

“Athletic Directors Don’t Need More Hustle—We Need Better Systems”

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The AD job is multi-dimensional. We’re managing people, emotions, schedules, budgets, facilities, eligibility, transportation, communication, professional development, and the unexpected—often at the same time.

It’s common to see athletic directors leave the profession. Many aren’t lacking effort—we just get buried in constant decisions and reactive work. The answer isn’t “do more.” The answer is: build systems that create efficiency, accuracy, and fulfillment. The job will expand to fill whatever space we give it.

Every task gets tossed into an imaginary backpack we carry all day—eligibility questions, bus changes, parent emails, facility issues, coach needs, purchase orders, schedule adjustments, professional development opportunities, and “quick questions” in the hallway. Alone, each item is manageable. But the pile can get heavy.

Systems aren’t about working less. They’re about doing the work better:

- fewer repeated decisions
- fewer “don’t forget” tasks
- fewer preventable errors
- fewer last-minute scrambles

Systems protect our time and attention so we can spend more time leading and less time managing. Borrow first. Refine later. “Steal Like an Artist” by Austin Kleon put language to something that matters in our profession: borrow what works, then make it yours.

Before the Beatles were famous, they played cover tunes—over and over—building skill, confidence, and stamina on music that was already proven. That’s a good path for all of us: Borrow what works. Build the reps. Then refine it into our voice and our system. Don’t struggle alone. This job is too complex to do in isolation. We’re better when we share. Use your network. Use templates. Call colleagues. Use AI to draft and organize. Struggling alone just makes the backpack heavier.

What “systems” look like in an AD office? Systems don’t need to be fancy—just repeatable.

1. Event checklists
2. Communication templates
3. Daily/weekly structure
4. Digital folder structure
5. Professional development map

Fulfillment and sustainability come from a lighter backpack. Systems lighten the backpack—less mental clutter, fewer fire drills, more capacity to lead and last.

2026 challenge: let’s each find two or three ADs we respect and “cover” their best work. Then adjust it for our school.

Borrow. Build. Refine. Repeat.