

Kavis Reed Breaks the “ICE” on Leadership in Safety

The Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association (SCSA) and the Regina & District Chamber of Commerce (R&DCC) were proud to host a Leadership in Safety Luncheon, featuring Kavis Reed — former assistant coach for the Saskatchewan Roughriders and the new General Manager for the Montreal Alouettes — at the Travelodge Hotel in Regina on February 9, 2017.

Following the luncheon, Reed facilitated a complimentary Executive Leadership Development session for SCSA members followed by a Q&A period. Reed shared his unique perspective on teamwork, based on the principles of “ICE” (Intellectual, Communal, and Emotional) Leadership and “ZERO TO TEAM” — the making of high-performance teams.

“We were fortunate to have such an influential leader grant us insight on what it takes to develop and maintain strong leadership — a crucial component to driving safety culture in any type of organization,” says Collin Pullar, president of the SCSA.

“Whether you’re managing a football team, supervising workers on a construction site, or in any other type of work environment, safety is paramount to getting the job done and making sure everyone goes home safely,” added Pullar.

John Hopkins, CEO of the R&DCC, agrees. “Leadership, especially in regard to safety, plays such an important role in strengthening our communities, our businesses, and our local economy. We hope everyone walked away with a better sense of how to be a safety leader in each of their organizations and spheres of influence.”

Growing up in his birthplace of South Carolina, many of Reed’s uncles worked in construction, exposing him to the importance of a strong team environment in the industry, which he readily translated to the football field.

“The most important thing I observed is how everyone relies on each other to do their particular part in an effective and

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Safety in Leadership Luncheon featuring Kavis Reed in Regina on February 9, 2017. (L-R) Kavis Reed, Montreal Alouettes General Manager; John Hopkins, R&DCC CEO; Collin Pullar, SCSA President.

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safe manner so not only the job gets done properly, but also so everyone gets to go home safely,” says Reed.

There was an incident Reed vividly recalls when his uncles came home severely distraught due to one of their crew members being injured on the job.

“It was all because someone on the team did not adhere to the things they should have adhered to, took a shortcut, and that shortcut didn’t allow the team to be successful ... In any team, you rely on people to execute their assignment and execute their job in a safe manner so that everyone enjoys the outcome.”

During his football playing years as a defensive back for the Edmonton Eskimos (1995-99), Reed reached several milestones, including playing in the 1996 ‘Snow Bowl’ Grey Cup in Hamilton, and being named CFL All-Star in 1997. Unfortunately, his playing career was concluded two years later after suffering a severe neck injury.

“My career ended because the rules weren’t followed ... rules are in place for a particular reason, but things happen. It is what happens after that — how can I, and how can those people involved, make it better for others.”

Although he would never play again professionally, Reed was able to stay in the game as a CFL coach to nearly every team in the league over the years, including the Toronto Argonauts (2001), Ottawa Renegades (2002-03), Hamilton Tiger-Cats (2004-06), Saskatchewan Roughriders (2009), Winnipeg Blue Bombers (2010), Edmonton Eskimos (2011-13), and now as the General Manager for the Montreal Alouettes (2015-Present).

Taking what he’s learned from his personal experiences on and off the field, Reed is now a major advocate for safety as a CFL Rules Committee member. His goal is to ensure all players are operating in a safe environment so fans are able to enjoy watching them in action for as long as possible. For Reed, certain injuries are testimonies that have improved the game significantly.

“There’s no compromise when it comes to people’s safety. There’s no compromise when it comes to ethical standards, and if you have that zero-compromise mentality, I truly believe you are going to have an environment that sooner or later starts to morph into that kind of environment — and your job, your execution, becomes that much easier.”



Kavis Reed presents on “ICE” Leadership and “Zero-to-Team: The Making of High-Performance Teams” at the Safety in Leadership Luncheon co-hosted by the R&DCC and the SCSA at the Travelodge Hotel in Regina on February 9, 2017.

Coach Reed’s Tips on Leadership

- The success of a group depends upon the effectiveness of the people in leadership
- All leaders are duty bound to be attentive to the needs and concerns of their people
- Trust provides the people it serves with the confidence that their welfare is held in the highest regard
- You have to empower people — send down the vision. Make sure the message is clear and trust your team to keep it unchanged
- Have well-defined roles and ensure people are comfortable in those roles. Don’t limit growth and expansion, but do emphasize the importance of everyone functioning optimally as a member of the team
- Efficiency leads to success. Ensure no one steps outside the scope of their role and is the best they can be within that role
- Trust-centred leadership nurtures the Intellectual, Communal, and Emotional (“ICE”) Leadership aspects of a team
- Services and caring are the driving forces to a happy, productive, and successful team

“Everything from proper equipment inspections, proper tackling, and other critical techniques to make certain people are doing things fundamentally correct,” Reed continues. “Everything that we do is all about player safety. That is one thing that we will not compromise.”

Pullar argues that habits dictate the future, whether they are good or bad, and the more that habits are acquired in doing things methodically and safely, the more it becomes second nature. “When you do it frequently enough, it becomes a part of who you are and gives you the strength to resist those compromising moments ... as you build your habits, those things that ‘come out of character’ become less frequent.”

Although both Pullar and Reed agree that it is important for leaders to invest in people emotionally and make sure they are comfortable and operate safely in the environment being established, they also note that emotions can at times override the techniques and habits put in place to ensure safety is upheld; negatively impacting the overall performance of the team.

“You try to educate guys as much as you possibly can before games and you constantly and repetitively drive it home that everyone wants to go home as safely as possible ... not allowing our adrenaline to take over and force us to step outside the boundaries of the rules,” says Reed.

“Wanting to get the job done quickly and get it to the customer as fast as we can is sometimes driven by a set of emotions. We need to be, as leaders, stable enough and practice stability so we are not trying to do things at a frenetic pace — such that we start risking quality, we start risking safety, and we start risking the overall performance of the business,” says Pullar.

“We all get to enjoy the beauty of people’s hand in the construction industry, but we want them to enjoy it as well. We want them to see the completion of their projects, and be able to exhale and know that they’ve done it safely,” adds Reed.

Aside from safety, Reed is also very passionate about his advocacy for developing and maintaining strong leadership — calling it the core of every entity, whether it be family, business, academic or other types of environments.

“I’m a fervent believer that we can do things the right way and we just need people to champion those things ... If there are issues or there are concerns or problems, it usually traces back to problems with leadership. You look at the leadership structure to tell you whether or not it’s a healthy environment,” Reed argues.

According to Pullar, the construction industry has issues with safety, but the bigger challenge is with regard to leadership. He continues to share this message with business owners, supervisors, financial investors, academic professionals, and workers throughout the province, in an effort to improve safety



Kavis Reed spent some time at the Regina SCSA office in between interviews and appearances. (L-R) Collin Pullar, SCSA President; Kavis Reed, Montreal Alouettes General Manager.

culture on Saskatchewan worksites, and in turn, improve the success of businesses and the overall satisfaction of consumers.

“If you control your risk, control the avoidable losses, your likelihood of success goes so much higher. Your likelihood of having a good product — whether it be on a playing field or on a construction site — you are more likely to have fewer errors and a much higher probability of having your customers happy with what they receive. They can see the quality in it. The evidence is there,” says Pullar.

Like Pullar, Reed also attributes efficiency to success, and claims that having well-defined roles, and ensuring every member stays active and optimally efficient within the scope of their roles, is crucial to achieving and maintaining that success.

“Leadership is not about being popular. It is about being fair and doing things the right way. You have to stand on your soap box to make certain that things are done right. That’s your only job — if you have that as your compass, I think you are going to be an effective leader.”

Reed lives in Edmonton during the off-season with his wife Darlene and their two children, Tyra and Tarik. He maintains a close friendship with Pullar as they both advocate very passionately about the importance of safety, leadership, and the linkages between the two for yielding high-performance environments and business success.

To view a full recording of Kavis Reed’s keynote presentations in Regina on “ICE” Leadership and Zero-to-Team: The Making of High Performance teams, visit the Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association’s (SCSA) YouTube channel, available at www.scsaonline.ca