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## **A Qualitative Analysis: An Examination of Recreation League Sport Official Satisfaction and Retention**

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### **Abstract**

#### Aim of Research

The purpose of this study was to investigate the retention and loss of experienced sport officials from park and recreation department leagues. The question that primarily guided the research was “what factors contribute to the retention and resignation of recreation league sport officials?”

#### Literature Review

Retention of trained employees is a task faced by administrators of business and public service organizations on a regular basis. Job satisfaction has been studied on numerous occasions and administrators should pay close attention to what the studies are reporting (Ellickson & Logsdon, 2002; Raedeke et al., 2002). In order to retain employees and keep them performing well, administrators need to work harder to understand the stress employees are feeling and make every attempt to alleviate the problems before they become overbearing (Ellickson & Logsdon, 2002). VanYperen (1998) found that volleyball officials were more likely to leave the job when they showed a low commitment level, experienced a low enjoyment of the experience, and had positive alternative options.

Employees that experience increased work stress experience lower job satisfaction and are more likely to experience burnout thus leaving the job (Koeske et al., 1994). VanYperen reported that overworked volleyball referees who rarely received breaks throughout the season and those scheduled with multiple games during the day were more likely to quit prior to the season ending. Raedeke et al. (2002) reported that coaches experienced burnout due to a variety of stress-related factors including perceived stress, social support, coaching issues, role-related issues and individual hardiness. This research also reported that coaches that had left coaching for other opportunities reported they left the job because it

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was not fulltime and other responsibilities required them to have full-time employment. Active coaches, on the other hand, report that there are few attractive alternative jobs than did those who left coaching. Quality of leadership and supervision, amount of authority given over work responsibilities, and clarity of job guidelines are all factors reported to affect job satisfaction (Koeske et al., 1994).

### Methodology

This qualitative study examined the perspectives of four recreational sport league officials. Two of the officials were still employed as umpired in a community recreation league and the other two officials had recently left employment from the same league. Interviews were conducted with all four officials as well as observations of the two working umpires. Analysis of the data used constant comparative method until categories and themes developed into which all gathered material were sorted (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The researcher also maintained a personal journal in order to watch for any personal bias that may begin to show in the data. The researcher also met with other researchers and sport professionals to discuss potential bias they may have been overlooked.

### Results and Implications

Four themes emerged from the data collected from observations and interviews of the officials. Personal benefits were viewed by all four officials as an opportunity to work with/ teach kids sport, the opportunity to still be involved in sport, financial gain, and the opportunity to make officiating a career. Difficulties of the job included dealing with parents, working with difficult coaches, and disruption of officials' personal lives. Personal philosophy of sport was the third theme and included information of how the officials dealt with aspects of employer leadership, maintenance and control of the game, and working with other officials. The final theme was personal history/memories of sports. Each official reported playing sport as child, having memories of family and sport, use of their sport memories as a retreat from life, and an opportunity to continue participating in a sport they had grown to love.

If nothing else was learned from this research, administrators should recognize the need to talk, on a regular basis, their employees and sport league officials. When speaking with them, listening to concerns, problems, stressors, and other difficulties being experienced by the employee is key. Upon hearing the problems, administrators need to take steps to alleviate or minimize the issues that employees have voiced.

Future research should examine other sports and other levels. A longer, more in-depth study should be conducted that will permit researchers to gather more data to ensure that the data is as accurate as possible. Another interesting topic would be to examine women sport officials and the stories they will have from experiences in sports.

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