



Drone Soccer in Rocky Mount: A Leadership Journey

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What happens when community, technology, and bold leadership collide? This project explores how drone soccer became a vehicle for youth empowerment, STEM engagement, and transformational leadership in Rocky Mount, NC – guided by Kouzes and Posner's Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership.

Project Overview

Drone Soccer in Rocky Mount is a community-centered STEM initiative designed to bring the exciting sport of drone soccer to local K-12 students. By partnering with schools, nonprofits, and local businesses, this project creates pathways for young people – especially those from underrepresented communities – to discover careers in technology, aviation, and engineering.

What is Drone Soccer?

A competitive sport where teams pilot drones inside protective spheres to score goals – blending athletics with STEM skills.

Who Does It Serve?

K-12 students in Rocky Mount, NC, with a focus on youth from underrepresented backgrounds who deserve access to emerging tech.

Why Rocky Mount?

A community rich in potential but underserved in STEM resources – this project brings innovation directly to those who need it most.



Project Goals

Every great initiative begins with a clear sense of purpose. These four goals anchor everything this project does – from the first planning meeting to the final tournament celebration.

1

Introduce Drone Soccer

Bring the sport of drone soccer to Rocky Mount schools and community spaces, giving students hands-on experience with cutting-edge technology.

2

Build STEM Pathways

Connect youth to real-world careers in technology, aviation, and engineering through engaging, experiential learning opportunities.

3

Foster Community Pride

Create a program that the entire Rocky Mount community can rally behind – students, educators, families, and local businesses alike.

4

Develop Future Leaders

Empower young people to develop confidence, teamwork, and problem-solving skills that will serve them for a lifetime – in the air and on the ground.



Timeline

This initiative unfolds across all four seasons – each phase building momentum toward a full-scale regional competition. Every step is intentional, designed to grow knowledge, enthusiasm, and capacity within the community.

1



Fall

Planning & Partnerships – Identify school partners, community stakeholders, and potential sponsors. Lay the groundwork for a strong coalition.

2



Winter

Training & Equipment – Educate teachers on drone soccer fundamentals and secure the drones, nets, and safety gear needed for classrooms.

3



Spring

Pilot Programs – Launch in-school drone soccer sessions, giving students their first taste of competition, collaboration, and flight.

4



Summer

Regional Camp & Tournament – Host an exciting multi-day camp and culminating tournament, showcasing student growth to the wider community.



Challenges We're Navigating

No bold initiative comes without obstacles. Identifying these challenges early allows the team to plan proactively, seek creative solutions, and remain agile throughout the process.

Funding & Resources

Drone equipment, safety gear, and venue costs require substantial investment. Securing grants, sponsorships, and community donations is an ongoing priority to ensure no student is left out due to financial barriers.

Building Awareness & Excitement

Drone soccer is new to most people in Rocky Mount. Creating buzz requires consistent outreach – social media, school assemblies, local media, and live demonstrations that ignite curiosity and buy-in.

Teacher Training & Scheduling

Educators are already stretched thin. Integrating drone soccer into the school calendar demands flexible training options, clear curricular connections, and strong administrative support at every level.



Meet the Team

Behind every successful community initiative is a dedicated team of people who bring diverse skills, lived experience, and a shared passion for youth empowerment. This project is no different.



Project Lead

Felicia Sanders – Visionary leader, community advocate, and the driving force behind bringing drone soccer to Rocky Mount.



Nonprofit Leader

An experienced nonprofit professional who manages partnerships, grant writing, and community outreach to keep the project funded and growing.



STEM Educator

A credentialed educator who bridges classroom curriculum with real-world drone technology, making learning tangible and exciting.



College Intern

A motivated NCWC student who brings fresh energy, social media savvy, and a peer perspective to everything from events to communications.



Certified Drone Pilots

FAA-certified pilots who provide hands-on instruction, flight safety training, and technical guidance for students and teachers alike.



LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership

Kouzes and Posner's *Leadership Challenge* provides the guiding framework for this entire project. Each of the Five Practices shapes how decisions are made, how the team operates, and how the community is engaged at every stage of the journey.

- 1 **Model the Way**
- 2 **Inspire a Shared Vision**
- 3 **Challenge the Process**
- 4 **Enable Others to Act**
- 5 **Encourage the Heart**



PRACTICE 1

Model the Way

Great leadership begins with personal clarity. Before asking others to act, a leader must first define what they stand for. For this project, that means grounding every decision in a set of core values that reflect both personal conviction and organizational purpose.



Equity

Every student deserves access to STEM opportunities, regardless of zip code or background.



Community

This project belongs to Rocky Mount. Decisions are made with the community, not just for it.



Empowerment

Students and educators are treated as capable, creative contributors – not passive recipients of a program.



Innovation

Aligned with FSTS values, the project embraces new ideas and challenges the status quo with courage.



PRACTICE 2

Inspire a Shared Vision

A compelling vision is the engine of collective action. The theme of [flight and future](#) captures what this project is really about: helping young people in Rocky Mount see themselves soaring – not just in the sky, but in boardrooms, labs, and cockpits.

The Vision

Students who once thought tech careers were "for someone else" begin to see themselves as engineers, pilots, and innovators. Drone soccer is the spark that ignites that belief.

Community-Driven Ownership

This is not a top-down program. Parents, teachers, students, and local leaders are invited into the vision from day one – shaping it, championing it, and making it their own.

Shared Identity

When a community rallies around a shared goal, it builds social cohesion and collective pride that extends far beyond the playing field.



PRACTICE 3

Challenge the Process

Innovation requires the courage to push back against the way things have always been done. In a community where drone soccer is brand new, that means challenging the assumption that advanced STEM programs aren't possible here – and then proving otherwise.

Push Back Against Limiting Assumptions

Reject the notion that cutting-edge tech programs belong only in wealthy or urban districts. Rocky Mount students are ready – they just need the opportunity and investment.

Introduce Bold New Programming

Move beyond traditional classroom learning with live drone demos, community build nights where students assemble their own drones, and open flight days that draw crowds and curiosity.

Learn from National Drone Communities

Connect with established drone soccer leagues, national STEM organizations, and innovative educators to continuously improve and stay ahead of the curve.

Enable Others to Act

Leadership is not about doing everything yourself – it's about creating the conditions for others to thrive. This practice is at the heart of how the project team is built, trained, and empowered to make real decisions.

Build a Diverse Team

Intentionally recruit team members who represent the community: educators, pilots, students, nonprofit professionals, and college interns who each bring unique strengths and perspectives.

Provide Training & Resources

Equip every team member with the knowledge, tools, and support they need to be effective – from drone operation certifications to curriculum design workshops.

Encourage Risk-Taking & Innovation

Create a culture where it's safe to try new approaches, learn from failure, and iterate quickly. Great ideas can come from anyone on the team – especially students.





PRACTICE 5

Encourage the Heart

People do their best work when they feel seen, valued, and celebrated. This final practice is woven into the DNA of the project – making recognition and human connection a consistent priority, not an afterthought.

Celebrate Milestones

Mark every major achievement: the kickoff event, certificate ceremonies, tournament victories, and a closing showcase dinner that honors everyone's hard work.

Recognize Contributions

Publicly acknowledge the efforts of students, educators, community partners, and team members. No contribution is too small to deserve recognition and gratitude.

Promote Informal Interaction

Build in moments for casual connection – shared meals, open-mic reflections, and celebrations that deepen trust and strengthen the bonds within the community.

What I Learned About Myself

This project was more than an academic exercise – it was a mirror. Leading a complex, community-based initiative from concept to execution revealed dimensions of my own character and capacity that I hadn't fully recognized before.

Braver & More Resilient

Facing uncertainty, pushback, and resource constraints taught me that I am capable of holding steady under pressure. The challenges didn't break the project – they made it stronger, and so did they make me.

Shaped by Experience

Years in IT and mentoring weren't detours – they were preparation. Every technical skill and every conversation with a young person informed how I approached decisions throughout this journey.



"Friendship with Samantha Scully – a BEYGood grant recipient and bold changemaker – inspired me to lead with courage, dream bigger, and never shrink from the magnitude of what's possible."



PERSONAL GROWTH

Leadership Strengths & Areas for Growth

Honest self-assessment is a hallmark of exemplary leadership. This project clarified both where I naturally shine and where intentional development is still needed.

💡 Strengths

Leading with Heart

I bring genuine care and empathy to every interaction, building trust with partners, students, and team members across all levels of the project.

Vision

I am able to see the big picture clearly and articulate it in ways that move people – even when the path forward isn't yet fully mapped.

Resilience

When obstacles emerged, I found ways to adapt and persist rather than retreat – a strength that proved essential throughout this journey.

📊 Areas for Growth

Delegation

Learning to truly trust others with important tasks – and release the urge to oversee every detail – is an ongoing practice that this project actively developed.

Pacing

Sustaining energy and avoiding burnout requires strategic pacing. I am learning to work in sustainable rhythms rather than constant sprints.

Celebrating Small Wins

With eyes always on the horizon, I sometimes miss the moments right in front of me. Pausing to acknowledge progress keeps the team motivated for the long road ahead.





References

The following scholarly sources and resources grounded the leadership framework, research approach, and community engagement strategies of this project.

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Images: Pexels, Unsplash, and Pixabay.