



JIM HARSHAW JR

Revealing Failure as the Path to Success

Wrestling with Success Podcast

Action Plan Episode #55

James Leath, Head of Leadership Development
IMG Academy

James Leath joined IMG Academy in 2015 as Head of Leadership Development. James develops and delivers curriculum for IMG Academy student-athletes across eight sports and presents to visiting teams, companies, and professional athletes.

Leadership lessons consist of communication skills, personal and group leadership, developing identity, and building team culture. James attended Fresno State University where he received his B.A. in Communication. During college, when he wasn't playing football, he was best known for being the beloved mascot of Fresno State, "*Time Out.*" After graduation, James went on to play quarterback for a semi-pro team in Fresno, CA. With over 15 years of coaching experience and a M.A. in Performance Psychology, James is passionate about teaching athletes the tools they need in order to be successful in life and in sport.

What is IMG Academy?

Google says: IMG Academy is a world-renowned boarding school and sport training destination in Bradenton, Florida, United States.

James Leath describes it as "Hogwarts [from Harry Potter] for athletes."

How to use the rules of improv to teach athletes leadership...

There are no bad ideas. If someone throws in an idea, figure out how to use that idea instead of just saying "no" all the time. The main rule in improv is "yes, and..." You accept whatever is given to you and you add to it. Imagine teaching a group of

soccer players the value of “yes, and...” Now, no matter what happens on the soccer field, they’re going to be successful because they’re like, “ok, good job. Good pass.” They just accept it.

James Leath’s basic curriculum:

Identity, Connection, Communication (non-verbal, verbal, digital), Inspiration, Being a leader

The problem with youth sports...

“Unfortunately as adults, we’ve turned youth sports into entertainment. We don’t value development as much as we value a winning record. It used to be a real safe place where you could fail and then just try it a different way.”

Why athletes struggle with identity after sports...

“Identity is fluid. We want to know that this is our job and this is what I’m going to do for the next 40 years. It’s not going to happen. Here’s what you’re going to do for the next 3 years. [...] My identity is not in my job. It’s in what I do with my life. And it’s always going to change. Wherever I go, whatever I do, my identity is ‘how can I be of service to those who are coming up next?’ When I found that as my identity, the details didn’t matter anymore. [...] Where a lot of people go wrong is that their purpose is their position. If your purpose is your position, you have to realize that positions come and go. Companies come and go. Positions come and go. If you put all of your identity into what’s on your business card, you’re going to be very disappointed.”

How do you find inspiration?

“It’s very easy. Go serve. Go be valuable. Go add value to some organization without any kind of monetary gain. It doesn’t have to be some grand thing. You don’t have to start a blog and quit your job. No. You don’t have to do any of that. There are places to serve.”

One action to take now...

“If you were an athlete you have proof that you can face adversity and make it through to the other side. [...] Can you keep doing when it hurts? Sports taught us that. We’ve dealt with coaches who were bullies. We dealt with coaches who were too soft. We’ve dealt with teammates who could do anything and get away with it and still start. We’ve dealt with critics.”

Website:

<http://www.jamesleath.com/>,

<https://www.imgacademy.com/>

<https://twitter.com/jamesleath>

Instagram: @JamesLeath