



## Observable Behaviors that Signal Toxic Connections

- Everyone in the circle agrees with the head coach; if they disagree it's heavily qualified or made to make the head coach look good.
- Glances among teammates (or even assistants) eye contact among players during commentary from a coach.
- As a head coach you hear only positives, especially from players, but even from assistants.
- The head coach is the last person to hear about troubles that arise within the team. Mistakes are hidden from you.
- Players and/or staff mocks the signals and language related to the team's culture.
- There is a lot of back channeling, also known as the meeting after the meeting. (These are Brené Brown terms from *Dare to Lead* that describe those environments that include the real sharing of feelings and thoughts before or after the meeting instead of in it.)

### Four Areas of Their Lives

Student-athletes are more than just their sport. Certainly, if you are reading this, you already believe that to be true. Coach Fleck at Minnesota often talks about the four areas of life he asks his players to be elite in as “academically, athletically, spiritually, and socially.” It is impossible to include a list of specific behaviors or standards that you should use to make up your program’s culture. Rules and guidelines have to be specific to your situation. Also, everything included in the structure of your culture, every rule, standard, guideline, or whatever you are asking from your team, must be important **all** the time, for **every** student-athlete and coach. If you pick and choose by person (i.e.- someone you like more or who perhaps is a better player) or instance (aka, your mood or energy level), trust levels will plummet and fracture your culture. It is best to ensure that your culture is based on a set of consistent boundaries that allow you the freedom to lead in a consistent manner based on timeless principles as it relates to accountability. Inconsistencies in rule enforcement are where many coaches unintentionally sabotage their own cultures. They write rules to account for behaviors in past seasons or rules that micromanage details of their student-athletes lives. Or, some coaches are inconsistent in holding their team to the guidelines they put forth. And so often, “holding each other accountable” becomes a toxic force, killing all trust among the team and preventing any chance of psychological safety from forming. So, we must correctly implement accountability.