

## PART 1

---

# Becoming a Coach *Redefined*

*“Failure is not fatal, but failure to change might be.”*

John Wooden, former head basketball coach,  
University of California, Los Angeles



# Chapter 1

## A New Coaching Paradigm

### *A Tale of a Coach Redefined*

Several years ago, I was enlisted to coach a woman named Lisa on how to coach teachers. She had recently been hired as the on-staff instructional coach at an urban high school. Previously, Lisa had been an instructional coach at a different high school where teachers, by and large, were motivated and well supported in a healthy culture. Together, she and her teachers had great success in improving instruction and student achievement across the board. As she started her job at this new school, she felt confident, emboldened by the instructional growth she'd been able to guide her former colleagues to achieve.

As they say, one of these things was not like the other. One of the aspects most exciting to Lisa about her new job was the abundance of low-hanging fruit for improvement. Student achievement was low by almost every indicator. Reading levels were low. Student engagement was low. Test scores were low. While she was aware she had her work cut out for her, she was also anxious to roll up her sleeves, get to work, and make several instructional changes and improvements with teachers.

What she was not aware of until after she'd started her job was how mistrustful the educators were of administrators—of which she was one. She wasn't aware that the recently exited district leaders had sown many seeds of discontent and resentment toward leaders. Such that the teachers at her school were demoralized, dispirited, fatigued, unmotivated, and almost totally disconnected from their jobs. In a district and a school where turnover was the norm, this school's teachers weren't exactly excited to see Lisa—just one more person who was going to force them

to change everything they do to accommodate some supposed silver bullet, only to walk out on them soon enough, too.

But Lisa was different. She was a passionate educator who cared deeply for students and educators. She was sincere in her drive and desire to help educators be better. And she was hired to coach instructors to better instruction, so she knew that's what she had to do with integrity. Yet, as she would soon admit to me, she had no idea how to work through the morass and disdain that she confronted at this new school. She could feel all the confidence in her coaching ability that she'd gained in her last job steadily drain from her.

As her newly appointed coach and support, this was difficult for me to witness. I could tell that Lisa was a good instructional coach. She had a deep and broad toolkit of instructional strategies. She understood rigor, relevance, and learner engagement and had a full suite of tactics to increase them in the classroom. To me, it was no surprise that at her prior job she was able to guide multiple already-motivated teachers toward great personal and professional growth.

What Lisa didn't yet grasp is that how we coach changes depending on the environment in which we are being asked to coach. It was OK that she didn't yet know this. Because we often don't have to learn this as coaches until we find ourselves walking into an environment where we can just tell we are neither wanted nor welcomed.

My early coaching story isn't too different from Lisa's. I've been working in education since I graduated college, first as a teacher and then as an administrator, where one of my primary responsibilities was serving as the instructional coach. Like Lisa, I was in a school with a pretty healthy culture. My teacher colleagues and coachees were more motivated to learn and grow than not. We were well supported in efforts to improve our practice. The school was relatively open to change and therefore responded to most of my suggestions for change at both the school level and the individual level. And together, we had success improving student achievement.

I would eventually find myself hungry for new challenges and the ability to impact more people. So, I decided to break out on my own and work independently to coach educators to become instructional coaches to their teachers. Today, I get the great pleasure of guiding educators from

all over the world to become great instructional coaches so that they can, in turn, coach educators to become great teachers. However, I will confess that the first time I walked into a school like Lisa's, it wasn't initially a pleasure.

Pretty early in my days as a consultant, I confronted a school not too different from Lisa's. Teachers had a low opinion of and a lack of trust in administrators and there was widespread resistance to change. Because I'd had a track record of getting results in the classroom, I'd assumed I would be able to replicate this in any school environment. But to be mistrusted and unwelcomed by these educators meant that I had to figure out a new coaching paradigm. I got a crash course not only in the most challenging kinds of instructional coaching, but also in learning to break through that resistance, the poor attitudes, the mistrust, and the lack of motivation.

By the time I was working with Lisa, I knew exactly what to do. Before we even began thinking about instruction at the classroom level, we had to repair trust between administrators and teachers at the school level. We had to begin building new and positive relationships. To do this, Lisa and I arranged several meetings with a range of people from all key stakeholder groups to ask them questions about the school. We talked to administrators, students, parents and guardians, and members of the community. Our goal was to understand what people with on-the-ground perspectives viewed as the problems standing in the way of change and student achievement. We wanted to know people's frustrations, fears, their dreams for the school, and their hopes for students. We wanted to listen and learn so that we could, in turn, figure out how to work to change perceptions, improve how the school operated, and restore faith in its educators.

Of course, we also talked to teachers. As many as we could, and all of the ones Lisa would be coaching. We wanted to know what had made them so demoralized, how they felt coming to work every day, and how they wished they could be supported to do their jobs better. We asked a lot of questions and listened carefully to what they shared, knowing that they were giving us a gift by talking to us at all. We listened to their assessment of the failures of past leaders and what they needed to be able to grow and be more effective in the classroom. We asked them what scared

them about change and what would make them more comfortable with it. We listened as each of them told us how they wanted to be coached and supported.

Lisa and I also did a deep analysis of all student achievement data that we could get our hands on. We looked for clues and artifacts around the school about how much, or how little, academics were emphasized, praised, and valued. We tried to get a sense of what about the school was influencing culture, for better and worse.

Together we then digested, synthesized, analyzed, and processed all the qualitative and quantitative information we'd gathered. We were able to begin to see a picture of how we could slowly but surely coax the staff out of its resistance to change and into taking little steps to make improvements. We also began to see some potential early, and relatively easy, wins in boosting student achievement that wouldn't require dramatic upfront changes yet would help create a new, positive story—and even begin to redirect the culture. Eventually, we put together a school-wide improvement plan that met its educators exactly where they were as a collective. We didn't ask too much of them too soon because we refused to risk sowing even more resentment toward administrators. And we began to put together coaching plans that met every educator where he or she was, so that Lisa could coach them in a way that resonated with them, made them feel respected, and would drive their growth.

In starting her coaching process this way, Lisa was using far more skills than her prior job required of her. Yes, she was applying her excellent instructional strategy acumen. But she was also using leadership and management skills. She was thinking through how to frame and communicate her plans in terms that her educators cared about and valued so that her ideas would be heard and trusted. On an ongoing basis, she was listening to different concerns and collaborating to negotiate often conflicting needs to create new solutions. She was problem solving and troubleshooting in real time to help her educators and also to repeatedly show them that she was on their side. She was team and relationship building so that everyone would mobilize around shared goals to do better for students.

In other words, Lisa was using a range of skills she never expected would be so vital to instructional coaching. She was also expanding her

definition of instructional coaching. As a result, Lisa transformed how she viewed her capacity and potential as a coach. She no longer viewed herself as myopically focused on classroom instruction. Rather, she viewed herself a conduit between individual instructional needs and the school-wide systems and goals that had to be in place to support those needs. She understood that for individual change at the classroom level to take root, it must be able to grow from the fertile soil of a school ready for change and improvement. Thus, she began viewing herself as leading educators—of all different personalities, preferences, fears, and dreams—from being a loose collective of individuals into a team working toward school-wide and personal growth. In newly seeing herself as both a leader and a partner in co-creating improvement plans, and collaborating to see all teachers through to success, Lisa became a *great* coach.

Today, my most challenging educators and schools are often my greatest joys. They taught me what great coaching is and what instructional coaching today must be—a process that requires deep thinking and thoughtful planning to consider the school and the individuals in it holistically. A process that includes driving change not just at the classroom level, but at the school level, too, so that the two can work together to unlock the greatest growth potential. It requires great coaches who know not just how to teach, but also how to lead and inspire.

These schools showed me just how much support coaches need to become great coaches *and* leaders. They showed me just how much the notion of coaching needs to be redefined to support the kind of change and improvement all of our schools today need to meet the ever-evolving demands on students for successful futures tomorrow.

Helping schools and educators all over the world redefine coaching has become my greatest professional joy. This book represents my desire to lead as many coaches as I possibly can to the greatness I know is there in each of them.

## **The Building Blocks of a Coach Redefined**

Another confession: When I first started working as a coaching consultant and had that first experience of walking into a school where I could just *feel* that I was not wanted, I didn't just snap my fingers and know what

to do. It took some years of trial and error and practice. And it took a bit of chance.

Prior to walking into this first challenging school, coaching always felt like a natural fit to my skills. As it turned out, certain skills that are so core to coaching—helping people discover their strengths, outlining with them steps to grow those strengths, and supporting them through the process of improvement—were skills I’d organically developed in my life and work. Using these skills also proved fulfilling to me, in part because I derive joy from watching people grow.

It felt serious to me, too. The work of instructional coaching is to support educators, yes. But it has a dual and ultimate purpose: to improve student learning and achievement specifically so that students may thrive in their futures. Each time I sit down with a new instructional leader I’m coaching, I introduce myself with the same promise to them. It usually goes something like this: “I’m here to serve you. I’m here to understand where you are, what you need, and walk beside you as you improve your ability to better guide your teachers, so their students will become better learners.”

Early in my coaching career, when I was an administrator, it quickly became apparent that if I were to make good on this promise and continue to make good on it as circumstances around education changed, I had to keep learning. I had to stay on top of changing learning models and philosophies, the latest instructional strategies, new technologies, evolving content, newly understood science of learning, and any and all changes in standards. After all, how could I teach what I didn’t know? I owed it to my teachers to keep my toolkit chock full of the latest and greatest in great instruction.

Fortunately, my commitment to my own ongoing learning paid off. While an administrator, my collaboration with teachers catapulted more and more of them to levels of growth that led to real change in their classrooms. As their successes grew, I was asked to coach the principal and other school leaders.

Thrilled by this new opportunity, I began diving into books about leadership and management. Again, how could I teach what I didn’t know? How could I impart sage advice if I didn’t have a well-stocked arsenal of it? This challenge exposed me to a world of books, websites, and podcasts about leadership. In most cases, each of these resources spoke to people

in the business world, as so often it is in the business world where such concepts of leadership, management, motivation, and teamwork are discussed. It was slowly becoming clear to me that an exploration of business was going to help improve my work as a coach in a number of ways.

Let me try to build this point a different way: through LEGOs.

## LEGO: A Mini Business Case Study

Who in the world doesn't know LEGO? Those primary colored, interlocking bricks were a feature in most all of our childhoods. For those of us who've had young kids of our own, we've watched them bring joy to yet another generation. One of the thrills of forming one's own creation for some world unfolding right in their very own imaginations. And then dismantling it to rebuild an entirely new one in some new imaginary world.

If you haven't seen any LEGOs in recent years, browsing their vast offering today might surprise you. There are bricks for all sizes of hands—from those of toddlers all the way to those of adults impassioned about models and building. There are traditional bricks of varied dimensions to be constructed into whatever a person could dream up. There are kits to build anything and everything from a diner to a Ford Mustang to the Taj Mahal. You can build entire cityscapes—on lands as we know them or distant planets as we imagine them. LEGO, today, truly is a universe of creativity and possibility.

And did I mention LEGOs now also come in pinks and purples?

The Lego Group, as it is known today, was born in Denmark in 1932. Ole Kirk Christiansen, a Danish carpenter, manufactured stepladders, ironing boards, stools—all kinds of practical objects. Then one day, he began carving wooden toys. He decided to refer to his budding little toy business as "LEGO," a derivation of the Danish phrase *leg godt*, which means "play well" (Lego 1930–1939, 2018).

In 1947, the shop began producing toys in plastic. Two years later, for the first time, they manufactured "Automatic Binding Bricks," a prototype of what we know as LEGO bricks today (Lego 1940–1949, 2018). Nearly a decade later, in 1958, the LEGO stud-and-tube coupling system (those raised circles and their corresponding divots that interlock) was

patented, establishing the LEGOs we know today—and allowing them to stick to fellow bricks much more securely (Lego 1950–1959, 2018).

Not insignificantly, a market analysis department was formed a year later. For most of LEGO's history, the company has focused intensely on soliciting customer feedback and listening closely to it. They routinely engage customers for ideas and insights, which drive product changes and new product development at LEGO (Lego 1950–1959, 2018).

It was thanks to one of those recent solicitations of user information that LEGO discovered they had failed to connect with as many young girls as they had with young boys. LEGO believes constructive play nurtures lifelong skills, excites children's curiosity, sparks imagination and creativity, and taps into logic and reason. It was always LEGO's intention to make mini builders out of boys and girls (Lego Brand, 2018). But last decade, household studies of primary child LEGO users revealed they had not done enough to appeal to little girls. In the United States, they learned that of households with kids actively playing with LEGOs, girls were the primary users only nine percent of the time. They found similar patterns in several other countries (Tranbaek, 2012).

LEGO wasn't meeting one of its most important goals. To right this wrong, they sought the insights, desires, and requests of the very consumers they were targeting. Around 2008, the company set out on what would be a four-year listening tour with 3,500 girls and their moms to understand what about LEGOs hadn't been appealing to them and what would make them more enticing. LEGO was committed to seeing more young girls gain the benefits of constructive play. And of course, there was a business opportunity in growing an untapped market.

LEGO's listening tour was highly intentional. Per a news release on LEGO's website about the marketing undertaking: "The LEGO Group is globally known for its co-creation philosophy to ensure that we deliver the best possible products and experiences. We have achieved this distinction because we have a long history of listening very carefully to the opinions and requests of our consumers . . ." (Tranbaek, 2012).

LEGO is a business. They have to generate a profit to stay alive and continue to meet their business and consumer goals of enabling productive play. So they have to create value—real value, value people will pay

for—for all of their customer segments. Only then will customers buy what they are selling. Historically, they have done this by seeking consumer feedback and opinions and then applying these insights to the development of their products—a process called co-creation. It's a process that ensures that what LEGO is selling to customer segments has meaning to them, meets needs and wants, and resonates with them. It's a process that never ends at LEGO. Asking consumers for feedback is ongoing because consumers change, markets change, and trends change.

As was the intention, this listening tour with girls and their moms taught LEGO what would make their toys more appealing and fun to girls. From that same paper on LEGO's website: "We heard very clear requests from moms and girls for more details and interior building, a brighter color palette, a more realistic figure, role play opportunities and a storyline that they would find interesting" (Trangbaek, 2012).

The result of the listening tour was LEGO Friends, which debuted in 2012. The LEGO Friends collection is based on five young girls who are all friends living in Heartlake City. Their mission, per the collection's landing page, is to "help make the world a better place." Each girl has a distinct personality and a different passion and, thus, a different way she contributes her gifts to her community. All can be built from LEGOs, of course, in a rainbow of bright colors, replete with pinks and purples (Lego Friends, 2018).

By *listening*, LEGO created a new product based precisely on what the segment of customers they were targeting wanted. A LEGO team showed up to their conversations with the moms and daughters with one agenda and one agenda only: to *listen* to what they had to say. They showed up with humility, ready to *learn*. Based on what they learned, they were able to *co-create* a new suite of LEGOs *with* their customers, not for them. This allowed LEGO to create real value for young girls—value for which parents would happily pay.

LEGO continued to listen even after LEGO Friends was flying off shelves. They listened to a chorus of people who'd taken offense at the implication that girls would only play with toys in the traditionally female colors of pinks, purples, and pastels. Feeling compelled to respond, LEGO stated:

We want to correct any misinterpretation that LEGO Friends is our only offering for girls. This is by no means the case. We know that many girls love to build and play with the wide variety of LEGO products already available. LEGO Friends joins this global collection of products as yet another theme option from which parents may choose the best building experience for their child's skill and interest. (Trangbaek, 2012)

LEGO did not manufacture pink and purple building blocks based on assumption; they manufactured them because that, among other features, is what little girls said mattered to them. LEGO understood they had to make a product that mattered to them to achieve the goal: get more young girls engaging in productive play. They knew LEGO Friends would work because LEGO met these little girls where they were and created the product from there.

Sound familiar?

Fortunately for me, when I first walked into that school that was making it known they were not excited to have an instructional coaching consultant around, I had some new tools in my toolkit. In fact, I had a new toolkit—one filled with leadership and management lessons and skills. Thanks to having begun a study into what are traditionally thought of as business skills, I had read a few things about leading change. I'd learned the importance of listening first to learn and then creating plans *with* educators that met their actual needs, not my perceptions of them. I'd read about how to present and communicate plans in terms that spoke to a person's values and aspirations. I'd read about how to convince people to embrace change by identifying the specific root cause of their resistance to it and targeting it with appropriate tactics and ideas. Thanks to my new crash course in business skills, I wasn't paralyzed by these highly resistant educators. I had ideas and began putting them to the test and adapting and improving them where they fell short.

I was beginning to put together what would become a full-scale program to guide coaches to listen to stakeholders in order to understand the issues and emotions across the school. And then how to devise a plan to break down resistance to change and begin to make small changes at the school level such that once individual instructional coaching began,

teachers would be open to suggestion and their efforts to change were supported across the school. I was also beginning to establish my new paradigm of coaching—that it cannot happen only in the classroom; it must happen across the school, as well. One cannot exist without the other if either is to become sustainable.

I love the LEGO story. I love it because it so aptly captures what coaching is when it's at its fullest potential and its best: a co-creation. It's a true collaboration between coach and teacher and coach and school-wide educators built on listening, learning, adapting, changing, and growing together. It also shows how closely the skills needed to lead change in schools mirror the skills needed to lead change in businesses and that a study in business *is* a study in great coaching.

Put another way, the story shows one of the most important things I've learned about great instructional coaching: for it to have the impact we all know it can and hope it will, it takes far more than instructional strategies and skill alone.

## Getting Out of the Education Lane

As I mentioned, this experience of meeting resistant educators dubious of me was in my early days as a coaching consultant. I had come to decide to function as an independent coaching consultant because of how much I love instructional coaching. Helping people grow fulfills me and gives me enormous joy. I wanted to be able to reach more people. Besides, the teachers and leaders at the school where I had been a full-time administrator and I were able to build a sustainable, system-wide instructional coaching program. I felt ready to confidently hand over the reins to those excited to lead the way.

All of a sudden, I found myself out on the road coaching teachers and leaders in districts across the country as a freelance consultant in charge of her own business. I didn't know the first thing about entrepreneurship. My head spun, but as a lifelong learner already familiar with a host of great business resources, I simply expanded my self-education into other areas of starting and running a successful business.

My education in business skills proved a benefit again. Something remarkable happened as I put myself through my little-to-no-cost, ad-hoc,

mini MBA program of sorts. I was exposing myself to, learning about, and becoming immersed in the very skills I'm always coaching educators to teach their students—career skills. Of today. The relevant kind. The very skills we talk about all the time in education!

I was reading books about connecting with customers on a human level and creating real value—the kind they'll put their hard-earned money into. Listening to podcasts about surviving in a constantly changing industry environment. Consuming articles about setting the right goals and aligning entire teams and all decisions to them. About synthesizing and evaluating disparate information to make decisions amid ambiguity. About creating new solutions to old problems; collaborating with co-workers in different states, even countries; working nimbly and swiftly to iterate a product or service to respond to market forces; rebounding from mistakes; branding and rebranding and rebranding again; recovering from a public relations disaster; and leading in highly uncertain times.

How can we teach what we don't know?

In stepping outside of the education lane, I made myself a stronger educator and a stronger, more valuable coach to my colleagues and clients.

So often, we educators go to school to become educators. And then we become educators. And we stay educators. Through no fault of our own, all we know is education! Yet, how many students are we preparing to become educators? A scant few.

When the day is done, we are preparing students for careers. The overwhelming share of those will be in some kind of business or professional setting that draws on the skills discussed most frequently in the business world.

We can't teach what we don't know.

## **Why We Need Great Coaches & a New Coaching Paradigm**

I am here to share with you all I've learned in my many years guiding others to become the greatest coaches, teachers, and education leaders they can be. I am here to help you avoid the mistakes I made. I am here to share the hard-fought wisdom I've gained. I am here to share my process to drive meaningful change at your school and with all your teachers so that all their students can achieve at the highest levels.

Let's now talk about why you're here—to become the greatest instructional coach you can be. To inspire teachers to be the greatest they can be so that they can inspire students to be the greatest they can be. Thank you for showing up. We need you more than ever. In my opinion, instructional coaching has always been important. But it's taken on even more importance in recent years.

At this point, it's almost cliché to say our educators are overwhelmed, overworked, overtired, overextended. But it's become cliché because it's true. It's true because we have eyes and ears and we can see that our world is different from the one in which most of us were educated and raised. We know that what our students today will be asked to do in their careers tomorrow is different. It's complicated, nuanced, technological, global, and often interdisciplinary. It rests heavily on social-emotional skills and the ability to deal with—no, *thrive*—amid constant change and ambiguity.

That's why I'm so glad you're here. Instructional coaches—or anyone responsible for, in some capacity, guiding educators to improve their practice—in my view and experience are the missing link between the old way of teaching and learning and the new, desperately needed way. Great instructional coaches can truly change the game for educators and, therefore, their students. They can help their educators focus their efforts and instruction, with intention, on those things that matter most to students and their futures. Coaches can help teachers cut through the confusion, the overwhelm, the distractions, and get to the heart of the matter. They can help them identify their strengths, set meaningful goals, and grow more effective and impactful in the classroom than they ever thought possible. And they can also help them see their growth as boundless, lifelong, fulfilling, and enjoyable. (Really!)

Great instructional coaches also have unique power because of their unique position: they serve as a link between instructors and the instructional system. Coaches, often more than most anyone else in a school, can see the gaps and systemic impediments that are thwarting teachers' capacity to build meaningful relationships with students and to deliver truly rigorous, relevant, and engaging instruction. Thus, coaches are uniquely positioned not only to push individual teachers toward improvement, but also to push the entire instructional system toward improvement so that

individual improvement can sustain itself. Great coaches understand this. They see this vantage point as not just as an opportunity, but also as an obligation—to students, teachers, and the entire school. They grasp that without doing what is within their power to guide change at the school level such that it is built to support individual teacher growth, that growth will hit a ceiling. Great coaches, then, know that to unlock full educator potential, they must help unlock the full potential of the system to support educators' boundless growth.

Part of breaking out of the old way of thinking about instructional coaching and into the new is understanding what differentiates a good coach from a great coach. A good coach thinks instructional coaching only happens in the classroom. A great coach knows that an individual teacher can achieve only so much growth if the school she's in isn't also adapting and evolving processes and systems to provide fertile ground for her growth. A good coach guides individual teachers to improve their instructional practice. A great coach also guides the school through improvement so those individual practices can stick and be sustained.

A good coach will get straight to work coaching individual teachers in the classroom. A great coach will begin her coaching process first by listening to all stakeholders and working to comprehend the dynamics in and around the school. A great coach will have a leadership and management toolkit full of tools to determine a school's readiness for change, and then suggest changes only of a scope and pace that the school can withstand. A great coach knows that coaching on any level cannot happen without trust. A great coach understands that relationships build trust and set the stage for the most productive coaching possible. A great coach knows that in order to get buy-in for a school-wide improvement plan, it must be crafted and communicated in terms that speak to the school's and its educators' values and needs. A great coach grasps that she must continue to listen to learn, not listen to respond, and adapt plans—but not big-picture goals—to support her educators.

A good coach will have the instructional coaching cycle down pat. She will know how to design powerful instruction around rigor, relevance, and learner engagement and will have a full and growing toolkit of instructional strategies. She will know how to assess teaching and have suggestions for improvement. She will know how to apply data to

individualize instruction. She will know what goes into building a sustainable coaching structure. In short, she will know all the nuts and bolts of instructional coaching.

A great coach knows that without bringing in the human element, the nuts and bolts almost don't matter. Great coaches understand that educators must teach the whole child if they are to set them up for successful lives. Therefore, they also understand that they must coach the whole teacher; they must break beyond talk of only instructional strategies and push into conversations about the educator's hopes, fears, frustrations, and dreams. A great coach will engage with their coaches as humans, not just as teachers. It is the humanity—the trust established between coach and educator, the relationship formed—that separates good coaches from great ones.

To be an instructional coach is to be an expert in powerful instruction. A good coach understands the mechanics of instruction and how and when to apply them effectively. A great instructional coach must know what great teaching is, how to spot it, and how to guide others toward it. A good coach is knowledgeable about academic skills and savvy about how to apply them to powerful effect in instruction. A great coach is also knowledgeable about career skills. She knows what they are, what they do and why, what they look like in practice, and how to include them to powerful effect in instruction.

To meet the demands placed on teachers and schools today, being a great instructional coach demands more than it did in years past. A great coach grasps that to be an instructional coach today requires having skills that go beyond instruction, or what we think of as typical teaching skills. It takes the learning and nurturing skills typically discussed in the business world. It takes marketing skills to share your suggestions for change in a way that resonates with educators; customer service skills to problem solve and serve teachers; and operations skills to strategically manage improvement plans and the coaching cycle, to name some. Ultimately, it takes strong leadership and management skills to inspire people to join your vision, make them feel like vital parts of a team, and keep them motivated as they work toward meeting goals.

To practice what I preach, I am peppering mini business case studies, such as the LEGO story, throughout this book when they show how leadership or more traditional business skills align to great instructional

coaching. My hope is that these cases will begin to transform your capacity as a coach, expand your potential, and also stoke your desire to continue your own business- and leadership-skill learning outside of this book.

It is not my intention to make you feel overwhelmed with the suggestion of learning about other worlds of work. It is my intention to fortify your toolbox, even create new ones, to help you connect the dots in order to see the whole picture that is learning today. Thinking of instructional coaching strictly in terms of instructional strategies will keep your thinking stuck. It will keep *you* stuck. It will keep your educators stuck. And it will keep teaching stuck.

I assure you that by devoting just an hour per week to a new leadership podcast episode or a management book, your job will grow *easier*—not harder. You will be armed with new wisdom to apply directly to your interactions with educators and a deeper understanding of how students will one day use these skills in their careers. Trust me: this will only help you. It's a surefire way to grow your skill sets, to help yourself reach a new level of potential, and to find new tools for new challenges in a new world. It will grow your capacity so that you can break free from being merely a good coach and evolve into the great coach you are.

After all, we are not only leading the teachers with whom we work; we are also leading a significant shift in how educators need to think about and approach instruction. We are leading them toward career- and college-ready instruction—in that order. We are leading them to be of greater value to their students in their rapidly changing world.

We are also leading a new paradigm of great instructional coaching. To lead this change confidently and competently as the great coaches we are, we have to step out of our education lane and explore other ones. We have to fearlessly redefine coaching.

## Supporting Great Educators Through Great Coaching

To continue moving our education system to a place that meets the needs of today's learners, who will all need careers in a changing world, we are going to have to change. We are going to have to change how we lead schools. We are all going to have to think differently and deeply about instruction. We are going to have to better understand the skills

our students will need in careers. And we are going to have to provide for all of our students as many learning opportunities as we can to get them thinking deeply and applying real-world career skills to their school work.

We cannot ask our teachers to move through changes of this scale successfully without support. It's not fair to teachers, and it's certainly not fair to their students. All educators deserve the ongoing help they need to do right by all of their students.

To any principals, superintendents, or administrators reading this book—and I hope you are—your teachers need you to advocate on their behalf. I urge you to discuss with your teams how you can bring great instructional support to ALL of your educators. We are asking them to teach in ways that will be new to most of them. If we ask them to do this without a trusted, competent guide, many will fail. Then our students will fail. Effective instructional coaches make the difference between an education system that remains static and stuck and one that breaks out of its myopic, educational lane to fully meet the needs of all of today's students.

To that end, I ask you also to read this book in its entirety. It will equip you with the know-how to discern a good coach from a great coach. It will provide a roadmap for you to support your clients to become great coaches capable of making the fullest impact of great coaching. And it will help you know how to provide them with what they need to lead school-wide instructional change and build a sustainable coaching structure to allow ongoing, limitless growth across the school.

It will, I hope, also get you to see coaches as the trusted advisors they can be. As the link between instructor and instructional system, coaches can be a powerful informational resource as you work to move the entire system toward better supporting rigorous, relevant, and engaging learning. In chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6, in particular, we will discuss the process that great coaches follow to build a school-wide instructional improvement plan. This process can also serve as a blueprint for you to partner with the coach to transform instruction on two levels: the school and the individual.

## **Our Co-Creation: A Guide to Great Coaching**

To the instructional coach reading this book, it is my hope and intention that it will equip you to be a great coach—the kind leaders clamor to hire

and teachers enthusiastically request. It will make you wholly prepared to lead the way through transformation.

Coaches, you are the conduit for change at the school level, which can in turn better support individual teachers. You are the conduit to change for individual teachers, who can in turn be the conduit to change for their students. We need you.

By the time you finish this book, you will be ready to be a great coach *redefined* and an expert in the new coaching paradigm. You *can* do this, and you *will* do this. Together, we will co-create your path toward remarkable growth. Trust that what follows works and is here to serve you, so that you may serve any and all educators, from the enthusiastic and motivated to the demoralized and dispirited. Trust that once you get through this book, you will be ready to transform their lives and their students' lives. Commit to the craft and to ongoing learning, and believe in your boundless potential. I will be here by your side the entire time, always available for you to return to for support, ideas, encouragement, and those nuts and bolts. I will show up fully here for you, sharing all the lessons I've learned in my many years of instructional coaching, all the mistakes I've made so that you can avoid them, and all the wisdom I've gathered.

My ask of you is that you in turn show up fully as well. Without you, we can't co-create. And ultimately, coaching *redefined* has to be a co-creation.

### PONDER & POST



To grow as an instructional leader, I will get out of the "education lane" and \_\_\_\_\_.

#coachingredefined