



Cadence Bank Podcast: In Good Companies

Season 2 Episode 6: Leadership, with Super Bowl Champion Keith Jackson

Leaders decide goals and dictate strategy. Perhaps most importantly, they set culture. But the workforce is changing and leadership must evolve with it. So what makes a good leader in this current environment? How do you engage and inspire your workforce? And what can you do to improve, so you can build your business and career?

To help us, we turned to one of the greatest leaders we know: Keith Jackson. Keith has an illustrious football journey – he played tight end at the University of Oklahoma and went on to star in the NFL with the Eagles, Dolphins and the Green Bay Packers. Over the course of his career, he was Rookie of the Year, a 5-time Pro Bowler and Super Bowl champion. But his experience goes far beyond the football field. Keith is on the board of Cadence Bank and he's also the president of the youth non-profit P.A.R.K. (Positive Atmosphere Reaches Kids), which he founded in 1993. He knows a thing or two about leadership.

Throughout his career, Keith played for some of the greatest coaches the game has ever seen: legends like Barry Switzer, Buddy Ryan, Don Shula and Mike Holmgren. So in this episode, we're going to break down what Keith learned from each of these leaders, and how their teachings apply to business today. Join us, as we tackle leadership with a legend.

Episode Transcript:

[00:00:00] **Patrick Pacheco:** How many OU freshmen does it take to change a light bulb?

[00:00:04] **SFX:** Intro music in quietly underneath

[00:00:06] **Keith Jackson:** Four.

[00:00:08] **Patrick Pacheco:** No, zero. That's a sophomore level course.

[00:00:14] **Keith Jackson:** The day of, My daddy worked here, my granddaddy worked here, my great-grandfather.



Those days... I would say they're obsolete. But now what we have to do is make sure that the individuals, whoever they are, say, I like this place. I want to make this place better. And even though my job, as you said, Patrick, is small, the small job I do makes a change all the way up the line.

[00:00:39] **SFX:** Intro music up, then ducks underneath

[00:00:41] **Patrick Pacheco:** I'm Patrick Pacheco, and you're listening to season two of In Good Companies from Cadence Bank, the podcast where we guide you through the forces shaping your business inside and out.

[00:00:50] **SFX:** Intro music out

[00:00:51] **Patrick VO:** I want you to think about a football team--a good one. They've got some of the most talented athletes in the world, players who can run faster, jump higher, and push harder than 99% of the people on Earth. At the very least, they'll be competitive.

Now, imagine that same team without the coach. No plays, no gameplan, no inspirational half-time speech. How do they do now? It doesn't matter if you have a team full of Pro-Bowlers--take away the guy with the clipboard and the headset and you'll have problems. That's the importance of a leader.

Leaders decide goals and dictate strategy; perhaps most importantly, they set the culture. But the workforce is changing and leadership is evolving along with it. So what makes a good leader in this current moment? How do you engage and inspire your workforce? And what can you do to improve, so you don't fumble this opportunity?

[00:01:52] **SFX:** Whistle blows

[00:01:53] **Patrick VO:** Man, I wonder why I have football on the brain...

[00:01:57] **Keith Jackson:** First of all, I'm Keith Jackson Senior because there is a Keith Jackson Junior.



[00:02:01] **Patrick VO:** That's why! It's not every day we have someone with five Pro Bowls and a Super Bowl ring on the podcast. Anyone with that resume knows a thing or two about leadership--but Keith's experience goes way beyond the football field.

[00:02:17] **Keith Jackson:** Patrick, I grew up in my formative years in Little Rock, Arkansas, and as you mentioned, I went to the University of Oklahoma, got recruited there, played for a great team and a great guy by the name of Barry Switzer. Graduated in '87 with a bachelor of arts degree, and after that I got drafted to the Eagles, in first round, 13th pick. Then from the Eagles to the Dolphins, from the Dolphins to the Green Bay Packers. While I was playing, I started this organization called P.A.R.K. I founded it. I have been the president of it ever since 1993. Patrick, I've served on many local boards. I served on the Oklahoma Foundation and two public boards that I'm proud of, Dun & Bradstreet and Cadence Bank. So that's kind of the gist of getting me to this point.

[00:03:00] **Patrick VO:** Keith's been leading and observing leaders throughout his career. In that time, he's developed his own thoughts on the subject.

[00:03:08] **Patrick Pacheco:** What I want to do is get your definition of leadership. What do you view leadership to be?

[00:03:13] **Keith Jackson:** You know what's really interesting is, what I like to say is what leadership is not. Leadership is not being a dictator, leadership is not dictatorship. And that's something that we've got to recognize today. That's totally different. When you're leading, you're leading a group of people, you're leading for a change with a group or have this common goal. When you're a dictator, it's typically all about yourself. I think sometimes people don't recognize the difference between the two. You've got to come in and understand that leadership is a privilege and there are certain things that go with that.

[00:03:41] **Patrick VO:** With all the knowledge he's collected, Keith devised his own formula for successful leadership.

[00:03:47] **Keith Jackson:** To be a good leader, there are things that you have to be able to do. One is you got to be able to see it. You got to see it, you got to say it and then you got to write it. It's so simple, Patrick. See it, say it and write it. When you say see it, you're talking about vision. You got to have a vision for it. But if there's already a vision set, you've got to buy into



that vision and you've got to see the end product of where you want to go and what kind of leader you want to be, and how you want to establish yourself inside the company.

Saying it is basically having faith. I believe in what I say. Sometimes if you don't say it, do you really believe it? You've got to be able to say it. Let the words come out of your mouth to say, this is going to be a great company, here's how we're going to do it. And you got to say it. That's having faith.

But writing it, whether it's a business plan, a strategic plan, it's got to be written down. What you see, what you say, you've got to write it down. And if you are governed by those three, you can become a great leader.

[00:04:50] **Patrick VO:** See it, say it, write it--those are Keith's pillars of effective leadership. But there are plenty of different ways to fulfill those principles.

[00:04:59] **Keith Jackson:** I don't think there's one fit for all. I think that you have individuals who say, I know what I'm doing, I'm very confident in what I'm doing, and because of that, what I'm going to do is I'm going to direct everything. Then you have individuals say, I like an offensive coordinator, I like a defensive coordinator, I like these coaches that are around me and I can actually manage the game, but what they can do, they can bring me the information to make me better. There's two kinds. I don't say that you prefer one over another, but I will say that you can use both of them.

One thing I want to add to that is that leaders are forged in the fire of hard times. And sometimes when you're in the midst of it, you don't have time to call a group, a session and get ready, you've got to make quick decisions. But sometimes you've got to be very calculating on how you're going to work something out, how the year is going, how the process is going to go. When I think about leaders, that's something that they have to do is to look at situational awareness and be able to plan through it.

You look at what we just went through, Patrick, when you talk about COVID. Nobody knew COVID was coming. You didn't know how to get ready for it. It just showed up. All of a sudden everything changes. Now, the people that were able to make the changes, the companies and the leaders that were able to make the changes were the one who still survived and came out unscathed. And that's part of it. Nobody knows when hard times are coming so, therefore, how do you know to make a quick change or a long change? You've got to be able to do both of them.



[00:06:30] **SFX:** Midroll music transition

[00:06:31] **Patrick Pacheco:** Even great leaders, great football players, great anything, there's always room for improvement. What do leaders do to improve themselves?

[00:06:40] **Keith Jackson:** Well, first we don't need to grade our own papers. If you ask me, I do a great job all the time. I don't know if anybody else believed that, but...

[00:06:47] **Patrick Pacheco:** I believe you, Keith, because I do the same thing.

[00:06:49] **Keith Jackson:** Right. I do a great job all the time.

[00:06:49] **Patrick Pacheco:** We get each other.

[00:06:52] **Keith Jackson:** You get it, right. You need to have someone who is looking at you, someone that you admire, that is sitting there over your shoulder and saying, hey, you need to get better at that. We talk about great coaches down the line, there is a great one that exists up in Green Bay that's named Vince Lombardi. He said, "Leaders aren't born, they're made." I want to add something to that though. Leaders are mentored, they're not born. I think that when we look at all the great leaders in any country, our country as an example, they always talk about a mentor or individual they learn from or individuals that they learn from. I think that what you have to realize is that we learn from individuals what to do and what not to do. Sometimes you can have a leader that you can take a piece of what they have and leave the stuff that you don't like.

I'm reminded of a story my mother used to say. She said, "When you're sitting there around people and you're learning from them it's like going to have dinner at their house. The things that you like you eat, the things that you don't like you leave on the table." I think there's some time when you're being mentored, there's some things that you go, that doesn't fit in this time, that's not my personality. But the things that you do like, you've got to realize that when you see great leaders, they've always learned from someone else.

[00:08:08] **SFX:** Music transition



[00:08:09] **Patrick Pacheco:** Okay, so you brought up coaches. You've worked with some legendary leaders in the football profession, some of the biggest names there are. I'd like to go through and explore some of these folks and what their leadership style was like, and what you thought about it and how it impacted you. Let's start with Oklahoma. Barry Switzer, National Championship at Oklahoma, he's won a Superbowl ring with the Cowboys. What did you learn from Barry Switzer? What type of leader was he?

[00:08:35] **Keith Jackson:** Barry Switzer was a really positive reinforcement coach. Always looking at the positives, always talking about team more than I. He was just always one of those guys who always said, "Here's what we can do." I was having a conversation with him not long ago, and he said to me, he said, "Keith, when you were in school there we went 42-5 and one. That's a pretty good football team. The one tie was against Texas because they were afraid to go for it on third down in one game. Fourth down. Fourth down in one game."

[00:09:06] **Patrick Pacheco:** I remember that. I remember that.

[00:09:08] **Keith Jackson:** They tied it. But 42-5 and one. And we had a great career there. And then he said, "I had the Selmon brothers and we were 62 and three," or whatever the record was. But he always talked about his coaches, his players, and he always talked about how great it was that you played for him, that you helped the Sooners win. And he always was complimentary and had this positive reinforcement about him, that's the reason why he won 83% of his games.

[00:09:31] **Patrick Pacheco:** You're an incredible leader in your own right, and you've been on boards, you have this organization. What did you take? You said, "There's some things I take," like your mom said, "I can leave some on the plate, some things I won't." How'd you take your mom's advice with respect to these coaches?

[00:09:44] **Keith Jackson:** When I looked at all the coaches and I look at Barry Switzer, when you have an organization, whether you're the CEO or president or just the leader of the organization, you got to make sure that you're positive reinforcing the people that are around you, and you got to make them understand that the team concept is so important.



[00:10:05] **Patrick VO:** Keith's first coach in the pros was the legendary Buddy Ryan, who made his name as the defensive coordinator for the '85 Bears, one of the best defenses of all time.

[00:10:18] **Keith Jackson:** Oh man, Buddy was one of those army veterans. I called him one of them brown shoe sergeants or whatever he was, and just really tough. But he did use positive and negative reinforcement.

I think he was at a time when he grew up where they put you through all these pressure points to see what kind of man you were and if you could survive it, they moved you over into a different category.

I'll tell a great story. So I'm a rookie—I'm the first round, 13th pick of the NFL Draft to the Eagles. And the reporters, they interview, and Buddy Ryan, he said, "88 thinks it's spring break." He's talking about me, I'm 88. He never called you by name. And so it hits the paper the next day and I'm reading it. And so they came to me and they said, "Well, Coach Buddy Ryan said that you were taking a break, you know, number 88 is taking a break because it's spring." They said, "What do you say about that?" I said—well, back at that time, they had a drink that Buddy was doing a commercial for: Slim Fast. So I said "Well tell Buddy Ryan that it looks like he's drinking Slim Slow." Right? The next day, I get called into his office. And I'm sitting in his office and he said, "I'm reading a paper. Did you say that, about this Slim Slow stuff?" I said, "Coach, let me ask you a question. Did you say something about me looking for a spring break?" And he said "Okay." He closed up the paper and he said "I'll see you at practice." Well, he started calling me Keith Jackson from that day, or "Hero." He said, "Hero, Keith Jackson." So what he did was he used his negative reinforcement until he saw you weren't going to take it anymore and moved you. He realized that some people he could bully a little bit and some he couldn't. But that's the kind of way he coached and he was very successful at it.

Buddy Ryan is sometimes, you don't treat everybody the same, sometimes you've got to have those conversations with individuals that are not producing. But yet, and still, you've got to realize that there's some that you can't push too far and you've got to be able to use a different method.

[00:12:23] **Patrick Pacheco:** I always thought he might have a little soft spot because in some big game or something happened, he'd crack a little smile on the sideline.



[00:12:29] **Keith Jackson:** Because he always had to be that mean, rough coach, and every now and then he lets you see the soft side of him. And that's just the way Buddy was. Boy, great defensive mind though.

[00:12:40] **Patrick VO:** After four years in Philadelphia, Keith joined the Dolphins and their Hall of Fame coach, Don Shula. To this day, Shula still has the most wins of any coach in NFL history, and he's the only one to ever have a perfect, undefeated season. Keith quickly found out why.

[00:12:59] **Keith Jackson:** The magic to Don Shula was he was so organized. He was organized and he asked for perfection. You had to be perfect in everything you did and if you did it wrong, he made you do it over again. He was just so methodical and he was so organized and he did everything the same way, every day. Things never changed over the years. And you go, I wish he'd change it up a little bit. But you realize that this guy is making sure you're eliminating mistakes. He didn't put up with mistakes.

And so what made him so good and what made him such a great coach over all those years and so many wins is that he eliminated mistakes so when you got on the field, all you did is you made plays. And when you made a mistake, he would come down to you and let you know it. You could catch 10 passes and when you dropped one, oh no, he's on his way. And I said, "Coach, I caught 10 you didn't say anything. I dropped one, you come down here." He said, "You get paid to catch them, not drop them." He's one of the old school coaches that he would get on you on the sideline. He didn't care who you were. Dan Marino, Keith Jackson or whoever. You're going to hear it.

[00:14:22] **Patrick Pacheco:** That's good. I tell my boys sometimes, they'll say, "Well, I was right," and I said, "Yes, but you were right for the wrong reason so you're not really right."

[00:14:22] **Keith Jackson:** That's right.

[00:14:22] **Patrick Pacheco:** That's hard for them to understand. That sounds like getting the play done was not necessarily... You could have gotten a great tackle and still he'd say, "Yeah, but you're in the wrong position; I don't care about the tackle."



[00:14:24] **Keith Jackson:** That's exactly right. Because it's about the next time. What's the next time? Are you going to make the right decision in the times that you're playing against better talent?

Don Shula, when I think about my way of leadership today, it's not like Don Shula in the sense that I will have to be negative, but it is letting people understand or my employees understand, we've got to do things the right way. We've got to do it every day. We've got to be very consistent and we've got to eliminate the mistakes because mistakes will cost you issues down the line. Mistakes will derail the success that you're having. And so that I learned from Don Shula.

[00:15:01] **Patrick VO:** It was with his final team, the Green Bay Packers, that Keith ultimately won a Super Bowl. And he attributes much of their success to the Packers' coach, Mike Holmgren.

[00:15:13] **Keith Jackson:** Out of all my coaches, Holmgren was an educator. Came from the West Coast offense, it was the whole thought process about everybody on the team is a coach, and they looked at you like you need to know all of the information, all the plays, everything everybody's doing. It's the first time that I hadn't been with a coach that says... He was a school teacher, too, now. We've got to say that, he was a math teacher once upon a time, that looked at football like it was an educational thing. And so he would just say, for instance, "It's third down, in order to be a championship team, you've got to be at least 50% on third down conversion," which is hard to get.

When you drop a pass on third down, he didn't have to come down and scream at you; he'd just look at you. You know the percentage. But he would teach you, he'd say, "Here's what we're doing in this situation and this is what we're going to do." And he was the first at West Coast offense was the first thing to bring everybody into the room and to have a conversation with everybody. You're hearing everything. You're hearing what the quarterback does, you're hearing what the running back does, you're hearing everybody, so in the game you could actually be the coach. And I'm going, this is really interesting. I'm learning the whole game, not just my position. Most of the time you learn your position, you come together in practice, and in practice you do what you're supposed to do to other guys and it comes together. No, he wanted you to understand this is how this works and this is how we're going to be successful. When you made mistakes, you knew you made mistakes. Great, great way of coaching, great way of communicating.



[00:16:48] **Patrick Pacheco:** I think that had to be a breath of fresh air to understand why they're asking certain people to do things that you might wonder why are we doing this on second down all the time? And then you realize this is why we're doing it because we're setting up something in the fourth quarter or something like that.

[00:16:53] **Keith Jackson:** When you think about it in business, it's the communications. You've got to communicate things about why you're doing it, why you create it, how you're going to be successful. And you've got to continue to do that. And the more you know about your business, the more you can go out and produce. And that's just what the Holmgren way was.

Mike Holmgren, in the other sense, that's educating. Just educating the masses, being able to take that vision that you have and being able to explain it to individuals that are working for you and they understand it and they're educated about it so they don't make as many mistakes, one, and if they do make a mistake, they know they've made a mistake.

[00:17:34] **Patrick VO:** But coaching, and leadership in general, is changing.

[00:17:37] **Keith Jackson:** I would say this though, the days of the Don Shula's and the Buddy Ryan's of the world are really tough. I don't know if you could last being those hardcore type coaches anymore. I think that you have to recognize that it's a different time, we're dealing with a younger generation that just won't accept that.

And with that being said, I would say that when you look at Switzer who says, "Hey ra-ra, we can do it. We can go out and achieve it. We're going to be the best." Or Holmgren's way where coach would say, "Okay, here's what we do and here's why we do it." And so you assume everybody's educated, everybody can understand that and go forward. And that's what to be productive today is going to happen.

[00:18:36] **Patrick Pacheco:** What challenges do you see for upcoming leaders and how do you see this evolving?

[00:18:41] **Keith Jackson:** This is a scary thing. It's really scary. I think about Jim Clifton, CEO of Gallup, wrote a book called The Coming Jobs War. And in it he was talking about engaged workers, disengaged workers and actively disengaged workers. And he talked about the engaged workers were 28%, the disengaged workers, 53%, and actively disengaged workers were 19%. But he concluded this, and this has not happened, he said that the 28% engaged



workers have got to start pulling from that 53% and moving them up. Because the dangerous part is the 19% of actively disengaged workers are trying to pull them down. But I don't see the 28% pulling the 53%, I see the 19% winning. They're pulling disengaged workers basically to accurately disengage workers. And that's the problem we have and so that's the challenge of the future. That's the challenge of leaders today. How do we get disengaged workers to engage? And I think there's ways we can do that. I think that you've got to create a clear mission and then you've got to recruit employees of like passion. I think you've got to find people who like to be in the job that you're putting them in and they enjoy participating. You've got to go find those people who think like you. When you create that culture, you've got to find people who fit into that culture.

[00:19:57] **Patrick VO:** But engaging modern workers isn't just about finding the right people--it's about managing them the right way.

[00:20:04] **Keith Jackson:** The thing about it is, bosses have to be psychologists in a sense. You've got to sit down and evaluate each individual and say, here's what I need to have this conversation, but I need to make sure that they know there's some things that are important to me to them. One is they have a future with the company and they have a purpose with the company. And they've got to explain that in a way that, "Yes, I'm telling you, you need to modify your behavior in a sense, but you're going to be around, you have a future." And so the way to communicate that is different now than it was in the past.

[00:20:36] **Patrick Pacheco:** I love the "But you have a place," because the one sport that I think is a true team sport, especially nowadays, is football. Because football's where if everybody does their job on a given play, it should be a touchdown. It's always somebody not doing their job that results in the big game or the big loss. Having employees understand that their job, no matter how little they think it is, if they don't do it the whole team suffers, is something that I think good managers do and it makes people feel their importance no matter where they are in the organization.

[00:21:09] **Keith Jackson:** It only takes one not doing their job in order for the play to break down. Now, you need 11 for the play to work, one can make the play breakdown. And so that's why it's a team concept that you've got to get the individuals around you fired up to say, I'm going to do my job to the best of my ability. That's the challenge today.



I think what you have to do, you have to produce a loyalty to the company. Sometimes it's not about you, the leader, it's about the company. How do we get people to be loyal to what we're doing?

If I'm running a bank, how do I get people to be loyal to making me a great bank? If I'm running a charity, how do I get people to be loyal to making a great charity? Because at the end of the day, leaders change. You've got CEOs, they come and go. The whole thing is you want to make them walk to the industry. The day of, my daddy worked here, my granddaddy worked here, my great-grandfather. Those days are... I would say they're obsolete. But now what we have to do is make sure that the individuals, whoever they are, say, I like this place, I want to make this place better. I want to be engaged on giving enough information to say, this is how I can make a change. And even though my job, as you said, Patrick, is small, the small job I do makes a change all the way up the line.

[00:22:28] **Patrick VO:** One way to inspire engagement in employees is with an approach that Keith calls "servant leadership".

[00:22:36] **Keith Jackson:** Well, I think servant leadership is leading from out front. You've got to be in front and they've got to see you and they've got to believe in what you're saying and what you're doing. Not just what you're saying, but also what you're doing. You've got to have both of them, because some people will say something but they don't do it. They're watching you and they're saying, "Do you believe what you're telling me?" And so when you talk about being a servant, you talk about individuals who are not coming down to wash your feet, but yet still they get down in there with you and you see that they are working hard and they're grinding also. I love what George Patton says, this is what he says, "You either lead, follow or get the hell out of the way." You've got to understand, am I a leader or am I not a leader? And I need to get into my position. But if you understand that you want to define leadership, leadership has a lot of parameters around it. But what it's indicating is that you're there to serve the people and to make sure that you're helping that individual or that company.

Great story of a friend of mine, CEO. He went to a company to become CEO, and he goes, "I don't want the high salary. I'd rather have stock." And they go, "But we want to pay you this salary." "Don't want that salary. Would rather have stock." And they go, "Well, the company's struggling." He said "Yeah, but I believe in the company." Right? How many of his VPs and Senior VPs said "This is the guy for the job!" Right? And so that reminds me of being a servant leader, whether it's financial, whether it's physical, you still are down there with everybody and you're working just as hard as they are and they see it.



[00:24:11] **Patrick VO:** And even if you've been a leader for a long time, Keith says it's important to avoid complacency.

[00:24:18] **Keith Jackson:** You can always get better. And when you're talking about redefining and improving your leadership skill, as long as you're learning, you're getting better. When you think you know it all, oh, we're in trouble.

[00:24:29] **Patrick Pacheco:** Can you think of a time when, a time where you got up there to that spot and they knocked you down pretty good?

[00:24:36] **Keith Jackson:** Probably my wife. I got to tell a great story. We're playing the San Diego Chargers back when they were San Diego and I caught two touchdowns, big game. We go to the playoffs and me, I was big, I thought I was big. I walk in with my chest all big and I said, "Hey honey, you see me at the game today?" She said, "I did, but the trash needs to be taken out."

[00:25:04] **SFX:** Outro music in softly underneath

[00:25:06] **Patrick VO:** Leadership is different for everybody and every business. There's no one-size-fits-all approach. As long as you see it, say it and write it, there's room for your unique style. And if you lead from the front--with hard work and humility--chances are, people will follow.

The best leaders are always looking to get better, so be a student of leadership. You may not have access to NFL legends, but there are plenty of great mentors out there. If you keep improving, you'll be ready to lead into the future, regardless of what comes next. Thank you to Keith Jackson Sr. for tackling such an important topic with us today.

[00:25:49] **Patrick Pacheco:** In Good Companies is a podcast from Cadence Bank member FDIC, Equal Opportunity Lender. Sheena Cochran is our production coordinator. Our executive producer is Danielle Kernell with writing and production from Andrew Ganem and Sound Design and mixing by Ben Crannell at Lower Street Media. I'm your host, Patrick Pacheco. If you've made it this far, why don't you go right and review us in your podcast app.



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[00:26:20] **SFX:** Outro music out

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