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A New Season

As we wrapped up the spring with #CEFMAVirtualVegas there was much to learn and take away from some of the messages. Most notable, at least for me, was Kevin DeShazo discussing the concept of "New Normal" v. "New Season." Early on in the pandemic, a colleague texted me to say that he hates the term "new normal," because it meant we would all be out of a job. For many of us that has proven to be true and the weight of that fact is heavy on our industry built on students, games, fans and contests. However, as Kevin stated in May, a "new normal" is negative and reflects something that we are stuck with. A "new season" is a powerful statement and brings hope to what is coming ahead of us.

Out with the old and in with the new, a new season allows us to change and address weaknesses that we see in ourselves, in our operations, in our culture and in our community.

The normal that was growing in our communities was the idea of "Cancel Culture." A phrase I heard several years ago and laughed off, but now look at as the main source for the eroding of our interaction as humans. This has eliminated our ability to have honest and open discussions on hard issues. It has eliminated our ability to accept another opinion. It has eliminated our ability to become self-aware of our tendencies and grow as individuals through others. Flip that normal to the opportunity of a new season and you can see how as a community we can all grow.

It is this growth that we all need, the pandemic has brought out frustration and anger that has been stewing for a long time beneath the surface. Racism, bigotry, and hate have become common place in society. Interesting that our ticket gates, courts, fields and arenas don't care, but those who fill them impact that experience.

So now we forge ahead in the new season that is upon us. It is difficult, it is different and it

certainly is not normal, but shouldn't there be some shared excitement for opportunity? How can we change for the better? How can we eliminate the biases that exist in ourselves and society? The facility and event community have been leaders in planning and welcoming staff and students back into our work spaces and practice fields. Now through our connections as professionals we can be leaders in being better people. #CEFMAConnects started out as a way to learn from one another in our industry, but it goes so much further than that. It is about changing a culture to one of support and unity rather than cancelling others. Our organization is and always will be one that supports each other regardless of any categorization someone may fall in. This is a new season and we will be better because of it.



Sam Atkinson

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How is your crisis communication plan going? We are seven months into a reeling college athletics landscape that got flipped upside down back in mid-March. College athletics departments and conference offices have been dealing with several crisis issues for months and there doesn't seem to be any end in sight.

Hopefully during these unsettled times, athletics departments and conference offices are leaning on the expertise and experience of the skilled athletics communicators on their own staffs.

CoSIDA continues to advocate for the sports communications profession and champion our athletics communicator members in their daily jobs. These positions have never meant more to an athletics department or conference office than this year.

Several athletics administrators and head coaches have made missteps with public comments about the pandemic or speaking out about Black Lives Matter.

As the students say, "They didn't read the room."

These missteps have forced departments and offices to regroup, strategize and save face before things evolve into a bigger problem.

In this 24/7 world we live in and the race to be first to post a statement or fancy graphic, there inevitably seems to be mistakes made. How many of these missteps could be fixed before things went public if the athletics communicator(s) on your staff were involved? There are not many staff members that have the pulse of your entire department more than your athletics communicator(s).

CoSIDA continues to educate its members year round with online Listening and Learning webinars and leadership education, while stressing crisis communication strategies and how to handle certain situations. Our hope for schools and conferences in 2020-21 is for them to continue to see the value of being a CoSIDA member and what that membership can do to improve the skills of athletics communicators - and ultimately benefit each school or conference.

As an organization, we are the first to admit we have a problem with our membership demographics (predominately white males). We are committed to making diversity a priority and improving the makeup of our organization.

This past summer, we launched our #CoSIDAForChange campaign to address Racial and Social Justice issues, introducing our Critical Conversations series with our first panel "The Intersection of Race and Athletic Communications." The response was so overwhelming that two weeks later we had an after-hours virtual gathering to dig deeper into more questions that were not answered on the mid-July webinar.

The work of CoSIDA's Diversity and Inclusion Committee has been truly pioneering in the athletics landscape. We are proud of what this committee has accomplished and continues to produce.

College athletics faces a lot of change moving forward. The time is now to make sure your athletics communicators are close to your senior athletics leadership team, if not already a member of it, as you navigate these uncharted and challenging waters. Your crisis communication plan, messaging and public and media relations will thank you.