

Doug Smith ([00:07](#)):

Hey, leader, and welcome to another episode of the L3 Leadership Podcast, where we are obsessed with helping you grow to your maximum potential and to maximize the impact of your leadership. My name is Doug Smith and I am your host, and today's episode is brought to you by my friends at Beratung Advisors. We also recorded this episode live from the ManUp Pittsburgh event here in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, hosted by my friends at Urban Impact Foundation. If you're new to the podcast, welcome. I'm so glad that you're here, and I hope that you'll enjoy our content and become a subscriber. Know that you can also watch all of our episodes over on our YouTube channel, so make sure you're subscribed there as well. And if you've been listening to the podcast for a while and it's made a difference in your life, it would mean the world to me.

Doug Smith ([00:43](#)):

If you'd leave us a rating and review on Apple Podcast or Spotify, or whatever app you listen to podcasts through, that really does help us to grow our audience and reach more leaders. So thank you in advance for that. Well Leader In today's episode, you'll hear my conversation with Steelers coach Mike Tomlin. This is the fifth time I've got to interview coach, and every time I spend time with him, I learn something new and I just come away so fired up about life and leadership, and this time was no different. And so if you enjoy today's conversation, I really encourage you to go back and listen to the other interviews I've had with him. He dropped so much wisdom in each of them. And the reason I get to interview Coach is because Coach actually partners with a local nonprofit here called Urban Impact, and they do work with inner city kids.

Doug Smith ([01:21](#)):

They're an incredible nonprofit ministry. If you're here in Pittsburgh, I really encourage you to check them out. My wife Laura and I support them and have for years and just love the work that they do. But about 11 years ago, urban Impact and Coach Tomlin partnered together to create a conference called ManUp Pittsburgh. And the whole purpose of the event is to equip dads to be better dads and help put a dent in the fatherless epidemic. And, uh, it's just been an incredible conference. It has made such an impact. And so if you're in the Pittsburgh area, or even if you're not, I encourage you to check out Urban Impact and ManUp Pittsburgh. I think you'll really be inspired, and again, a ton of great resources to help us put a dent in this huge, huge issue. Well, in today's conversation with Coach Tomlin, you'll hear, uh, him talk about what he's learning in this season of his life about being a dad.

Doug Smith ([02:03](#)):

And he also, his message for dads in general. Each year, he has a different message on his heart for Dad, so he'll share that. He talks about why adversity is a good thing, and he actually goes into which season of his coaching career caused him the most adversity and growth. He also shares the best advice he's ever received and his biggest leadership pet peeve and more, I think you're gonna love this. Everything he says is gold. So, uh, get ready for that. But before we dive in, just a few announcements. This episode of the L3 Leadership Podcast is sponsored by Beratung Advisors. The financial advisors at Beratung Advisors help educate and empower clients to make informed financial decisions. You can find out how Beratung Advisors can help you develop a customized financial plan for your financial future by visiting their website at beratungadvisors.com. That's B E R A T U N G advisors.com.

Doug Smith ([02:50](#)):

Securities and investment products and services offered through L P L Financial member of FINRA and S I P C, Beratung Advisors, L P L Financial and L3 Leadership are separate entities. I also wanna thank our sponsor, Henne Jewelers. They're a jeweler by my friend and mentor John Henne, and my wife Laura. And I got our engagement and wedding rings through Henne Jewelers and had an incredible experience. And not only do they have great jewelry, but they also invest in people. In fact, for every couple that comes in engaged, they give them a book to help them prepare for marriage, and we just love that. So if you're in need of a good jeweler, check out henny jewelers.com. And I also wanna thank our new sponsor, reiturn.com and leader. Let me just ask you this. Have you ever had an interest in investing in real estate? Well, now for as little as \$500, you can become a commercial real estate investor. Just visit reiturn.com to learn more. That's R E I T U R n.com. Investing involves risk. Please consult the return offering circular if you're interested in investing. And with all that being said, let's dive right in. Here's my conversation with Mike Tomlin.

Doug Smith ([03:49](#)):

Coach. Here we are again. I think this is the 11th year of Man Up and we've done this several times, and I just always like hearing your heart, you know, why are you partnering with Urban Impact to do this conference every year called Man Up?

Mike Tomlin ([03:59](#)):

You know, I think originally it was really simple for me. Um, I had a desire to be a more godly husband and father wanted to find community, um, and support and encouragement information. Uh, it was about to get better for me, and that's why, um, we were really interested in the workshop format. We had breakouts and small groups and things of that nature where we could kind of meet the individual needs of, of dads. Um, and then I had supplementary wants and, and needs, if you will. I wanted to, to be a dad to those in my close proximity, whatever that meant. Um, friends of my kids, uh, people in my community and things of that nature. And so, um, it's kind of grown from there, but initially it was just about finding community, um, brothers that, that we could sharpen our swords and, and get better together.

Doug Smith ([04:53](#)):

Yeah. So I know every year you have kind of a different message on your heart for, for dads this year. What are you feeling? What's your message to dads out there?

Mike Tomlin ([05:01](#)):

For me, I just, you know, I just want to honor man and, and, and shine a light on the stepdads. Um, you know, part of my desire to, to participate in this is because I'm a broken home kid and, you know, I, when you're a broken home kid, sometimes you spend a lot of time wondering about, um, things you don't have and making sure that you could be the best parent for your kids. And, you know, I was blessed enough to have a great stepfather and, um, and also thankful that time has taught me that because I had a great stepfather that I don't know that I missed anything <laugh>. Wow. Um, and it's been cool to come to that realization. And so, man, I'm here this year with a legitimate agenda, um, you know, shining the spotlight on the stepdads man and uplifting those guys and, and thanking them for, for the love and effort that they provide young people.

Doug Smith ([05:58](#)):

Yeah. I think I heard you recently talk about just how you've had to, to grow as a leader and, you know, you started off as a young coach and you were more of a peer or a brother, and then you said you kind of moved into a dad phase and maybe even moving into more of a sage phase. Now. How have you had to grow as a leader, just being a, a stepdad so to speak, or a father figure in, in players' lives?

Mike Tomlin ([06:18](#)):

You know, to be honest with you, um, it is, it has become easier and, and because it's become easier, I've probably gotten better. Um, the guys are now in the age group of my sons and, and so I recognize that. And so I, I'm probably more willing to push boundaries that I wasn't as comfortable pushing in the past. <laugh>, um, when you're looking at a 22 year old now through 51 year old eyes, <laugh>, you know, where they are in life, you know, the help that they need, and I'm probably a little bit more forceful in terms of, um, getting in their space and, and being appropriately nosy in an effort to, to, to help them in as many ways as I can. Looking

Doug Smith ([07:07](#)):

Back, do you feel like you could have done that as a young coach, or is that just something you had to grow through? Because I feel, I, I feel that as a young leader,

Mike Tomlin ([07:13](#)):

I, I think that, I think that hindsight is always 2020. I think that it's something that you have to grow into and, and see, and I think at times, uh, time is the only, uh, provider of that perspective.

Doug Smith ([07:29](#)):

Yeah. And what are you learning in this season in your dad life, your dad, I know your kids are getting older. When we first started this, they were still in school. And are you an empty nester yet?

Mike Tomlin ([07:36](#)):

Getting close. Okay. I got a 17 year old daughter. All right. Um, you know, uh, uh, I'm probably just the younger your kids are, um, the simpler parenting is because they're in your close proximity. Mm. Um, they have less decisions to make you make decisions for 'em. Um, and I'm learning now, um, that, you know, parenting is tougher <laugh>. Um, when, you know, I got one son in Boston, I got one in New York. Wow. Um, my wife and I were in prayer a lot, <laugh>, you know? Yeah. Yeah. Um, and, and appropriately so I just, I just think you don't, you think you have a, you have a vision of parenting getting easier. Yeah. Um, and on some levels it is, yeah, sure. Don't stick your finger in that light socket <laugh> type things. But, um, there's a lot of metaphors for that. As you get older, uh, it gets more complex. Uh, while at the same time, I do think, uh, it does get more rewarding as well just to kinda watch them, uh, live out life and pursue their passions and, and, and be the type of people you hope and pray that they're capable of, of being.

Doug Smith ([08:52](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. I got four under seven right now, man. And, uh, we're in it. Yeah,

Mike Tomlin ([08:55](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Doug Smith ([08:56](#)):

Yeah. You've been there, you've been there. Uh, a little bit about leadership. Um, I wanna talk to you about one, just peak performers. So you've been in, you've been around athletics your entire life. You've seen players come and go. I'm just curious from your standpoint, have you found there's differentiators that separate great performers for people who come into the league and maybe fade away, uh, or even those who go on to become, you know, hall of Famers?

Mike Tomlin ([09:20](#)):

I do. Um, I think a lot of times we spend time and energy talking about talents, about blessings in that area, the things that God has given us. And really, I think when you get to this level, um, everyone's talented. Mm. Um, it's, it's the, it's the work ethic related things. It's what you're willing to do as opposed to what you're capable of doing. Um, and, and I just think that's all around us, uh, continually. I think that's one of the things that I really oppress upon our young players. They're so excited about being shoulder to shoulder with guys that they've watched from a distance. They, they, they're excited about playing with TJ about playing with mka. Um, I always make a point to point out to those guys the things that those guys do, um, that are not talent related. Mm. The habit things, the professionalism things, the commitment things, the work ethic things. Um, and that's as, as evident as their talent when you're around them day to day. Mm. But it's, it's still worth pointing out. Yeah. Um, because I want the young people to know, um, the same could be true for them. Um, everyone has sufficient enough talent. Uh, it's what you do with that talent, how you shape that talent, how you hone it, um, how you remain focused as, as you face the natural adversity that the game in life presents, um, is kinda where we spend our time in search of peak performance. Mm-hmm.

Doug Smith ([10:55](#)):

<affirmative>, do you feel like drive is something that can be developed? I mean, are there people that get to the pros that maybe don't have that initially and they get it and build it? Or do you feel like it's just you got or you don't?

Mike Tomlin ([11:05](#)):

I, I think it is a skill, um, in that I think certain people have a, a certain range of blessings in that area. Um, but we can all get better. I equate it to hitting a golf ball. You know, some guys can pick up a golf club and be naturals, and, and, and that process is really fluid. Some people have to really work at it, but I think we all can get better at it. And I view, uh, drive and work ethic and focus in a very similar way. Um, some people, um, embrace it and, and what could be drudgery is not drudgery for them. Some people really have to work at it, but we all can, can, can get better. Yeah.

Doug Smith ([11:48](#)):

I want to talk to you about adversity. Uh, I found this quote from you. I just love, I love everything you say, <laugh>. Uh, if our team doesn't face enough adversity early on in the season, I create it <laugh>. Nothing builds a team like adversity. Uh, can you just talk about adversity, man? Because I think a lot of times as leaders, we face adversity and pain, and if we're not careful that that can cripple us, but you, you see it as a good thing. Talk about that.

Mike Tomlin ([12:10](#)):

I've just learned that it's always a growth opportunity. Um, I had a coach that used to say, we win and we learn. Meaning that the, that it is something to be gleaned, um, when you're not successful, and if

you're committed to what it is that you do, that you'll, that you'll, that you'll seek those things out. And so, um, I think that's a mindset that I share. Um, I learned, I've learned to embrace the misery associated with failure, um, and adversity. And I realize that there's always a silver lining within it, and an opportunity to improve and get better. Um, as much as we hate it, growth can be uncomfortable. And I'm thankful that I've had enough growth in my life that I have learned to embrace, um, the discomfort that comes with growth. And, and unfortunately, or fortunately, depending upon perspective, um, the more uncomfortable I am, um, the, the greater the growth opportunity,

Doug Smith ([13:15](#)):

<laugh> <laugh>. So, well, as you look back at your, your career then, is there, is there a season, not necessarily an NFL season, but maybe a season of your leadership, uh, where you did face where you're like, man, that adversity to that face that season or in that circumstance was excruciating, but it helped me grow immensely. Does anything stand out in your memory?

Mike Tomlin ([13:32](#)):

I, I, I think the, I think the, the 2019 season will always stand out for me. Um, professionally speaking, um, Ben got hurt in the second game, and, you know, we got faced with a lot of challenges from a player availability standpoint. Um, and it took us a while to kinda gain our traction and find the new normal. Yeah. If you will. And, and find a way to, to, to, to do our jobs. You know, I tell my guys all the time, football is our game. Our business is winning. <laugh>, let's go. Cause sometimes when you're not handling business, you can, you can hate the game of football, man. And I never want our guys to hate the game of football. I got a love affair with football. It's always been great to me. Sometimes when I'm not winning enough, it's not as fun. <laugh>. Um, I think the, I think the challenges that, that, that we faced in 19, um, and that, that specifically I faced in terms of shepherding or leading the group through the things that we faced, um, was an awesome growth experience for me professionally.

Doug Smith ([14:43](#)):

Yeah. That's incredible. And, uh, you, you were talking about your affinity for football. I listened to your conversation with Ben, and, uh, I didn't know there, you, you were sharing, there's a league out there on YouTube of players to play with No pads. Yes. That here you might buy a franchise. Oh,

Mike Tomlin ([14:56](#)):

Man. I love the A I love the A sevens. Um, I'm just a football fan and of, of all levels and types. Um, and when I watch this league, when I watched these guys play, um, you see the love of the game displayed in the guys that play it. Um, and that's a cool thing. Um, it's fun. Um, those guys are having fun. Um, and I just appreciate it. Um, that's a component of my relationship with this game that I never want to move beyond, uh, and graduate from mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, I love it because it's fun. I love it because it's challenging. Um, and it's cool to see other people share that love.

Doug Smith ([15:40](#)):

Yeah. Well, hey, with a few minutes we have left, I wanna take you through the lightning round. We've never done that in our times together, so just a bunch of fun questions Yeah. I ask in every interview versus what's the best advice you've ever received and who gave it to you?

Mike Tomlin ([15:51](#)):

Um,

Mike Tomlin ([15:54](#)):

There's a, there's an old coach that I worked with, Ben Rod Marelli. Um, he was the defensive line coach in Tampa when I was a secondary coach. Um, he went on to be the head coach of the Lions, uh, for a number of years. And, you know, um, he always equated what we do to teaching. Mm. Um, he was a, he was an education, uh, major in college, and he talked about the, the profession of coaching, um, being a teaching one. And, and, and it's an art to it, and that we prepare for each day the way that a teacher prepares meaning. Um, there's a lesson plan. Hmm. Um, and there's preparedness. And I just think that, I just think, when I think about coaching, um, it's, it's oftentimes things that you do innately, the inner interactions with people, the caring about people or the giving of your time and space and experience to others.

Mike Tomlin ([16:58](#)):

But I also think there's a formality to it, um, that shows respect for what's going on from a preparedness standpoint. And I always thought that I had a heart for teaching and coaching. Um, he made me respect the profession com, the professional component of the vocation. Wow. The preparedness required to maximize the opportunity to capture the audience. Um, and it resonated with me because he took that analogy of teaching and a lesson plan and, and, and the things that teachers do. Wow. From a preparedness standpoint to maximize the time to capture the audience. And it, it, it took my appreciation for what we do to another level, and it, and it allowed me to hone my skills in that area, um, more intentionally. And really, I kind of apply it to everything to, to being a dad, you know, um, just about every component of my life, I try to formalize it. Um, the things that I might do innately. I don't, I don't seek comfort in that. Um, I just, I, I try to prepare and I try to, I try to organize in an effort to maximize. Yeah.

Doug Smith ([18:22](#)):

If you could put a quote on a billboard for everyone to read, what would it say?

Mike Tomlin ([18:25](#)):

Um, head down and working

Speaker 3 ([18:30](#)):

<laugh>,

Mike Tomlin ([18:32](#)):

Head down and working. Um, it's just something that, that, that resonates with me. Um, my head's always down and I'm always working. Come on. Um, regardless of outcome of games and so forth or what have you, um, those things are irrelevant. It's about how you learn from your experiences and how you transition that learning into preparation for your next opportunity, whatever it may be. And I think if you're doing those things, I think you always got a mentality that's kind of displayed by head down and working. Come on.

Doug Smith ([19:16](#)):

<laugh> biggest leadership, pet peeve,

Speaker 3 ([19:20](#)):

Biggest

Mike Tomlin ([19:21](#)):

Leadership pet peeve is assuming. I think for me, um, I just make a conscious effort not to assume anything. Not to assume that, that my message is being received in the manner in which I anticipate, uh, not to assume, um, that there's clarity in it. Not to be soon assume that even that the, that the audience wants to or is ready to receive the message. Wow. Um, I just have learned to work to keep assumptions to a minimum, uh, to respect the here and now and what's transpiring and my role in it. And, um, I think it just helps me be, be at my best.

Doug Smith ([20:06](#)):

Yeah. Open-ended. Last question. Anything else on your heart for leaders this year? You wanna sh end with?

Mike Tomlin ([20:13](#)):

Don't be afraid to lead with your heart. Mm. You know, um,

Mike Tomlin ([20:21](#)):

You know, I, I know that leadership requires wisdom and, and, and intentional thought in, in those things, but I think, I think that we all respected on that level and we all, um, naturally I think pause and, and understand the gravity of, of what it is we're blessed to do. Um, but we shouldn't let that slow down the heart component, um, the emotional component and, and, and, and what that can bring. Um, and, and I think you have to be somewhat comfortable, um, with your position and with what you're doing in an effort to, to, to be. We spent a lot of time trying to control the heart component of leadership. And I think the more experience you have, the more comfortable you are. At least for me, the less I try to control it and the more I, I let it lead me. Wow.

Doug Smith ([21:18](#)):

So good. Coach, thanks for everything you do for Man Up. Thanks for everything you do for dads. Thanks for everything you do for our city. Appreciate the time today.

Mike Tomlin ([21:23](#)):

Thank you. Always a pleasure to be with you.

Doug Smith ([21:27](#)):

Well, leader, thank you so much for listening to my conversation with Coach Tomlin. I hope that you enjoyed it as much as I did. Again, this was our fifth conversation together on the podcast, so if you enjoyed it, I really encourage you to go back and listen to the other four. I think though add a ton of value to your life. And I just wanna say one more time, thank you to the Urban Impact Foundation for making this possible. Thank you for putting on the ManUp Conference. Uh, it's really challenged me and helped me grow as a dad and to care about the fatherless epidemic we have in our nation. So thank you for that. And if you're listening to this and we're inspired by that, I'll include links to, to both Urban Impact and the ManUp Conference in the show notes. So make sure that you check that out.

Doug Smith ([22:00](#)):

Well, leaders Always, I wanna challenge you that if you wanna 10 x your growth this year, then you need to either launch or join an L3 leadership mastermind group. Mastermind groups are simply groups of six to 12 leaders that meet together on a consistent basis for at least one year in order to help each other grow, hold each other accountable, and to do life together. For me personally, mastermind groups have been the greatest source of growth in my life over the last eight years. If you're interested in learning more about launching or joining a group, go to L3leadership.org/masterminds or email me at dougsmith@l3leadership.org. And as always, I'd like to end every episode with a quote and I'll quote Coach Tomlin again today. This is something he said in last year's interview. He said, I'll tolerate you until I can replace you. Incredible. And if you wanna hear him talk more about that, go check out last year's interview with Coach Tomlin. Hey, I hope this episode encouraged you know that my wife, Laura, and I love you. We believe in you, and I say it every episode, but don't quit. Keep leading the world desperately needs your leadership. We'll talk to you next episode.