

## The Instructional Coach's Real Values



### Real Value #1: Listening to Learn

For coaching to work, it must meet the precise needs of a school and its educators. The coach can only learn and respond to these needs by listening often and actively to what educators are—and are not—saying.

#### *Exemplifying Listening to Learn as a value means:*

- You are aware that how you listen to your educators is essential to building trust with them.
- You listen to learn, not to respond.
- You listen actively: You give cues to the educator that you are fully present in the conversation and respecting him with your undivided attention. The smartphone/laptop/tablet is far from view. Eye contact is strong. And body language signals total focus.
- You take notes, as needed and where appropriate, as you listen to signal you are capturing your educator's thoughts and will reflect on them again later.
- You respond to what the educator is saying, not to what you think he should be saying, to indicate that you are there to respond to and serve his needs.
- You understand that a possible result of listening is a situation where you might put certain goals temporarily aside to pursue the educator's more urgent goals for himself. You also understand it is up to you to trust your expertise and make sure you do not lose sight of the ultimate end goal as you keep your educator on track, despite brief and temporary deviations.

### Real Value #2: Leadership & Lifelong Learning

President Harry Truman once said, "Not all readers are leaders, but all leaders are readers." Inspired by this notion, I share my own take on his quote with my educators: "Not all learners are leaders, but all leaders are learners."

#### *Exemplifying Leadership & Lifelong Learning as a value means:*

- You recognize that to be an instructional coach is to be a leader. You are leading the school and its educators through the vulnerable, challenging, and highly rewarding process of change.

---

## The Instructional Coach's Real Values

Continued from previous page

- You understand that to get any educator to see you as a leader, you must establish trust and build relationships. You know that to achieve this, you listen to learn about them; you establish a coaching plan tailored to the strengths, weaknesses, and goals of both the school and your individual coaches; you treat everyone with respect and as the whole humans they are.
- You understand that leaders are only leaders if they are always learning and growing.
- You understand that your capacity to be effective is contingent upon your commitment to maintaining your instructional skills and keeping your fingers on the pulse of the latest technologies, newest instructional strategies, and changing content.
- You understand that to lead educators toward the powerful change today's instruction requires, you must routinely travel outside of your education lane and expose yourself to the business world and its skills. Doing so will equip you with both the change-leadership and management skills you need and the career- and real-world- relevant skills you are asking educators to teach students. You commit to learning about the business world for at least an hour every week in the mode that makes the most sense for you. In Appendix 1, you will find a list titled "Resources for Ongoing Learning: Business and Leadership" to help guide you.
- You know that you will eventually be overwhelmed with work if you continue your lifelong learning alone. Personal learning networks (PLNs) are powerful tools for great coaches. Whether it's Twitter or professional organizations such as Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, National Science Teachers Association, or National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, you know that you must find a group of like-minded people or a network that will keep you motivated, champion your wins, and push you to keep growing. In Appendix 2, you will find a list titled "Resources for Ongoing Learning: Valuable Educational Organizations."

### Real Value #3: Deep Thinking

Instructional coaching can be distilled to one thing: you are trying to get your educators to think deeply so that they do the same with their students. To do this, you must be able to recognize the levels of thinking (which, by definition, is an exercise in deep thinking).

*Exemplifying Deep Thinking as a value means:*

- You understand that your educators deserve and expect your deepest thinking in the coaching process, particularly as you observe their instruction and approach to eliciting deeper thinking from students.

## The Instructional Coach's Real Values

Continued from previous page

- You know the hallmarks of deeper thinking: analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, and creating. You consciously apply them to your work, look for them in your educators' work, and ensure they are incorporated into all instructional plans.
- You seek to see the whole picture and synthesize all relevant information at hand so that analysis and evaluation are pertinent.
- You are reflective, allowing time and thought to take place in order to preclude knee-jerk reactions or opinions.
- You consider and reflect on your educators' current development, goals, and progress relative to *their* needs, not your own.

### Real Value #4: Communication

Without communication, there can be no coaching. At its core, coaching is an ongoing dialogue. The success of this dialogue depends on the coach's ability to communicate respectfully, clearly, and frequently.

*Exemplifying Communication as a value means:*

- You communicate openly and often with your educators. You frequently and clearly communicate with them your expectations of the coaching relationship and process.
- You offer routine and unambiguous feedback respectfully and with sensitivity to an educator's pride, so that it will be heard with openness and without defense. You choose your words with care and speak in a calm, respectful tone.
- You frame your suggestions and plans in the terms and values that are important in the school and to your educators so that the ideas will be most likely to resonate.
- You set clearly articulated and personalized goals, including milestone expectations, with each educator.
- You offer praise and encouragement to educators so that they are confident you see and celebrate their strengths and growth.

### Real Value #5: Honesty & Courage

Great coaching draws upon honesty and courage in a number of ways. It takes courage to keep a school moving toward instructional goals when there is a dip in motivation. It takes honesty to consider if you need to coach a teacher differently and then to change course.

Honesty and courage are also vitally needed when you must have those inevitable difficult conversations with educators. It might never be in your nature to be comfortable with

## The Instructional Coach's Real Values

Continued from previous page

such conversations, and that is OK. You don't have to change who you are, but simply move through these conversations with honesty and courage.

*Exemplifying Honesty & Courage as a value means:*

- You critically evaluate your own approaches to coaching and your coaching past and admit when you need to change course or improve.
- You persevere through inevitable setbacks, dips in motivation, and challenges to continue pushing toward the instructional improvements you know the school must make on behalf of students' futures.
- You say what you mean and mean what you say because it's the educator's right to get the truth with respect, and you know they are smart and capable of picking up on dishonesty.
- You do not let fear stand between you and a difficult conversation with an educator where it will be an ultimate benefit to that educator—and his students. You recognize that *what you permit, you promote*, and all educators deserve your honesty.
- You honor your own expertise and tactfully explain to a teacher his blind spots or behavioral patterns that might be standing in the way of his growth or improvement.
- You recognize that difficult conversations might never get easier, but they are almost always powerful when delivered with candor, diplomacy, and respect. You let what is ultimately in the best interests of students provide you the courage to tolerate the discomfort of difficult conversations.

### Real Value #6: Realistic Optimism

A coach must believe that her work can work. She must believe that when all the pieces come together—when trust is established, relationships are taking root, and educators open up to the process—coaching can change lives. It is your job—and a profoundly inspiring one at that—to help each educator become better. This means helping the strongest teachers become even stronger and helping the struggling teachers get in touch with their capacity for limitless growth and improvement.

*Exemplifying Realistic Optimism as a value means:*

- You believe *all* teachers are gifted, can learn at the highest levels, and are capable of growth and improvement. You have faith in the potential of every last educator—no matter the circumstances of her . . . or his . . . life and work. This belief provides the motivation for your entire coaching process.

## The Instructional Coach's Real Values

Continued from previous page

- You believe *all* children are gifted, can learn at the highest levels, and are capable of growth and improvement. You have faith in the potential of every last student—no matter the circumstances of his or her life. This belief provides the motivation for your entire coaching process.
- You understand that, just as students can sense when we lose hope in them, educators can sense when we lose hope in *them*.
- You understand that people only rise to the level of expectations we set for them or believe they are capable of.
- You also understand that you cannot help those who do not want to be helped. In these cases, you remind the educator of his potential. You reiterate your faith in him. You ask how you can be of greater service. And, ultimately, you know it is up to the educator to change.
- You believe every school is capable of change once the educators in it have been heard, respected, valued, and reassured that change will only go at a pace, and be of a scope, they can withstand.

### Real Value #7: Compassion

The coaching process will have its frustrations. A teacher or the school staff at large might get discouraged or exhausted at some point in the process. This is normal and OK. What matters is how the coach responds and redirects the process.

*Exemplifying Compassion as a value means:*

- You expect, allow, and understand that educators will get frustrated or discouraged now and then.
- You patiently offer compassion and empathy when your educators struggle. You communicate that you understand their frustrations. Where appropriate, you share moments from your own life when you have gotten discouraged and believed you weren't capable of something.
- You always redirect the conversation to what is working and where the teacher or school is growing. You focus on every little win and strive to restore hope and optimism in the process.

### Real Value #8: Professionalism

While the work of a great coach is to bring humanity to the process, the process is still a professional one. Professional boundaries must be present and honored at all times.

---

## The Instructional Coach's Real Values

Continued from previous page

*Exemplifying Professionalism as a value means:*

- You use discretion in all your professional relationships. You choose language that is not personal but constructive and appropriately business-like.
- You know gossip has no place in the process, and you also know not to have sensitive or professional conversations in open spaces.
- The coaching process often requires reporting to educators' leaders and administrators. You take care to speak diplomatically to these colleagues. You only say things to them that you have said directly to the educator and have received permission to share.
- You start each teacher-coach relationship with a clean slate, despite any past encounters with the educator.
- If you shift role from teacher to coach and begin coaching teachers who were once your direct peers, you adapt relationships with them accordingly so that professionalism is maintained, while taking care to treat teachers as partners in a co-creation, as opposed to acting like their superior.
- You don't hold grudges and can start anew after difficult conversations.
- You remain objective and focused on guiding the school and its educators toward their goals so that their students may grow into better learners.

### Real Value #9: Commitment to Instructional Skill Building

Bringing humanity to the coaching process is essential for good coaches to become great coaches. From there, great coaches must keep their coaching skills sharp and updated. After all, we can't teach what we don't know. We also can't coach fully if we haven't honed all the skills that go into the coaching process, from having solid skills around instructional planning to building a sustainable learning system that can grow all educators into leaders of their own learning, no longer dependent on you.

*Exemplifying Professionalism as a value means:*

- You understand that part of your coaching practice needs to include time carved out to routinely refresh your coaching skills and knowledge.
- You understand that the six skill sets that follow in this chapter are integral to becoming a great coach and you commit to grasping, practicing, and honing them all.
- You seek out the methods that work for you to maintain an ongoing study, whether it's with a PLN, in a course, or as an independent study.

## The Instructional Coach's Real Values

Continued from previous page

In this final real value, we will deviate somewhat from the prior eight. There are six categories of skills, or skill sets, that every coach who seeks to be a coach *redefined* must commit to learning and refining. As you read through these skill sets, you might find that you are new to some or still working to develop many. That is OK. What matters here is your commitment to growing and expanding them. Take heart that in the later chapters of the book, we will dig deeper into the hows and whys of all of these skill sets and equip you with many of the tools you'll need to build these skills. Once you are done with all chapters, you will feel ready to put all of these skill sets to work and develop an expertise in them.

### The 6 Instructional Skill Sets of Great Coaches

#### 1. *Instructional planning skills*

- You learn the nuts and bolts of designing powerful instruction that elicits the deepest thinking and most relevant work from students.
- You know how to infuse learning tasks with high-level cognition and how to make them relevant to the world beyond classroom walls.
- You know what it takes to make a lesson engaging and exciting to students.
- You know the component checklist that goes into rigorous, relevant, and engaging instruction: goals for the lesson; ideas to enable student agency; strategies to increase rigor; higher-order questions for deep thinking; work that is relevant and the responsibility of the student; moments for formative and summative assessment to guide instruction, to name some.
- You know that your work extends beyond looking for these hallmarks of rigorous, relevant, and engaging instruction; you are also able to identify the mechanics of each, so that you can guide the educator through instructional planning, explaining the thinking and intent behind every strategy, tool, and step.

#### 2. *Research-validated instructional skills*

- You know research-validated instructional practices that can be used across a curriculum and how to apply them to instruction.
- You are familiar with John Hattie's work and have a sense of which high-effect-size instructional strategies are most effective for different scenarios and content areas.
- You are familiar with the Rigor/Relevance Framework™ and know how and when to move instruction through the various quadrants.



## The Instructional Coach's Real Values

### Continued from previous page

- You are familiar with The Hess Cognitive Rigor Matrices to understand Depth of Knowledge.
- You are familiar with Marzano's Nine High-Yield Instructional Strategies.
- You know that your awareness of effective instructional practices must be broad and cover several content areas. When you coach teachers in content areas where you have less familiarity, you do research to learn the most impactful instructional practices for that area, so that you may be of greatest value to them.
- You know how and when to use technology as a tool that enhances the teacher's effectiveness and the students' learning. You also know when technology will be nothing more than a distraction to teachers or students. (For guidance on this topic, I suggest reading *Bold School* by blended learning expert Weston Kieschnick. In it, he explains and showcases how to use technology to drive improved instruction and learning outcomes, including how to apply several blended learning instructional strategies.)
- You have a database of formative and summative assessments and know which work best for yielding different kinds of information.

### 3. Data skills

- You know that data—not opinions—must guide the school-wide improvements and coaching processes.
- You understand the power of both quantitative data (such as test scores, formative and summative assessments, class attendance, etc.) and qualitative data (student reactions, degree of engagement in learning, etc.) to reveal issues and demonstrate progress in correcting them. You are adept at using both kinds of data to advance the school-wide improvements and coaching processes.
- You understand that data help bring more trust and transparency to the coaching relationship by validating claims, ideas, and suggestions.

### 4. Vision-casting skills

In his book *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, leadership coach John Maxwell writes: "The truth is that nearly anyone can steer the ship, but it takes a leader to chart the course . . . they see the whole trip in their minds before they leave the dock. They have a vision for their destination . . ." This quote gets at the heart of vision casting, a tool common in the business world to help teams move together toward a clear vision for the future (2007).



## The Instructional Coach's Real Values

Continued from previous page

When it comes to instructional coaching, the point of vision casting is to help the school at large and individual educators set a vision for themselves in the future. The vision is meant to be inspiring, motivating, and give purpose, for all parties, to the effort that goes into coaching. Vision casting goes beyond simply explaining the vision. It is meant to be vivid, to come alive, to feel tangible to educators. It's also simple to do.

- Taking what you have learned about your school or an individual educator (through active listening, through ongoing relationship building, in conversations about what they hope to achieve, through the coaching cycle—tools and tactics we will delve deeper into throughout the book), you cast with them a clear picture of what their instruction will look like in the future, once identified goals have been achieved. The vision is detailed and specific, including the skills and strategies that will be present and utilized in the realized vision.
- You include details relevant to any goal. If a school-wide goal is increasing learner engagement, the vision will include specific details of what high student engagement will look like in your educators' classrooms (e.g., students are encouraged to persevere through productive struggle; students take ownership of their learning and set goals toward future learning; students demonstrate respect for the thoughts of their peers; etc.). If a goal is to help an individual make regular and skilled use of data in instruction, then the vision will include details of what instructional planning looks like when the educator is routinely applying data with competence and confidence (e.g., the educator constantly monitors student progress and shares data with students, to increase their ownership, and with the students' parents/guardians, to increase their engagement; data informs interventions; etc.).
- As you vision cast, you fold into the vision the talents and potential you see in your educators, even though they might not yet see them. In doing so, you help your educators unearth hidden gifts and get in touch with the vastness of their potential. If you have an educator who is discouraged by a goal that feels too lofty or too out of reach (because it is based on the potential you see in him), you remind him that this is exactly what he does with his students all the time—help them reach the potential he knows they have, even if they don't yet know it.
- Once your school or an educator has embodied the vision you and they laid out together, you cast with them a new vision toward new goals they will work to embody next on the path of ongoing learning and growth.

## The Instructional Coach's Real Values

Continued from previous page

### 5. *Differentiated coaching skills*

We expect teachers to differentiate in the classroom. As coaches, we have to differentiate our support for the teachers we are serving. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to coaching.

- You understand that coaching is personal and requires that you tailor guidance to the specific circumstances of the school or needs of an educator. You must, therefore, remain flexible and be willing to adapt plans and thinking based on the school's progress or an educator's progress and growth.
- You recognize that the best coaches differentiate on two levels—content and coaching modality (explained in chapter 7).
- You know to alter the content and information you discuss with educators based on their current level of aptitude with any topic at hand.
- You use the full range of coaching modalities as needed to maximize your effort and your educators' learning. You know how to differentiate the modality of your coaching based on an educator's needs (not on what feels easiest to you in a given moment) or on the circumstances at hand.

### 6. *System-building skills*

Bestselling author and leadership guru Tom Peters said, "Leaders don't create followers, they create more leaders." A great coach will create more leaders of their own learning. This is because great coaches know that eventually the work will grow beyond what any single human can handle. Therefore, the best coaches grow ongoing learning capacity at the organizational level, which usually means working toward a full learning system—an endeavor that relies on the following:

- You know that the ultimate goal of coaching is to grow the school's coaching capacity by evolving the school into a learning organization—a school that systematically supports the ongoing learning of all educators within it. When a coach helps a school become a learning organization, she weens educators off of her one-on-one coaching support so that they can lead their own learning and the coach can begin coaching new teachers. (In chapter 11, I will guide you through the process of building a learning organization.)
- Early in your work coaching a new team, you begin to identify the near- and long-term professional learning needs for them, which will be informative as you build out a learning system.

## The Instructional Coach's Real Values

Continued from previous page

- You also survey the strengths of educators to determine who might be able to help you in your work of building a sustainable learning system. This might include hosting professional learning sessions on identified needs, taking on leadership roles on their professional learning teams, or becoming a point person for a particular topic. Using this information, you begin to think about how you can scale your efforts to reach more teachers by matching needs to strengths.
- You keep your eye out for educators who prove capable of bringing new ideas and perspectives to the ongoing learning system.
- You know that you must speak up well before you reach your personal coaching capacity limit and advocate for resources and support to build out a learning system that can grow beyond you.