

How Coach Changing Lives Is Changing the Way We Teach Leadership

INTRODUCTION: Beyond the Scoreboard

Leadership. It's a word plastered on locker room walls, scribbled in notebooks, shouted across sidelines, and scribbled in chalk on whiteboards. But what does it really mean?

Is it about wearing the captain's badge? Calling the coin toss? Getting the postgame quote?

Or is it something deeper, something revealed in the boiling moments of adversity?

That's the question posed in this episode of *Changing Lives*, a **free 36-part character and leadership development curriculum** created by Dennis Parker, hosted by veteran athletic director **Scott Garvis**, and featuring legendary coach and educator **Dennis Parker**. Together, they unpack what leadership *really* means and how to build it in every athlete, not just the stars.

This isn't a conversation about titles. It's a blueprint for transformation.

THE BOILING WATER TEST

Coach Dennis Parker opens with an image that's become the heartbeat of his leadership philosophy.

"I take a pot of boiling water," he says, "and drop three things in it: an egg, a carrot, and a tea bag."

Each represents a reaction to adversity, the inevitable, unavoidable trials every athlete will face.

- The **egg** hardens. It builds a shell. "It doesn't matter to me," it says. But inside, it's tough, bitter, and closed off.
- The **carrot** softens. Strong at first, it loses its form. It bends under pressure.

- The **tea bag**? It transforms the water. It turns adversity into strength. It makes everything around it better.

“*We want tea bags*,” Coach Parker says. “We want kids who step into the fire and make their team stronger because of it.”

It’s not just a metaphor. It’s a mindset. And it’s the foundation of the *Changing Lives* leadership model.

LEADERSHIP IS EVERYBODY’S JOB

Coach Parker isn’t a fan of captains.

Why? Because it places all the responsibility on one or two players and gives everyone else a pass.

“Everyone on that team is a leader,” Parker says. “They’re either going to be an egg, a carrot, or a tea bag. It’s a choice.”

His approach flips the traditional hierarchy on its head. Every player, regardless of grade, background, or position, is empowered to lead whether with their voice, their effort, or their integrity.

Coach Parker shares a story about a game where the opponent had the ball on the two-yard line and the season was on the line. Before he could deliver the coach’s pep talk, a player stepped in.

“We got ‘em right where we want ‘em,” the kid barked.

The team responded. They stopped the opponent cold. They won the game.

That player? He was a tea bag. He changed the climate.

BELIEF IS CONTAGIOUS

“Belief is transferable,” Parker says. “But a high school kid said it better ‘Coach, belief is contagious.’ And he was right.”

When a coach believes in a player, the player starts to believe in themselves. But belief like negativity, spreads.

If a coach gripes about an official, the players start blaming too.

If a coach points fingers after a loss, the team learns to deflect responsibility.

But when belief flows down, when it’s modeled and spoken and reinforced, it sticks.

That’s why Parker challenges coaches to inspect not just what they teach, but how they lead.

“What is your lowest acceptable form of behavior?” he asks. “That’s your culture.”

CULTURE: IT’S NOT WHAT YOU SAY. IT’S WHAT YOU TOLERATE.

Ask a coach about their team culture and they’ll usually give you a mission statement.

But Coach Parker flips the script.

“Culture is defined by the worst behavior you allow,” he says.

If your standard is first class, in the classroom, on the field, and in the community, you’ll build a championship culture.

But accept sloppiness, selfishness, laziness and that’s your culture now.

Leadership, then, is about protecting that standard. It’s about backbone.

HEAD, HEART, AND BACKBONE: BUILDING COMPLETE LEADERS

Coach Parker breaks leadership into three elements:

1. **Head** – Knowing what to do. Knowledge. Purpose. Vision.
2. **Heart** – Caring enough to do it. Passion. Empathy. Love for the team.
3. **Backbone** – The courage to act, especially when it's unpopular.

“It’s my job as a coach,” Parker says, “to give them the head and the heart. But backbone? That’s their decision.”

And it’s in those D-Day moments, when everything’s on the line, that backbone is revealed.

A PLAYER’S CALL AT 3:00 A.M.

One of the most powerful moments in the episode comes when Parker shares a story of a player who used a coach-issued contact card to make a midnight call.

“Coach, I’m in Fort Worth. My buddies are talking about robbing a liquor store. Can you come get me?”

No lecture. No judgment. Just a ride home.

The next Monday, the player walked into Parker’s office.

“Coach, I had the backbone to say no.”

That’s the tea bag in action. That’s leadership, not in a game, but in life.

LEADERSHIP IS PERFORMANCE — AND PERFORMANCE IS LEADERSHIP

It's not just feel-good stories. Coach Parker makes it clear: **Performance matters.**

“Football is the perfect world,” he says. “A poor kid gets a sack, and everyone black, white, rich, poor, hugs him. Performance unites us.”

That’s why expectations must be clear.

Want to be the starting quarterback? You must complete the quick pass series better than anyone else. Period.

Want to be on the field? Align your practice goals with your playing expectations. Every day.

And when you reward consistency, showing up, doing the right thing, being a tea bag you raise the entire program.

“Don’t just celebrate touchdowns,” Garvis adds. “Celebrate the kid who’s early every day. That’s leadership, too.”

ACCOUNTABILITY WITHOUT SHAME

Leadership without accountability is just a title.

That’s why Parker insists coaches must define and reinforce clear expectations, not with threats, but with consistency.

“Third-and-one is where backbone shows up,” Parker says.

He had a drill: third-and-one, run behind the left guard. Before the snap, the running back would tap the guard’s back.

“That’s your reminder,” Parker told them. “Do you know who to block? Do you want to block him? Do you have the backbone to block him?”

It’s simple. It’s consistent. And it teaches more than football.

A BLUEPRINT FOR BUILDING LEADERS

As the episode winds down, Garvis offers a challenge to coaches:

1. **Identify your vocal leaders.** Are they building or breaking the culture?
2. **Empower your quiet leaders.** What can they do this week to elevate others?
3. **Model leadership yourself.** Think head, heart, backbone.

“You’re not just coaching players,” Garvis says. “You’re building the next generation of leaders.”

Parker agrees, but he adds one final word of encouragement:

“All of this, it’s not complicated. It’s logic. But it takes courage. And it starts with us.”

CONCLUSION: CHANGING LIVES, ONE TEA BAG AT A TIME

The *Changing Lives* curriculum isn’t just another leadership program. It’s a free, 36-part playbook for transformation, not just of athletes, but of entire teams, communities, and futures.

Coach Parker doesn’t promise easy wins or motivational fluff. He offers truth, tools, and timeless wisdom.

In a world desperate for better leaders — on the field, in the classroom, and beyond this episode delivers a clear message:

Be the tea bag. Transform the water. Change lives.

Want more? Access the full FREE curriculum at [Bound](#)

For coaches. For athletic directors. For student-athletes. For the head. For the heart. For the backbone.