

Introduction

“At the most fundamental level, it is an honor to serve—at whatever type or size of organization you are privileged to lead, whether it is a for-profit or nonprofit. It is an honor to serve.”

Alan Mulally, former CEO of Ford Motor Company

Through my work as a coach who guides administrators and educators to serve as instructional coaches, I’ve had the honor to engage with thousands in the field of education in locations near and far. To name just some, my work has taken me to urban centers in Detroit and Philadelphia; rural areas of West Virginia and Washington; suburban Illinois and Ohio; communities in Mississippi and Louisiana; all over Texas, California, and New York; and the islands of St. Thomas, St. John, St. Croix, Hawaii, Tinian, Rota, and Saipan. On these trips, I’ve worked in schools as small as one hundred students and as large as nearly two thousand. I’ve been in schools with large populations of English language learners and special education students. I’ve interacted with educators and students of numerous backgrounds, nationalities, and creeds. And I’ve guided improvement in a range of environments and circumstances—from schools with limited resources to those with excess.

As distinct as every learning environment is, there are three common truths among all. First, it doesn’t matter where we are from or what we have; we are all human, and we all need the same things to grow. Second, all children deserve the learning that helps them find their boundless growth potential and create hopeful, successful futures. Third, getting all children to this point means supporting them and their educators in a way that meets their needs and is tailored to their specific circumstances.

No matter where I have had the honor to serve educators, I must serve *them* best. For me to do this, I must take the time to learn about them, their

learning environment, the challenges they face, the resources they have, and the dreams they hold for themselves and their students. Only then can I respectfully lead them in a way that is meaningful, motivating, and impactful. To offer any school or educator an off-the-shelf improvement plan would be to lead them only to stalled growth and progress.

It was early in my coaching career that I realized coaches are so much more than our title would have us to believe. While coaching captures the nuts and bolts of what we do, leading captures its essence. We are not just asking people to teach; we are also asking them to trust us on a vulnerable process of change and growth. We cannot do this if we do not first get to know our educators and the students they serve so that we can serve their individual needs. And we also cannot do this if we do not also get to know the environment in which they educate.

To lead is to know. To know is to ask that people open up to you, share with you, be vulnerable with you, and trust you. That, simply put, is an honor.

It is also a responsibility, one I believe instructional coaches are uniquely capable of fulfilling. And one that I believe is taking on more weight in today's world.

The world that follows high school graduation is changing dramatically. Of the fall 2010 cohort of students enrolled part-time and full-time at all two-year and four-year institutions, the six-year completion rate was 54.8 percent. Meaning 45.2 percent of these students dropped out of college within six years of entering (Shapiro et al, 2017).

Class of 2017 college graduates hold an average of \$39,400 in student loan debt, a six percent increase from the prior year (Student Loan Hero, 2019). In 2012, 1.3 million students graduated from college in debt, up from 1.1 million in 2008. Data released in 2017 from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York found that underemployment rate (the rate of college graduates working in lower-paying jobs that don't require a college degree) for recent college grads has bounced between 40 and 50 percent for the past 25 years; and 34 percent of all college grads have remained underemployed in that time.

The composite picture is of college students graduating (or not graduating) with more debt and fewer job opportunities commensurate to

their college degrees that offer greater capacity to pay down college debt. The choices we guide our students to make after college matter. And the changing realities of these choices mean that we must change how we teach, what we teach, and why we teach.

For two key reasons, instructional coaches and instructional leaders are best positioned to lead the instructional change our students need and deserve. First, our teachers need our support and guidance as we ask them to deliver instruction at higher levels and in new ways to manage new realities. In this century, much of what we are asking educators to do they did not learn in school. It's unfair and doesn't show them due respect to change and raise expectations of them without providing guidance to meet those new expectations. Second, coaches have a singular vantage point in schools, as we get insights into how teachers and a school's system intersect to advance or obstruct student learning. To serve our students today, we must redefine coaching as existing on two levels of learning—the school level and the individual level.

This book is for instructional coaches—or anyone in charge of instructional improvement, be they principals, administrators, or consultants. With this book, it is my aim, first and foremost, to lead you through the process of becoming a coach *redefined*—one capable of unlocking the greatest instructional potential in both teachers and the school so that they may together create a virtuous cycle of limitless growth. A second aim is to recruit you and other future-focused coaches and educational leaders to join the movement of coaching *redefined*. The process I lay out in this book truly redefines how to change and improve student learning.

I have created, utilized, and refined this instructional coaching process throughout my decades in the field. It is the result of years of experience, which has been shaped and influenced by the great work of industry giants like Jim Knight, Robert Marzano, John Hattie, and Elena Aguilar. It's also been improved by the educators I've been privileged to serve. Their willingness to share and grow with me has fortified this work.

I have tested the steps and tools hundreds of times. Each time, I have reflected on the results, analyzed the process, culled it for new understanding, and then applied what I've learned to the next round. Based on my own ongoing learning, I have added new insights to it. At every

turn, I have worked to strengthen this process so that the coach may be more effective, the teachers more intentional in their practice, and students more improved in their learning outcomes.

I have also imbued the entire process with everything I've learned from years of study in change leadership and management. To coach *redefined* is to ask educators to take a leap of faith with you and as a team. At the end of the day, your goal as a coach or instructional leader is to lead the school and its educators to lead their own ongoing learning such that their growth can far outlast their time with you. This is work that leans on leadership skills. To ignore them in my own practice and in this book would be a failure of my service to you. You will find examples of and references to best practices for leadership and management throughout the book. These are often drawn from the wisdom of renowned leadership and management thinkers, such as Gina Folk, Daniel Pink, Simon Sinek, Alan Mulally, Seth Godin, Chip and Dan Heath, and John Maxwell.

This book is designed to be as helpful as possible in preparing you to rise to the occasion of leading instructional change. It is divided into three parts. In part 1, we will discuss in detail why a new, redefined coaching paradigm is needed. I will then delineate the values every great coach must hold and follow to become as effective and valuable to educators as possible.

In part 2, I will walk you through the four steps of leading school-wide instructional improvement. The steps in these chapters will culminate in a school-wide plan for the year. By design, this part of the book is technical, process oriented, and heavy on planning. While at face value these chapters may look dense, please trust that they present a big process broken down into smaller, manageable parts. Each part serves to bring intention, purpose, focus, and clarity to the work ahead. In turn, you position yourself and your educators to achieve the greatest success possible.

In part 3, I will guide you through the mechanics and best practices of high-impact, one-on-one instructional coaching. We'll move through how to meet each individual teacher exactly where they are, so you can optimize growth potential from that point and provide the kind of coaching best suited to their needs. I'll explain in detail how to coach for high levels of rigor, relevance, and learner engagement as illustrated by real-world

scenarios. And lastly, I'll show you how to build a sustainable coaching system in your school.

All told, what you will learn here will allow you to lead instructional change that optimizes the relationship between educators and school systems. This book will prepare you to do so much more than change instruction in the classroom. It will prepare you to change the school system to enhance instruction in every classroom, even those belonging to educators you aren't coaching. It will also teach you how to customize all of your plans to the specific environment, educators, and needs in front of you for greatest impact.

To simplify this work for yourself, I suggest reading the book in full so you can digest its content and reflect on it as a full-scale plan you repeat each new school year. Once you can step back and see how all the parts come together, you will gain perspective such that it begins to feel like the manageable process it is. As a best practice, I recommend revisiting the book or specific chapters as needed once you begin leading educators through the implementation of each part.

Marissa Mayer, former CEO of Yahoo!, who was hired at age 37 and while pregnant with her first child, is quoted as saying, "I always did something I was a little not ready to do. I think that's how you grow. When there's that moment of 'Wow, I'm not really sure I can do this,' and you push through those moments, that's when you have a breakthrough" (Toren, 2014). To those of you reading this book who are not yet accustomed to thinking of yourself as leaders of change at the school level, that is OK. It is OK if this feels uncomfortable to you now. Remember that you, too, have boundless growth potential. Trust that each time you apply the process, it will get easier and feel more comfortable and natural to follow. Experience will also hone your intuition. With time, you will find you do not need to complete all the component parts of each of the steps. You will grow more adept at synthesizing information and drawing informed conclusions automatically. Let the steps in this book serve as training wheels that, with practice and confidence, you can eventually remove.

Soon enough, you will be leading the meaningful, sustainable growth our schools deserve with ease, assuredness, and flexibility. Soon enough, you will be a great coach—*redefined*.

As a final note, I share stories from my own coaching experience throughout. While the point and heart of all stories are true, I have changed names, certain details, and identifying characteristics to protect privacy and identities.

I am truly honored that you are joining me in the important work of redefining coaching together and leading the growth and improvement our students deserve.