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## Developing Inclusive Teams

This post is a summary of our key takeaways from **Volume 2 Episode #97 of The Educational AD Podcast**, hosted by retired high school Athletic Director Jake Von Scherrer. This summary of the podcast episode is posted with permission of Coach Von Scherrer.

You can watch the 27 minute interview on YouTube at this link: **Deepjyot Sidhu Interview**



**Deepjyot Sidhu** is the Director of Equity & Inclusion at the Global Online Academy. She is also a former cross country coach. The discussion today includes some practical steps that we can take as coaches to be aware of the differences

**Whose voices do you hear in your head when you are working with coaches, teachers, students, athletes, or parents?**

Those voices are the sum of what you have heard from your mentors—from both your experience as a student athlete and as an adult educator. They are the what is still with you from how your parents, teachers, coaches, and other leaders from throughout your life who influenced you.

**Regardless of our own personal programming and life experiences, we can decide to do our best to make every encounter a good one.** That doesn't mean to make everything superficially pleasant. It does mean that we can make our own choices as to how we act during all interactions both in our personal and professional lives.

Some of the athletes that we work with have far more athletic skill than we had. Coaching is not only about imparting our knowledge to them, but rather thinking about each athlete individually, what they bring, how they are developing, how they are growing.

**Equity and inclusion should be a priority for all coaches and athletic administration.** Making it a priority means developing and designing (or better yet redesigning) systems,





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structures, and practices in the interest of equity and equitable experiences and outcomes for all kids.

**Key questions that we all need to ask ourselves as individuals and as staffs collectively.** What does inclusion mean? How do we design for equity? In part, it means insuring that we focus on every kid as an individual and their individual athletic experience. It means disrupting neutrality to bring intention to an environment that fosters a culture of belonging for all kids.

## **THREE Specific actions that ADs and coaches can take:**

**1) Start by reflecting on ourselves**—who we are and what our experiences, where we grew up forms our perspective. Starting with self is being aware that your athletes are experiencing things that you aren't thinking about and are not even aware of. We need to be intentional about expanding our perspective and our lenses. So that we are not inadvertently leaving anyone out.

We have points of focus and points that are in our margins. We need to be more aware of the margins of the lenses that we see the world through. It will always be true that you will not have experienced everything that your athletes have experienced. These experiences that your athletes have had or are having are not always physically apparent.



**Here is an example that can be extrapolated to our own specific situation.** A coach or teacher has not had the experience or even taken the time to consider what it is like for one of their student athletes to have a close family member serving in the

active military. Because I have not experienced that, I don't know what it feels like for one of my athletes who is experiencing that in their lives.

**2) Prepare for the ongoing**—We all know that team building is not a one-time thing that will last forever. It requires ongoing attention and intentionality. That same intentionality is required to be an ongoing equitable practitioner.

Consistently giving some sustained thought to questions such as: Who is new to our team that we haven't designed structures and systems for to support them? What can we do to ensure equity for them?



**3) Prioritize the Impact You Want to Have**—When the goal is to eradicate all inequities, it can be so overwhelming that we might want to give up before we get started.

Always remember that we don't have to be perfect. We are doing it for our athletes, so it is important to do as much and whatever we can.

**When an athlete shows up to your team for the first practice or call**

**out meeting**, they are determining in their own mind if they do or don't fit in with your group. That conclusion they are reaching is based on their life experiences to a great extent. That is why it is important that we consciously and deliberately work to empathize as much as we can.

**As coaches and ADs what are we doing to promote belonging?**

**How do we do a better job of finding the balance of the old school wanting athlete's to be tough and be aware and sensitive to the challenges that athletes are facing?** It starts by reframing what toughness, mental strength, and courage are. It takes both of those to face up to and publicly admit what you are going through.

Knowing what the limit is and how to navigate that limit.

Pressures are increasing on young people in athletics and academics and that stress impacts areas of their lives such as sleep and motivation which allow them to be at their best.

We need to be more intentional about the circumstances we create for our athletes. All while being focused on supporting athletes and less focused on forcing them to comply



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and to meet unreasonable and often unnecessary standards that don't help with mental health or performance.

Athletes don't perform in a vacuum at school or in practices or games—they bring their outside life with them every day.

**What advice would Deep have for a new Athletic Director?** Have the agency to make every encounter a good one. You do that by thinking about EVERY athlete, EVERY team, and EVERY coach.



If you are interested in contacting Deep for further information or discussion on the topic of inclusion, you can reach out to her on Twitter or at the Global Online website:

**@deepjyot**

**[www.globalonlineacademy.org](http://www.globalonlineacademy.org)**



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