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SOC 492

Milne

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My internship took place at an indoor baseball facility located in Fairfax, Virginia, called HammerZone Sports. I was responsible for assisting in a few different ways: I was a youth camp counselor, a hitting instructor for the middle school-aged hitting groups, and a coach for one of the 14 and under baseball teams based out of the facility. At the camp, I assisted in planning out each day for youth baseball players aged 8-12 and assisted the campers in their baseball skills; much of it was also making sure they were behaving up to societal standards. The way these camps were planned and organized depended on the maturity, personality, and skill level of each individual camper. This relates to sociology in the way that it is important for me to understand that children are all socialized and experience life differently based upon their surroundings. Some come from families with a higher socioeconomic status with more opportunity, whereas some come from families with less status and opportunity. With the understanding of sociological theories and concepts, such as Weber's concept of social action, I am more understanding and smarter when it comes to working with children. This concept focuses on interactions between human beings and what motivates them to act a certain way regarding social forces, personal desires, and more. In the children's minds, they are there to have fun and get better at baseball. They also often have a desire for social status, which in society is often achieved through sports performance. To generalize, the campers' motivations are to do something they enjoy and fit in with their peers by achieving higher social status.

HammerZone also does a good job of listening to its customers through research methods, as they periodically send out surveys with various open-ended and close-ended questions asking about their business. With the obtained results from the participants, they can listen to the respondents' likes and dislikes and make slight changes to their business model. This is an example of non-probability convenience sampling; this kind of sampling is the cheapest and easiest to conduct. On the contrary, it is also considered to be the weakest as you have no real knowledge of the population, and there is a strong chance for bias.

As one of the hitting instructors for the middle school-aged group at Hammerzone, I would use technology (video and other metric-measuring baseball technology) and analyze the mechanics of each individual player's swing. From then, I would go on to implement different drills into their everyday plans or routines to improve those mechanical deficiencies. I worked with them for an hour, three times per week. This was particularly challenging with 6 to 10 kids and limited space. Regardless, I tried to make the most out of each player's hour they got with me, so they could take something home with them and improve. Similar to what was previously stated, this relates to the theory of social inequality. Many people do not have the access to the state-of-the-art facilities these kids have access to and would do anything to be in the financial position to be able to have access to training tools at any time. The same goes for myself; I was fortunate enough to grow up in a baseball family with a batting cage in my backyard and a weight room at my house. The relationships I have created over the years with others allowed me to have lots of opportunities to continue to play and improve my abilities. It is important for me to recognize the privilege I have in baseball in regard to the resources I have. Many do not have the opportunities I have resulting in inequalities. Because I recognize this, it makes me grateful and drives me to give the children the best opportunity I can give them to succeed.

A lot was learned over the duration of my internship, but there are a few key skills developed that should be highlighted: Leadership, problem solving, and communication. Before this internship, I would have already considered myself a good leader, but not in the style most would expect. I am not someone who is necessarily known to be outspoken when in a group. Through my four years in college, I have learned how to lead by example and speak up when needed. As a team captain for Longwood Baseball, I was a lead-by-example kind of leader; I preferred not to go and talk in front of everyone unless it was necessary. During my internship, however, I was forced to come out of my comfort zone and guide others by speaking in front of groups and leading others with my voice. In order to control a group of 8 to 12 year olds as well as middle schoolers, it is important to have high-quality outspoken leadership skills. Oftentimes during team practice and youth camp the kids would misbehave, have bad attitudes, show a lack of effort, and more. I learned how to give various kinds of speeches, give advice, and coach in front of a group of 6 to 15 kids. Being able to lead allowed me to have more control of the group and their thoughts and actions. Now that I have grown my ability to be more outspoken, I have further developed my leadership skill.

During my internship, daily activities and scheduling would not always go as planned. In order to continue running the youth camps and team practices as efficiently as possible, I had to learn how to problem solve on the fly. During the middle school hitting clinics, I typically would not know how many kids would be there until they arrived; it often ranged between 4 and 10. Because of this, I would have to alter the plan on the fly to keep things moving smoothly. Additionally, there were also times at our facility where our middle school hitting group was given a very limited amount of space due to scheduling issues. The practice plans were written with the assumption that we would get the needed space to run an efficient hitting clinic. This

reoccurring circumstance also forced me to think quickly and solve the issue of a lot of kids with little room. I would change up the plan to try to most efficiently utilize the small amount of space we were given. Through these situations during my internship, I was able to further develop my skill of problem-solving.

Lastly, communication was an important skill that needed improvement. I have a great understanding of the game of baseball and the fine mechanics of the game. With that said, it is not always easy to communicate and share my knowledge in a way for the person I am speaking with to fully understand. When working with an 8 to 10 year old player, coaching cues and tips should be light and very simple; if too much is thrown at the player too quickly or in a confusing manner, it can lead to a misunderstanding and a negative result. As the player gets older and more advanced, the instruction can become a bit more complex to an extent. I had to learn how to properly communicate in that manner and not throw too much at a player at once when coaching them. Most importantly, I initially struggled with articulating my thoughts (in regard to hitting, fielding, etc) to players of all ages. Though I understood my own ideas, I had a difficult time explaining to others my thinking and why I think that way. Initially when coaching I would panic when explaining things resulting in confusion and sometimes a misunderstanding. For example, early on if I was talking to a group of hitters about what the “load” phase in your swing is, I would have a hard time explaining to others what exactly it is and why it is an essential part to the swing; I know exactly what it is and why it is beneficial, but being able to explain my thoughts is another battle itself. Over time, I was able to relax and properly articulate my thinking, further developing my communication skills.

This internship gave me the opportunity to learn more about baseball coaching and development, the business side of sports, and my own preferences regarding what I like and do

not like in coaching and business. Watching the other coaches in the facility, I was able to learn about different styles of coaching. Coaching can be done efficiently and successfully in many different ways; the best style of coaching also depends on the personalities and skill levels of the players you are with. I was also able to speak with and learn from the director of operations and my supervisor, Rick Freeman, about the business of HammerZone itself. Lastly, my experience helped me figure out what style of coaching I like and feel is most successful with my personality. I also would like to own a business similar to HammerZone one day, and watching the daily ins and outs of the business have helped develop my ideas and preferences if I were to run a similar business.

In this particular workplace, we are providing a product for players to improve their skills. My job was to give each player all the necessary tools and resources to get better. It was important to me that they knew that I care and want the best for each one of them. I learned through my experience that things often do not go as planned. Sometimes the necessary space is not available, people cancel, people schedule late, or even want to work on something different than originally stated. At the end of the day it is the player's responsibility to have the drive to work hard and get better, but I made sure to put each one of them in the best position they can be to improve and be satisfied with our product.