There’s no off-season anymore” was a statement made by Hall of Fame pitcher Nolan Ryan in an Advil commercial. We are all feeling and experiencing this reality of a continual “season” as work and life demand more and more from each of us. The resulting stress obviously has implications for job and life satisfaction. The “good old days” of a slower pace in athletic training, at least during the off-season, are over. Jobs across industries are becoming more and more complex, employers are increasingly demanding, and yet resources are scarcer than ever. The drivers of change are a global economy, technology, and information. As to knowledge available, more information was produced between 1965 and 1995 than during all years combined up to that point. Furthermore, the information supply doubles now every 5 years. A medical doctor was recently asked how he kept abreast of all this information as it relates to the profession. His response was simple, yet profound, and one to cause all of us to stop and pause: “I don’t. There are simply too many facts produced for me to keep up. I do the best I can, and I hope that is good enough.” Is it any wonder employees feel stressed, have reduced job satisfaction, and are on the verge of burnout? Studies have demonstrated an increasing number of athletic trainers leaving the profession; therefore, it is important to elucidate some possible reasons for such job dissatisfaction, job migration, stress, and even burnout (also K. Walsh and J. McChesney, unpublished data, 1988). The purpose of this article is to review components of job satisfaction and how to maintain fulfillment with your job.

What Is Job Satisfaction?

Job satisfaction is simply the way we feel about our jobs. According to Mathis and Jackson (1991), job satisfaction is a positive emotional response resulting from an employee’s job expectations being met or exceeded. Messmer indicated that burnout is an emotional strain resulting from prolonged stress. A level of stress is both a natural element of most jobs and necessary in life, but as one study suggested, “the stress in which you feel out of control or powerless is the type generally associated with problems.” Although fundamentally different, both job satisfaction and burnout can interact to affect perception and performance of one’s job.

Job-satisfaction research suggests that employees who have certain attributes (see the sidebar) are more satisfied with their jobs than are those who lack these attributes. In addition, job satisfaction is influenced by coworker relationships, as well as perceived balance between the effort exerted and the compensation received. In athletic training research, burnout has been linked to lack of social support, role conflict and ambiguity, an excessive number of athletes to care for, and the sheer number of hours the job requires.

An unpublished study by Walsh and McChesney (1988) regarding NCAA Division I athletic trainers’ job satisfaction
yielded interesting results. Although the sample size was small (N = 21) and caution must be exercised in generalizing the data, the results are still pertinent to this discussion. The best aspects of the participants’ jobs centered on relationships and social-support issues such as helping the athletes and camaraderie with coworkers and students (see Figure 1). Social or affiliation needs were identified as critical to job satisfaction and motivation. The importance of social support and friendship at work for athletic trainers has been reported in the literature. In addition, athletic trainers can become emotionally vested in the lives of student-athletes and coaches, which can also trigger emotional exhaustion.

**Causes of Job Dissatisfaction**

A lack of satisfying job attributes can lead to gradual burnout in an employee, or gradual distress, which can lead to absenteeism and turnover (see the sidebar on the next page). The relationship between job satisfaction and stress is bidirectional; that is, increased job stress can contribute to a lowering of job satisfaction or vice versa. Athletic trainers who receive little recognition, have no growth potential, and perceive an imbalance between their effort and the amount of reward they receive might eventually become distressed by this work situation and question whether their job is really worth it. Likewise, athletic trainers who become physically and emotionally exhausted because of a tremendous work overload, long hours, and little recognition of their sacrifice might succumb to the negative attitudes associated with this distress, become dissatisfied, and eventually leave.

The degree to which an athletic trainer is job-satisfied is also tempered by the expectations and biases associated with choosing the profession in the first place. That is, there is a self-reflection process that occurs that will influence the tolerance of various job-factor inadequacies. Essentially, athletic trainers might have an occupational subculture that they accept, perpetuate, and will adhere to within reason. Athletic trainers, as a whole, value helping others, athletics, and the athletic arena. As such, they might be willing to put up with more abuse related to workload and lack of appreciation than the average person. Over time, however, job dissatisfaction because of high workload, lack of control, and lack of recognition and reward can affect marital, family, and leisure satisfaction.

The acceptance of the athletic training subculture is significant to consider. As outsiders looking in on the profession, it seems as if athletic trainers are passionate about their jobs. This passion can aid in reconciling or rationalizing the “little things” that can cause job dissatisfaction. A direct relationship was discovered between the number of little irritants in the workplace and employees’ job-satisfaction level. These researchers identified three stages in response to job irritants: acceptance, tolerance, and, finally, rejection.

The rejection stage is where minimal job satisfaction occurs and where burnout resides. Employees experiencing the rejection stage feel as if those in charge, the administrators, simply do not care and are in fact “incompetent, uncaring or both.” At this juncture, employees likely spend considerable time and energy complaining among themselves about the things that should be addressed by the organization. Some employees might take active positions to change the environment, but others opt to withdraw from the job and find satisfaction in other life venues.

**Attributes Contributing to Job Satisfaction**

- Autonomy and control over work
- A clear sense of tasks and roles
- Use a variety of skills
- Perceive work as interesting and challenging
- A sense of accomplishment
- Growth potential
- Receive positive recognition
- Feedback for what has been accomplished

Figure 1 “Positive working relationships with peers” was listed as one of the best attributes of being an athletic trainer.