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Coaching Up Colleagues: Ted Lasso & Lawyer Ethics

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Coaching Up Colleagues: Lessons from Ted Lasso on Mentoring Lawyers

What can lawyers learn from a fictional TV soccer coach? At first glance, you might not see much common ground between professional soccer and lawyer ethics, beyond the basic rule that you can't lay your hands on the competition without expecting some repercussions. But *Ted Lasso*, an Apple TV+ series about a professional soccer coach, offers valuable lessons for mentoring lawyers.¹

Ted Lasso is an American football coach who takes on a new challenge: coaching an English soccer team with a long history of losses, AFC Richmond. He was not hired for his expertise in soccer. To his credit, Coach Lasso makes no effort to mislead his boss, the team, or Richmond fans about his soccer credentials and lack thereof. He admits: "Heck, you could fill two Internets with what I don't know about football."²

If coaches were bound by the soccer equivalent of the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct, one might question whether Ted Lasso had the threshold competence to take on the job. Rule 1.01 of the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct states:

"A lawyer shall not accept or continue employment in a legal matter which the lawyer knows or should know is beyond the lawyer's competence, unless:

- (1) another lawyer who is competent to handle the matter is, with the prior informed consent of the client, associated in the matter; or
- (2) the advice or assistance of the lawyer is reasonably required in an emergency and the lawyer limits the advice and assistance to that which is reasonably necessary in the circumstances."

Fortunately, Ted is not coaching alone. Competent soccer coaches lead the team with Ted, including Roy Kent, a profanity-inclined veteran player; Nate Shelley, a kit man-turned-coach; and Coach Beard, Ted's longtime friend and colleague who "crossed the pond" with Ted to switch from coaching American football to English soccer.³

While Ted's knowledge about soccer is lacking, his strength lies in cultivating interpersonal relationships. Before moving to Richmond, he coached an American college football team to a national championship. He knows how to build relationships, motivate players, and change team

¹ The writer asks for linguistic grace from committed soccer fans and people across the globe who call the sport football, not soccer. In this article, the writer uses the term "football" to refer American football. In the show, the term "football" refers to soccer.

² *Ted Lasso*, season 1, pilot.

³ Unknown to Coach Lasso, he was hired to lose so Rebecca Welton, the club owner could get revenge on her unfaithful ex-husband, Rupert Mannion who lost the club to her after the divorce.

culture. He turns AFC Richmond around in three seasons, not because of what he knows about soccer. Rather, the team's success springs from what the coach knows about people. He doesn't treat his players like commodities from which he can profit. He treats them like sons and brothers. He would likely agree with Notre Dame football coach Ara Parseghian who said, "A good coach will make his players see what they can be rather than what they are."

This paper applies Ted Lasso's wisdom to lawyer ethics and the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct. The rules "stat[e] minimum standards of conduct below which no lawyer can fall without being subject to disciplinary action."⁴ The rules do not set an ideal standard; they set forth the bare minimum for ethical compliance. They are the floor, not the ceiling. This paper relies on true stories of Texas attorneys who coached their colleagues with excellence and compassion. These stories are offered to illustrate effective lawyer mentorship in a variety of settings. Special thanks to the school lawyers who shared their stories and the mentors who invested well in their colleagues' professional and personal development.

Lesson 1: Success is not about the wins and losses.

Season one finds Ted Lasso struggling to bring elusive wins to AFC Richmond. His focus is on long-term team building rather than immediate results on the field. This frustrates Richmond fans and team leaders. Local sports reporter Trent Crimm interviews the new coach over dinner and presses him about his strategy.

Trent Crimm:	Ted. What you're doing is irresponsible. This club actually means something to this town.
Ted Lasso:	I know that. I do. Trent, what do you love? Is it writing?
Trent Crimm:	Yes.
Ted Lasso:	Yeah. Well, good, 'cause you're darn good at it.
Trent Crimm:	Thank you.
Ted Lasso:	You're welcome. Me? I love coaching. Now, I'm gonna say this again just so you don't think it was a mistake the first time I said it. For me, success is not about the wins and losses. It's about helping these young fellas be the best versions of themselves on and off the field. And it ain't always easy, Trent, but neither is growing up without someone believing in you. ⁵

⁴ Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct, Preamble, comment 7.

⁵ *Ted Lasso*, season 1, episode 3.

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