practical, and honest. Answer questions and avoid creating more confusion. There are so many messages coming from all avenues seemingly changing by the hour. Simple and clear puts people at ease.

4) Planning needs to be early, sound yet flexible, and comprehensive, providing short and long-term solutions and hearing from others. Wise planning takes into account the known and works towards identifying the unknown and plans accordingly.

Adversity can either elicit a response or a reaction. Based on your handling of this situation would those you lead call you a "responder or a reactor" – Forged by the fire or burned by the fire?