

Interview with Angie Morgan co-author of the New York Times bestselling book,
Spark: How to Lead Yourself and Others to Greater Success.

By Sweta Patel, TA Specialist at Prevent Child Abuse-NJ

1. *Can you explain Spark?*

My business partner Courtney and I used to live together in the Marine Corps. I have known her for over 20 years and in 2004 we started writing our first book together. We created the company to help guide professional leadership development because we learned leadership in the Marine Corps, and it was such a powerful experience that we thought other professionals could benefit from similar leadership skills. The spark concept really comes from this idea that Courtney and I have, which is, professionals spend so much time developing their education, their experiences, building up their network, and often missing in that professional development equation is the fundamental leadership skills development that we both had the fortune of learning as Marines. But, most higher education institutions don't teach the basic leadership curriculum, and once people start to develop their leadership skills they take off; that's really the symbolism of "*Spark*", it's that missing link. The link that connects everything you've been doing in your career and can accelerate your career development.

Spark is really about helping individuals self-develop, because, often many people work in businesses where access to leadership development training isn't always available. Whether the organization doesn't have the resources or chooses to focus on a different skill set to develop, professionals end up getting the leadership training they need a little later in their career when it could have benefited them a few years prior. So that is something we're trying to do with *Spark*, just helping to put these resources in front of people and give them enough to get them going, hence the concept of *Spark*.

2. *How is Spark different from other leadership tools and techniques in helping leaders make a difference?*

There are fundamental misconceptions about leadership. Often when people write or speak about leadership they are talking about positional authority like managers, supervisors, and people with job titles. *Spark* is different, we approach it from a behavioral perspective. And if you really think about what leadership is, it is a behavior, it's how you engage others. We define leadership right up front as "a leader is someone who influences outcomes and inspires others." So a title doesn't make you a leader, your actions make you a leader and you can build and grow and develop these skills without a job title.

So in many ways *Spark* makes leadership and this idea of leadership accessible to everyone and people can begin to realize and see where their leadership can be helpful, whether it's in a volunteer organization, if they are an individual contributor, in their community or things that they do in their church. There are leadership opportunities everywhere and when you start to see yourself as a leader you behave differently, you look for opportunities where you can exercise your initiative, opportunities when you can serve your team, areas where you can do more because you have interest and passion in those areas. So again, when people read *Spark* I hope what they can see is that.... "a leader is anybody who chooses to lead."

3. *What do you think hinders individuals' potential growth as leaders?*

One of the risks of not seeing yourself as a leader is seeing yourself at the mercy of circumstances, feeling powerless or disempowered to do anything about your circumstances or situation. I think if you feel helpless it is really a call to lead and challenge yourself. Even if sometimes you might say, “that’s not my job, somebody else makes those decisions,” really challenge your thinking. We all have a tremendous ability to influence the direction of any organization that we are part of, so do you give up your power and choose to do nothing, or do you start to think “what can I do about this, how can I impact some of the issues that I am dealing with every day?”

4. *How can we develop Spark in ourselves and in our teams?*

In the spark experience we have two paths for people: they can grow their own skills or they can think about ways to grow the team around them. (How can directors develop spark in their teams?) I think first is to recognize that they can play a powerful role in shaping the leadership dialogue that is going on in their environment. Just reminding them that they probably play the most critical role in the level of leadership that everyone is demonstrating. With the *Spark* experience they can create lunch and learn presentations. We made it very easy for people to take all the resources, like slide decks, facilitator notes, videos that they can just put in front of their groups and discuss. By using Spark directors can get a lot of resources that can help shape the dialogue that is going on in their center.

You have to take care of the people around you. We learned a lot about servant leadership and this concept of a leader as a servant, that was very beneficial to us when we were young managers in the Marines, and I think sometimes just the right mindset can really shape and change the way you engage with people around you. And I think it’s the concept that can help you to take transactional relationships and transform them into transformational relationships. We can work together and have transactions but that is not necessarily where we build trust. It happens when we take the time to build trust, to get to know each other, to make investments in each other’s success.

5. *How can one apply Spark to GNJK process?*

The role of self-awareness is a really key point to that. It’s just recognizing where your gaps are, because, if you’re trying to spark leadership development within your organization and you are not a strong leader or don’t demonstrate leadership consistently, it’s going to be very hard to expect those behaviors from your team. So I think it’s really important to just recognize the role that you play and spend some time reflecting on your strengths and gaps as a leader, which can help you then be a better leader for your team. I think if you’re trying to inspire leadership in those around you, your example is the most powerful tool that you have.

To learn more about the Spark experience and the free online resources available, please visit <https://sparkslead.us/>