

# LAWRENCE BUSINESS MAGAZINE

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# Women of Impact



## Dena Johnston

**Executive Director – Lawrence Schools Foundation**

**(Spirit Squad Director/  
Head Coach – Free State High School)**

Dena Johnston was raised by her parents with a strong belief and ethos of public service and community involvement. As executive director for the Lawrence Schools Foundation, she believes every time she “teaches,” it’s just as important for her to learn about those she’s teaching and how she can further help improve lives. Making a positive impact has everything to do with giving, she says, and we all get by giving to others. Don’t have regrets dwelling on past mistakes or missteps. Keep both eyes forward, and she believes it especially is important to remain present and in the moment. It’s in those special moments that true joy lives. Not only does Johnston impress that upon those she touches with the Schools Foundation, but also as spirit squad director/head coach at Free State High School.

### IN HER OWN WORDS: YOUR MENTOR/ROLE MODEL

My parents. Growing up, my parents were actively involved in our community, their jobs, church and a variety of other organizations, boards and committees. They instilled in me how important it is to take on passion projects and really run with them if they are a good fit.

Giving back to the place that you call home helps to unite the community and you gain a unique sense of purpose by serving those around you, one that often manifests in other areas of your life. If a need in the community was articulated, my parents were among the first to be there. They set a healthy example from the very beginning that life is not all about getting... it’s about giving.

Even as an adult and mother now, they continue to remind me to live every day, focusing on how I respond to the challenges I face, rather than the challenges themselves.

### KNOW ABOUT YOU

Making a difference in the lives of others and putting good into the world are both a mission and a passion that are very close to my heart. One of my favorite quotes reads:

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” - Mahatma Gandhi

Great role models aren’t just “teachers.” They are constant learners, challenging themselves to get out of their comfort zones, and surrounding themselves with smarter people.

Every day I strive to be better than the person I was yesterday—as a mom, friend, sister, daughter, coach, director or community leader. It is important to remind yourself to be humble. We have nothing to prove, but we have everything to offer.

### MAKING AN IMPACT

Making an impact is about being able to positively influence the lives of others around you, while following your purpose. It is learning to be vulnerable, pursuing new relationships and leading by example.

Growing up, I learned how to be courageous and committed. I learned how to develop competence from my parents, even when they thought I wasn’t watching (or listening).

As a quote often attributed to Winston Churchill says, “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

Making a choice to have a positive impact gives meaning to life and is a tangible way to give back some of what you’ve received from others.

### LIKE TO SEE CHANGE

The ability to let go of regrets and live in the moment.

Regrets will only hold you back in life. If we spend all our time thinking about the past, we will miss the present and the future. Moreover, we are often so busy focusing on our pursuit of happiness that we miss the joy of actually living in the moment. △



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