

***Ted Lasso* Season Two Playbook Offers Mental Health Strategies for Attorneys**

By Heath Cheek (reprinted with permission)

In these fractured times, it's rare for a television show to breakthrough as a true "watercooler hit," but *Ted Lasso* has become one. Launched during 2020, it was a bright light of positivity in a dreary time. Now, as strange as it may seem, the "Ted Lasso ethos" of empathy and positivity is starting to drive changes in businesses and organizations across the country. For example, Dallas Cowboys Head Coach Mike McCarthy recently made news when he confessed that he drew lessons from the show in coaching the Cowboys to their hot start this season (Author's note: Lets Go, Cowboys!).

Over the past year, I've had the opportunity to write and speak to attorneys across the state about the leadership lessons from season one of *Ted Lasso*. Now that season two has ended, it felt appropriate to address how lessons from the second season also apply to Texas lawyers.

Caution: There are mild spoilers for season two below, so proceed at your own discretion.

Where the theme of season one was empathy, season two's theme is clearly about mental health. This message could not be timelier for attorneys. Mental health has become the hottest topic in the legal profession right now. The reasons are threefold. First, with "work from home" being normalized during the pandemic, many attorneys feel that the line between home and work has been eviscerated. Second, there are changing generational attitudes towards work/life balance among the millennials who form the junior ranks of most companies. Third, working remote increases a sense of isolation for attorneys and is not conducive to a normal feedback loop regarding performance or job satisfaction. Between these factors, the legal profession is seeing a dramatic increase in burnout and turnover. This issue is not exclusive to the legal profession and is a hot topic of conversation among our peers in investment banking, accounting, consulting and other similar practices.

Season two of *Ted Lasso* jumps straight into the mental health theme from the opening scene of the first episode. In that scene, star player Danny Rojas accidentally kills the team mascot (Earl the Greyhound) with an errant penalty kick. This sends the

relentlessly cheery Danny (“Football is life!”) into a deep depression and a case of the yips. Eventually the team brings on a sports psychologist, Dr. Sharon, to help Danny and eventually other members of the team.

Throughout the season, we see each of the major characters dealing with different but overlapping mental health issues. Ted has panic attacks and anxiety. Rebecca struggles with her self-worth. Roy Kent spends the first half of the season trying to find his purpose. Jamie Tartt struggles with regaining the trust of his teammates. Nate struggles with imposter syndrome. And Coach Beard attempts to shake off a bad loss by ending up at a rave in an abandoned church while engaging in some hula-hoop dancing?

Okay, so maybe not all of the plot points were winners. But from these storylines, there are some great pearls of wisdom for attorneys.

“It may not work out how you think it will or how you hope it does, but believe me, it will all work out.” This quote involved Ted describing the stereotypical ending to romantic comedies, but the point he made applies to all of life. Sometimes as attorneys we get so buried with stress that it’s hard to see the solutions that will alleviate it. While a particular event (*i.e.*, a closing or a hearing) can cause stress in the moment, when I look back at all the times I’ve felt that in the past I realized how foolhardy it was to stress by something which eventually works out (albeit oftentimes with a lot of work). Take a breath. It’s all going to work out. *Bonus quote: “Two buttons I don’t like to hit: Panic and Snooze.”*

“Well, I can’t be your mentor without occasionally being your tormentor.” One of the key storylines in season two is Ted’s struggle with anxiety. Ted is selfless: He gives so much to his colleagues that he does not have room to attend to his own mental well-being. When he finally turns to the team psychologist to help him figure out the problem, Dr. Sharon utters this quote. A mentor sometimes has to push us to deal with what is uncomfortable. Significant events often require significant discomfort in getting through them. Dr. Sharon does so and pushes Ted to figure out that the root of his anxiety lies in family trauma from the past. *Bonus quote: “A good mentor hopes you move on. A great mentor knows you will.”*

“I think things come into our lives to help us get from one place to a better one.” Ted spoke this quote about Danny Rojas’ depression in episode one. The experiences, trials and tribulations we go through shape who we are. Think of how many doors have opened or closed for you in the past that you were stressed about at the time but ended up being for the best (*e.g.*, jobs, relationships or educational opportunities). I constantly think about how a few key decisions or events could have caused me to end up as a wheat farmer in Chillicothe, Texas, rather than a litigation partner at one of the largest firms in one of the largest cities in the country. The jury is still out on if that was a net benefit to my overall happiness (Just kidding, Bell Nunnally family!), but I look at

my life and my wife and kids and know that I would make every decision exactly the same to get me to this point.

“The truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off.” Dr. Sharon tells this quote to Ted as she’s trying to get him to open up regarding his struggles. Often the hardest step is just admitting the problem, and sometimes the second hardest step is admitting the reason for the problem. But once you get past those, finding the solution is often the easiest part.

“Doing the right thing is never the wrong thing.” One plotline involves Sam initiating a team boycott of a sponsor that was doing some unethical things in his home country. Ted utters this quote in reflection of that act. It’s simple and perfect. You can put it on a t-shirt or a bumper sticker and make the world happy.

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