



## Jalen - a junior, Plan: Coaching/Education



**Meet Jalen.** Jalen is an 18-year-old junior and has lived in Cedar Rapids for ten years with his Grandma after his parents were tragically killed in a car accident. Fortunately, Jalen's parents had left him with the financial means to live comfortably and afford college. Jalen was referred to the Leaders-Believers-Achievers (LBA) program as a 9th grader because he was struggling to stay out of trouble and needed to focus on positive behaviors in school. Jalen has had ongoing issues with skipping school and being suspended, and even dropped out of school last year, but stayed involved with LBA.

With LBA, Jalen found mentors who took an active interest in his success and a community of peers who understood his world a bit better than his Grandma could. In identifying his purpose and learning how to tell his story, Jalen found a peer group who shared his passion for sports and who also found it difficult to learn in a traditional classroom setting. Jalen is very quiet by nature and his reticence to speak up and be generally aloof is often mistakenly seen as complete disinterest and/or quiet animosity by others. When Jalen makes connections with someone he trusts he is insightful, a creative thinker, and someone with a very active imagination. Jalen has a very difficult time staying focused when attempting schoolwork and has not learned effectively from traditional textbook-based coursework. Since becoming part of LBA, Jalen has found his motivation to move forward in school and has learned about the multiple opportunities available to him if he focuses his skills and talents.

Last summer, one of Jalen's LBA Vision Coaches helped pair Jalen with a job assisting a nearby college with their summer sports camps. The staff mentioned that Jalen was a natural with the young athletes and showed a great ability to connect with them. As such he was able to motivate several of them when they had periods of struggle during their camp experiences.

Jalen left this experience with a desire to work with learner athletes in the future and is now looking at both 2 and 4 year college options, which is something he says he never would have imagined when he dropped out of school years ago. Jalen signed up for City View because he knew to be successful he would need a different school environment.

### **Jalen's "Week in the Life" Example**

It's the first week of October and like many of his fellow learners in the District, Jalen is well immersed in his fall semester and football. Jalen is trying to help his team qualify for the playoff for the first time in over a decade. He's had a good season on the field but mentions to his LBA mentor that he has enjoyed this season more than any other season because of his camp counselor experience last summer. He is now paying closer attention to how his coaches set up practices, how they adapt their coaching style to best fit each individual player and their personalities, and thinking about what type of coach he may want to be in the future.

### **Monday**

Jalen arrives at the gym of his traditional high school at 7:30 AM to meet with his teammates for their weightlifting regimen. As a very quiet individual who is a year behind his original classmates, who graduated last year, Jalen is not one of the team captains. The coaches made him the "Weight Room Watchdog" which is a position chosen by the coaches. It is a player who will make sure all the players show up to every weight room session and that each of them executes on their weight training plan. Jalen took great pride in this request by the coaches because it showed him they recognized his diligence to training and also because it indicated to him that the coaches felt the other learners respected him.

"This week's workouts are going to be the difference 6 weeks from now in our first playoff game!" Jalen exclaims to his teammates as he tries to motivate them to all push one another.

"I like your confidence in us making the playoff J!" says a sophomore.

"It's entirely up to us, man," replies Jalen. Jalen is more comfortable acting as a leader because he has gotten practice as a learner leader at LBA events, including spending many evenings at the middle school gym being a chaperone for the LBA activities. He originally took the job because it seemed much more appealing than flipping burgers for some pocket cash. The LBA staff turned the job into a "training ground" of sorts tied to his future goals. He was given tasks related to helping some younger learners achieve short-term goals and that experience made him see how even a quiet person can be a leader if they approach things authentically.

After the morning workout, Jalen goes to his algebra class at his traditional high school. He's chosen this instead of a virtual class because he's already at the high school for weight lifting and feels he'll do better in an in-person class. He sits quietly through the class and admits to anyone

who asks that he spends half the classroom time daydreaming because he just can't find an effective way to sit and listen to any teacher speak for 45 minutes. He knows he is going to struggle with this algebra class and he just wants to get through it.

After his math class ends, Jalen checks out and heads over to City View to work on his group project. This semester Jalen is part of a team that is working to implement a plan to plant 4,000 trees in Cedar Rapids. This is to help replace some of the trees lost to a late summer severe storm that destroyed almost 65% of the Cedar Rapids tree canopy. Jalen enjoys being part of this group because he can see how the replanting will make a huge difference to the city. He also has become passionate about the project because as the team was looking at maps of the city to create their re-planting plans, he noticed the huge difference in how many green spaces there were in the wealthy neighborhoods compared to neighborhoods like his. As they went through map after map he saw how different the access to green spaces were and now as part of their team project, Jalen was able to convince his team that they should plant 75% of their trees in low-income neighborhoods to try and offset the disparities.

“This is jacked up.” Jalen said to his group. “No wonder none of us knew the difference between all these different species of trees we are learning about. They planted liquor and cigarette billboards in our neighborhoods while y'all got trees planted in yours.”

This issue upset him enough that he asked the LBA leadership if he could lead a tree identification event with the younger LBA kids so that they wouldn't be as unaware of the different kinds of trees as he had been prior to starting work on this project.

The team begins to go through their “task list” and each starts sharing the progress each has made on their parts of the project. One learner, Jessica, has not completed her task for the week and Jalen hears himself instinctively say, “Come on, Jess, you know you could have found an hour to get this done so the rest of us wouldn't be held up. Do you need a hand on it? Are you stuck?” Jalen knows he never would have interacted with a fellow learner like that previously. His leadership learning at LBA and as the weight room watchdog had helped him become more comfortable interacting in this manner. He knew she likely just needed a gentle nudge to get going and he was providing that.

The group decides how many of each species of tree they should order and begin putting together a preliminary plan of where they would be planted. They had previously researched the types of trees lost to the storm as well as noting which species seemed to survive the storm the best. Of course, they also learned about how Ash was not a great choice given the coming of the Emerald Ash Borer. An arborist had come in and spoke to the group about the importance of tree diversity and how each tree grew differently and had different characteristics.

Jalen and his group are having fun with a computer program showing how the trees would look in 5 year, 10 year, 25 year, and 50-year increments. They could see how some trees grew very tall and narrow, while others have a tendency to grow broadly. The predictive software also shows

how the trees would appear in each season, so they are able to see what colors the leaves would be in the fall as well as how the neighborhood would look in the winter when they lost their leaves. Jalen and his project partner, Chris, also discover that the software has an “aerial view” prediction tool as well so they could take a birds-eye view of the future canopy. They felt proud knowing their work would impact the City canopy for the next 100 years.

The group meets back in the conference room after their break-out work and provide updates on the day’s progress, asking each other questions about next steps and timelines. Jalen loves this part of working on a group project because it is very similar to football for him. He knows exactly what he is supposed to be doing, how success would be judged, and when he has to have his work done.

After his group disbands for the day, Jalen heads back to the traditional high school for football practice. At the completion of practice, he showers quickly to drive over to the middle school where LBA is holding its evening programming for the younger kids so he can help with the last twenty minutes. At the end of the session, he takes the LBA passenger van and drives young LBA kids to their homes.

## **Tuesday**

Jalen and Chris have some work to do on their project today so they meet up at Green Square Park in downtown CR to take pictures, do some measurements, and do an inventory of the trees left standing in the park after the storm. The second goal for the day is to go to every business that was adjacent to the park and let them know about the group project and see if they could get a donation towards the project budget from each of them. As someone who hated speaking to strangers, this task was not a part of the project Jalen was looking forward to.

As they were at the park, Jalen found himself getting frustrated with Chris because he was continually goofing off and talking on his phone with his girlfriend. In the past, his frustration would have led him to just say “whatever” and go home and not be bothered. Recently however, he has been working with his City View mentor, Becky, on how to have a constructive conversation with someone when they are pissing you off without it devolving into arguments.

“Yo dude, can you just tell your girl you need to focus for an hour so we can take care of this stuff. Once we’re done, I can bounce and you can chat her up all night Romeo!” Jalen says. He knows that by stating clearly what he wants from Chris and then adding in a bit of levity at the end he will be able to share his need for Chris to focus without it coming off as accusatory or Chris feeling like he needs to be defensive. Jalen is seeing how the learning he is doing at City View and LBA can be applied to many things. Even the math at his traditional high school now made more sense as he was doing budgets and predicting shade percentages with the tree project.

Jalen then heads to Mount Mercy University where he has an internship with the Head Basketball Coach. Jalen has been helping him with recruiting and learning about how a college coach kicks off a season.

### **Wednesday**

After stopping into a few of the businesses adjacent to Green Square Park yesterday, Chris and Jalen realized they needed a flier to better describe their project. One they could use as a guideline when explaining all the parts of the project and what they were learning through their work in the project. Additionally, it could have information about different ways they could support the project financially as well as through helping with some of the huge work that will be required when the trees arrive.

Neither Jalen nor Chris had any graphic design or digital media experience so they weren't sure how to get started. They met with Mark, one of the business teachers, who connected them to a local design studio who partnered with City View. During the phone call, Jalen and Chris decide that they don't just need a flier, but a whole social media presence and plan to take them from now until the completion of the project. After being introduced to a few computer programs, Jalen realizes that he can indeed create a professional looking flier. More exciting to him, however, is when he was shown the social media management platform. Within a half an hour, Jalen picked up how to plan out weeks and months of social media posts and how he could monitor the engagement of every post so he could report to the group which messages and images were being most positively responded to. All of a sudden, Instagram posts and Snapchat stories weren't just public billboards, now they could be actual data points. He is excited to share all of this with the team later on during their group project meeting.

As the group meets to share updates, Jalen discusses the information and the photos he and Chris had gathered at the park. He talks about how the businesses they visited were all excited about getting trees replanted in the park and loved being shown some images projecting how the park would look in the future with the new trees. Jalen says to the group "Once we started talking about what we were doing, everyone got really excited. It made me realize that if we get the word out now, that when we stop by businesses near all the streets and parks we are going to be planting trees, they will already be aware of what we are doing and we can get right into asking for help." The group all agrees and places Jalen in charge of managing the social media campaigns and assisting Chris with the creation of the fliers.

### **Thursday**

Today Jalen doesn't go to school because his group has no scheduled meetings and he can work on his two virtual courses. Later, he heads downtown to meet with Jim Leonard who owns a construction business in town. Jalen wants to talk with him about the project and see if there is a chance that Mr. Leonard will donate some staff and equipment to the project. Jalen is a little

nervous because he has always feared making presentations and he doesn't know Mr. Leonard well.

To start the presentation, Jalen begins a slide show of some of the social media posts he had started working on. He asks Mr. Leonard questions after each slide to keep him engaged as he was taught when he gave a presentation for one of his projects last year. After showing the slides, Jalen pulls up some of the maps of the city and aerial before and after photos showing the devastation caused by the August storm.

As they both exchange remarks about how incredible the loss of trees was, Jalen also uses this chance to point out to Mr. Leonard the difference in the number of trees and green spaces in poorer neighborhoods like his even before the storm came. "Can you see how uneven the number of trees were? Look over here on my street—there's barely any!"

Mr. Leonard is struck by how passionate Jalen is about this issue and he presses him a bit more. Jalen shares how the group's planting plan is going to focus 75% of the plantings in the lower income neighborhoods. Using the computer program, Jalen shows Mr. Leonard how these plantings will change the feel of neighborhoods like his and also shares that the predictive software estimates that in twenty years these trees will result in the neighborhoods being almost 4 degrees cooler on a hot summer day than now. Mr. Leonard agrees to share his team and his equipment for the plantings. Additionally, he says he will reach out to his contractor partners to get additional help and financial support as well.

Jalen heads to his internship excited about their progress.

## Friday

Friday morning, after weight training and math class, Jalen heads over to City View to work on his online classes. He finds he works best when he's at City View and the teachers are readily available to help him when he has trouble.

As Friday winds down, Jalen reflects on a busy week and feels good about how his project is gaining so much momentum. He now begins to focus his attention on his Friday night—and a gridiron showdown against a team from Waterloo. He is ready to keep his week of successes going.

## Jalen's Semester Schedule

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Weightlifting	Weightlifting	Weightlifting	Weightlifting	Virtual Day
Algebra @ HS	Algebra @ HS	Algebra @ HS	Algebra @ HS	

Re-Tree CR Project Team	Online Coursework	Re-Tree CR Project Team	Online Coursework	
Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	
Re-Tree CR Project Team	Online Coursework	Re-Tree CR Project Team	Online Coursework	
	Internship: MMU Basketball Coach		Internship: MMU Basketball Coach	