



The 4 M's of Motivation: Keys to Motivating Student-Athletes

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Motivating student-athletes can be very challenging, especially student-athletes from diverse backgrounds. In the student-athlete academic support realm, it is important for academic support professionals (i.e., academic advisors, academic coordinators, learning specialists, etc.) to find innovative ways to assist their student-athletes in cultivating and maintaining academic motivation. Working as a Learning Specialist, I have encountered many student-athletes that have only been motivated by extrinsic factors such as parents, teachers, and/or the opportunity to play sports. When they have arrived on campus as first-time freshmen, they find that they are missing some of those aforementioned motivators that they were accustomed to having in high school. Therefore, they find themselves in a place where they are unsure of their level of motivation, which could result in poor academic and athletic performance.

In order to meet the diverse needs of our current cohort of student-athletes and tackle our motivation dilemma, I developed the “4 M's of Motivation.” This model presents a strategic method for professionals to use with their student-athletes that may assist them in developing motivation and foster a mindset of success. The “4 M's of Motivation” are: (1) Mission, (2) Move, (3) Momentum and (4) Mindset. Each stage requires collaboration between the academic support professional and the student-athlete to set benchmarks and monitor progress.

During the “mission” stage, the student-athlete will develop and set goals to support their mission. Key components of this stage include the discussion of values (intrinsic, attainment, and utility), aspirations, actions and outcomes (Eccles, 2005). Research has found that students are most likely to be motivated to accomplish goals that they have set for themselves versus goals that have been set for them by others (Cheung, 2004). Therefore, it is imperative that autonomy is encouraged throughout this first stage and the student-athlete is highly involved in the process.

In the “move” stage, the student-athlete begins to take action and complete tangible tasks to support the mission. During this stage, the academic support professional works with the student-athlete to establish action tasks and set benchmarks for success. This stage involves controlled motivation because the student and professional work together to establish and complete concrete tasks. The key to this stage is to use controlled motivation to assist in facilitating goal progress through the use of consistent cues, reminding the student-athlete of the importance of each particular task in reference to their goals and mission (Deci & Ryan, 1987).

The next phase, “momentum,” involves self-realization, confidence, and consistency. At this point, the student-athlete begins to perceive their success and uses the momentum from completing action tasks to drive their progress. The student develops a routine of completing tasks (i.e., homework, projects, papers, etc.) and starts to feel good about getting things done. The “momentum” phase is a turning point in which the student-athlete begins to cultivate intrinsic motivation, specifically, toward accomplishment or the feeling of achieving something (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b).

The final stage is “mindset” in which the student-athlete becomes invested in their mission and is motivated to be successful. At this level, the student-athlete understands their purpose and is now intrinsically motivated to achieve their goals. Learning and achievement become self-determined at this stage and are self-endorsed by the student-athlete (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Not only is the student-athlete in the best position to achieve their mission, they are now purposeful in their actions and can better self-regulate because their mindset and way of thinking has shifted.

The progression of the “4 M’s of Motivation” was designed to follow the stages of the Academic Motivation Scale developed by Vallerand et al. (1992). However, it is important to note that each student-athlete may start at a different level of motivation and may progress through the model at a different pace. A respect for each student’s individual differences is essential when helping them to find and name their motivation.

References

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