

## Plan Your Path for Success

When it comes to having clear goals, umpiring college baseball is no different than any endeavor. Planning how to achieve those goals is vital yet often overlooked.

Consider these suggestions as part of a successful plan: understand the structure and environment, understand your role, manage your behavior, take care of the easy stuff, constantly work at your craft, and measure your success.

First, be open-minded and flexible. Understand that since your environment is comprised of conferences and coordinators that provide a regular season and exposure opportunities, you must constantly work toward aligning your schedule with where you are in the process. If a post season assignment is your goal, you must take advantage of those opportunities.

It is also important to understand your role. If you are a less experienced umpire, your mission is to learn and practice everything you can. When another umpire is the assigned crew chief or has more experience than you, avoid any tendency to overstep your place. Taking care of your own job is the best way to help the crew.

Less experienced umpires must find good mentors. Good mentors have experience. However, not every experienced umpire is necessarily a good mentor. The strong mentor is usually a very confident but skilled umpire that finds value in making someone else better. A good mentor is patient and nurturing but also demands the commitment from his subject to demonstrate consistent improvement. This person must also have the experience to understand not only the technical aspects of umpiring but also the culture of college baseball. Another sign that someone would be a good mentor is that he has a mentor himself.

Experienced umpires should be constantly working on their skills, but they should also be learning how to make others around them better. Understanding how to lead, mentor, and elevate the skills and confidence of other umpires, a good leader always puts his follow umpires ahead of everything else. Setting a gold standard of work ethic and selflessness makes others feel more empowered about their environment; they know someone has their back. Experienced umpires that demonstrate these characteristics are more likely to be strong post-season candidates.

Here are some other important things to remember regardless of your experience level: first, you cannot hide bad behavior on or off the field. Because you are an umpire, you are constantly being judged. Since most communication is non-verbal and attributed to your actions and body language, this judgment is highly subjective. You should know that the moment you arrive at a game site, meeting site, or other baseball event, someone is reading you. It may not be fair but umpires are naturally held to the highest standard. All parties involved expect their officials to be of the highest level of competence and character. Failure to recognize this rule is the fastest way off the track to your success!

Take care of the easy stuff! Hustle, avoid quirky behavior, treat people with respect, avoid conversations you do not need to have, avoid extending conversations that are otherwise over by trying to make your final point, and do not initiate physical contact or use profanity.

Constantly work at your craft. Not everyone has the same natural ability and not everyone develops or matures as an umpire at the same rate. Never miss a chance to learn from that day's game, but also find non-competitive situations such as inter-squad scrimmages or umpire camps to learn and practice. Preparation also includes healthy choices to stay mobile and athletic.

Finally, be sure to measure your success and recognize how it lines up with your plan. Know where you want to be in two years, in five years, in ten years. Be flexible and adjust your strategy to best keep on track. I wish you all good luck with your endeavors!