

Kirk Kendall on Coaching, Construction, and the Kind of Leadership That Carries Over

Kirk Kendall on Applying Field-Tested Leadership Principles from Youth Soccer to Industrial Construction

St John's, Newfoundland and Labrador Mar 18, 2026 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - There's a moment that happens most Friday evenings on a soccer field in Newfoundland that nobody warns you about when you take a leadership role in construction. A twelve-year-old misses a pass they've been working on all season. The natural response is frustration—yours or theirs. But [Kirk Kendall](#), VP Industrial at DF Barnes, sees something different in that moment. He sees the exact same inflection point that occurs when a crew member makes an error on a job site, and he sees the opportunity to handle it the same way in both spaces: with clarity about what happened, confidence that improvement is possible, and zero shame attached to the attempt.

"Leadership doesn't change because you walk off the field," Kendall says. "The people change, the scale changes, but the fundamentals stay the same."

Kendall coaches youth soccer in Newfoundland alongside his role overseeing major industrial projects—work that has taken him through aquaculture facilities, airport infrastructure, and large-scale industrial construction programs. He doesn't frame coaching as a break from work. He frames it as work of a different kind, governed by the same principles that have shaped his career in mechanical engineering and project management.

The parallels are sharper than most would assume. Both environments demand clear expectations set before action begins. In soccer, players need to know their position, what success looks like, what happens when the ball comes their way. On a construction site managing contract reviews and complex pursuits, crews need the same clarity—not because people are fragile, but because ambiguity is the enemy of execution. "Good leadership removes ambiguity," Kendall often says. It's a lesson he learned early, taught by military discipline, and refined through twenty years watching what happens when people know exactly what they're supposed to do.

Both environments also require celebrating incremental progress. Youth soccer coaching has taught Kendall something that construction timelines sometimes obscure: people need to see themselves improving. A youth player who learns to position better defensively might not have a standout goal, but that player knows they got better. The same applies to a construction team that successfully implements a new safety protocol or completes a phase ahead of schedule. These aren't headline moments, but they're where trust gets built. "You acknowledge the work," Kendall explains. "Small wins compound."

What separates solid leadership from exceptional leadership, in Kendall's view, is something both settings have reinforced repeatedly: communication beats volume. A coach who explains once—clearly, deliberately—why a player's positioning matters, and then follows up with honest feedback, will develop that player faster than someone shouting instructions from the sideline. The same principle applies to a VP directing multiple simultaneous projects across different sites. The number of messages sent matters less than the clarity of each one. Repetition matters. Consistency matters. Showing up.

His military background—commissioned Engineer Officer, deployed to Afghanistan, managing construction operations under pressure—ingrained a specific flavor of leadership into his approach. Military structure teaches accountability. It teaches that safety comes from preparation, not luck. It

teaches that people perform better when they understand the system they're operating within. But Newfoundland's soccer fields have taught him something military discipline sometimes obscures: people also need to see their leader as present, human, interested in them as individuals. The military provides the scaffolding; coaching provides the reminder that scaffolding is meant to support people, not replace them.

Kendall's personal routine offers another unexpected parallel. When he's not [on a job site](#) or the sideline, he's hiking Newfoundland's coastal trails. These hikes have become his laboratory for understanding the relationship between planning and adaptability. You can prepare meticulously for a coastal walk—map the route, check conditions, bring proper gear—but the trail still surprises you. Weather shifts. A path is worse than expected. You have to adjust. That experience, replayed across seasons, has convinced Kendall that preparation and flexibility aren't opposing forces. They work together. Preparation buys you the mental space to adapt well when conditions change. This mindset transfers directly to industrial construction. The most detailed project plan still encounters reality. The difference between a team that panics and a team that adjusts well is often preparation. It's having thought through contingencies in advance.

"Leadership is relational," [Kendall says](#), and this might be the core insight underlying everything else. It's built in conversations—the ones that feel uncomfortable sometimes, the ones where you have to tell someone they're not meeting expectations, or ask someone for their honest assessment of a problem. It's built in check-ins. It's built by showing up consistently, even when nothing dramatic is happening. A coach doesn't build a team by being present only for games. A project leader doesn't build trust by appearing only in crisis. The real work happens in the steady accumulation of small interactions where people feel seen, directed fairly, and genuinely invested in.

Walking into a soccer field or a construction trailer, Kendall carries the same set of priorities: clarity about expectations, consistent communication, acknowledgment of real progress, and a fundamental respect for the people involved. These aren't sophisticated leadership theories. They're the direct output of someone who has lived in multiple high-stakes environments and noticed what actually works. Construction teaches you the cost of poor leadership quickly. Coaching teaches you that good leadership doesn't cost anything—it just requires showing up the same way, every time.

About Kirk Kendall: [Kirk Kendall is VP Industrial at DF Barnes](#), a mechanical engineer and certified project management professional with extensive experience leading large-scale industrial programs, including aquaculture facilities, airport infrastructure, and complex construction operations. Based in Newfoundland and Labrador, Kendall holds a Bachelor of Engineering from Dalhousie University and a Master's Certificate in Project Management from Memorial University. He is a Registered Professional Engineer (P.Eng.) and Project Management Professional (PMP), with prior military service as a commissioned Engineer Officer with the Canadian Forces. When not overseeing industrial projects, Kendall coaches youth soccer, practices Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, and explores Newfoundland's coastal landscapes.

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