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As we wrap up this festive winter season, a lot has changed in the last two years. From how we think, operate and get things done to how we interact with and provide a safe environment for everyone. It's been challenging, especially in the world of facilities management. Managing facilities through the pandemic has been crucial to keeping teams healthy, safe and ready for competition and daily living. Facility managers across the country had to pivot and adjust to the sometimes daily changing dynamics. Enhanced cleaning measures, socially distancing signage, reconfiguring meeting spaces and altering game access and bench seating to washing your hands for 20 seconds, sanitizing often, sit-ins, protests and providing an inclusive environment. It's been a lot. Through all of this, remember your why and who you are serving.

Student-athletes, fans, donors and visitors to our campuses are important pieces of the why and who we serve. So putting them first and remembering the landscape has changed and improving service and

understanding each person's perspective is crucial for success and providing a welcoming environment and a safe space for engagement, interaction and dialogue. From the first interaction with a parking lot attendant to friendly smiles and greetings from ushers and ticket takers, to the all-important housekeepers that keep buildings clean to the concessions worker providing a healthy meal. Everyone has had to do it differently, in face masks and all.

A key element for this is training for the staff. Customer and guest service and cultural and bias training for front line interaction is the first line of defense. How a person is welcomed, greeted and perceived will start the path to a great customer experience. Everyone is different and unique and should be afforded the opportunity to be treated fairly, equally and enjoy the experience. It is important to work with conference offices and national governing bodies to have policies and procedures for implementation of game management duties and sportsmanship activities.

Student-athlete actions represent a powerful moment in time and history, and they should have the freedom to express themselves openly. Gender neutral spaces, accessible ready venues, prohibition of derogative messages/signs and coming together despite perceived differences. These are just a few areas the event and facility managers deal with daily and ensuring events are seen from a holistic

perspective to make things operate more smoothly. Providing access and opportunity for everyone to come together and enjoy the experience is paramount.

As the spring championships season is upon us, facility and game managers are the heartbeat of providing a world class experience for student-athletes, fans, donors, committee members, network crews, etc. Long hours and no days off, running from venue to venue, scheduling staff, and ensuring officials are on time and competitions start on time. These key team members must constantly work together and orchestrate lots of moving parts for success. Value, reward and recognize them and say thank you to someone on your facility and event management team. It would go a long way in the culture of your department and providing a welcoming inclusive environment.

McLENDON



Elian Rodriguez

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Sometimes, being a Dominican-American from the Bronx, it felt like a dead-end in terms of opportunity career-wise, no matter what degree I have. In a year where the world was dealing with a pandemic, it felt like an opportunity was nowhere to be found. However, the McLendon Foundation offered me an opportunity of a lifetime to work for the National Association of Basketball Coaches (NABC). With this opportunity, I have had the privilege of working with an amazing staff led by Craig Robinson and Nate Pomeday, and it has allowed me to work with some of the most legendary college basketball coaches in the history of the game.

One of the greatest highlights of being a McLendon Future Leader and working at the NABC was when the Future Leaders were given the chance to work as ambassadors during the 2021 NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament. At the tournament, I was able to meet executive leaders of the NCAA and members of the NABC in person for the first time. I got the chance to meet some of our Board and Congress members, including the legendary Roy Williams, in a year where the tournament was so limited to the public; a moment I consider to be one of the biggest moments in my career.

A recurring joke that I have is how does a Dominican from the Bronx end up working for the biggest trade association for basketball coaches headquartered in Kansas City? The truth is, the answer to that question is the McLendon Foundation. The McLendon Leadership Initiative (MLI) has provided me with an opportunity to show that I belong in athletics and show what I am capable of.

That is what the McLendon Foundation does - provides an opportunity to those who just need that one chance to show how amazing they are. Thank you to the McLendon Foundation for the opportunity and the NABC for accepting me as part of their team.

More information regarding the McLendon Leadership Initiative, including application information for interested and qualified individuals, can be found at minorityleaders.org.