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Supporting the Development and
Supervision of School Leaders

GARY BLOOM • JACKIE OWENS WILSON

A JOINT PUBLICATION

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Foreword

It has been about 18 years since the original publication of *Blended Coaching: Skills and Strategies to Support Principal Development*. Since that time, over 35,000 copies have been sold and *Blended Coaching* continues to be an essential text for those engaged in training and supporting educational leaders.

Many of the challenges that we faced in K-12 education 18 years ago remain in place today. We continue to struggle to close the achievement gap that mirrors and reinforces the inequities in our society. Simply put, we fail far too many of our students. We continue to face a daunting shortage of candidates for teaching and leadership jobs in our schools. We struggle with high turnover fueled by the demands of the job and the difficult working conditions encountered by professional educators. The political polarization that is fracturing our communities is being manifest at district and classroom levels.

On the other hand, there is reason to be optimistic about the future of K-12 education. More than ever, teachers are being recognized as professionals and are being asked to serve as leaders in their professional learning communities. The impact that principals have upon student achievement has been well documented, and districts across the country have developed career ladders that lead from the classroom to the principalship and beyond. Despite the forces that would divide our communities, a commitment to equitable outcomes is reflected in most educational policy and in our new generation of school leadership. And the social-emotional dimensions of teaching, leadership, and learning are now openly discussed.

Along with these hopeful trends has come a recognition of the value of mentoring and coaching support for novice and veteran educators in improving retention and performance. National standards for teacher and principal supervisors now call for coaching, and novice teachers and principals are supported by mentoring programs in many if not most school districts.

Mentoring- and coaching-based support were not the norm when Gary Bloom, Janet Gless, Wendy Baron, and I founded

the New Teacher Center at the University of California Santa Cruz in 1998. The NTC's work, grounded in the work of the Santa Cruz New Teacher Project, quickly grew to become a national model that produced well-documented positive impacts on teacher retention and student achievement. Early on in our work it became clear that teacher effectiveness was directly influenced by site leadership, and that school principals would benefit from the same sort of support we were providing to teachers. Our principal coaching work was soon adopted in many states and districts around the nation.

It became clear that the strongest schools and districts were ones where coaching and mentoring were embedded in the culture at all levels and at all career stages. Among other things, we were the first organization to write about the importance of principal supervision and to provide training for principal supervisors grounded in coaching.

It was this work which resulted in the development of the leadership coaching model that is described in *Blended Coaching*. The *Blended Coaching* model and book explicitly addressed conditions that we encountered in the field; that being an effective leader demanded both technical knowledge and skill, and “ways of being”.... Dispositions and interpersonal skills. These “ways of being” often went unaddressed in preservice programs and other professional development models.

In the years since the original publication of *Blended Coaching*, Gary has continued to develop the concepts articulated in *Blended Coaching* in collaboration with colleagues including coauthor Jackie Wilson.

In the first edition of *Blended Coaching*, we state that “coaching is not supervision... but effective supervisors coach, a lot.” In this new edition, the authors explicitly support the practice of coaching-based supervision, an approach to supervision that is focused upon growing those being supervised rather than merely rating them.

The authors have also broadened the focus of the book to address the value of coaching for educators in many roles in addition to the principalship. They have also updated the book to reflect current professional standards, while refining tools for the development of basic coaching skills.

Eighteen years ago, in the original edition, we brought attention to the importance of developing educators with the

commitment and skills to address issues of equity in our schools. Wilson and Bloom renew that focus in this edition.

With the publication of this updated edition, it is my hope that a new generation of educators will continue to recognize and develop the power to change the world for the better through collaboration, coaching, and community.

—**Ellen Moir**, Founder and Former Executive Director,
New Teacher Center

Preface

Welcome to *Blended Coaching: Supporting the Development and Supervision of School Leaders*.

The first edition of this book was entitled *Blended Coaching: Skills and Strategies to Support Principal Development*. The Blended Coaching model has been widely adopted as an approach to supporting the professional development of educators with many job titles and at all stages of their careers.

In this second edition of *Blended Coaching*, we have broadened the scope of much of our text to reflect the applicability of our approach to teachers, school leaders, and others in the K-12 community. While the bulk of our discussion speaks to the principalship, we suggest that what we share here has much broader utility. We also explicitly address the value of Blended Coaching as the foundation of effective professional supervision.

Schools need teachers, principals, and other leaders who are able to build communities of practice that will enable all students to succeed. These professional educators have a keen ability to promote collegiality, support student and adult learning, and nurture teachers. They encourage all members of the school community—students, teachers, and parents—to do their best.

Principals are responsible for setting the tone at their schools. And yet, as is frequently the case with teachers, principals are typically given the keys to the building, a pat on the back, and expected to go forth and succeed. New principals often have little or no supervised work experience and only limited practical preparation. Veteran principals struggle with changing expectations and increasing demands. Teachers practice in relative isolation, often receiving little or no actionable feedback. As the current generation of principals and teachers retires, school districts must contend with a well-documented shortage of candidates who have been suitably prepared to assume leadership and teaching positions.

Recognizing the importance of quality site professional development, school districts and other institutions around

the country are currently working to establish more effective models of support for new and veteran educators and pipelines to insure a supply of quality candidates. Calls for such programs have been issued by many national and state organizations. Professional organizations that represent school leaders such as the American Association of School Leaders (AASA), the National Association for Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the National Association for Elementary School Principals (NAESP), and the Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) have been advocating for high-quality preparation programs to better prepare aspiring school leaders who will eventually take on the role and responsibilities of Assistant Principal, Principal, and Superintendent. Professional organizations such as the University Council for School Administration and the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership that represent faculty who teach in preparation programs have been engaged in discussions about program quality and support. Organizations such as Learning Forward, Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington, the Leadership Academy, and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration have been working to establish more effective models of support for new and veteran educators and pipelines to insure a supply of quality candidates. Philanthropic organizations such as the Wallace and Joyce Foundations have provided financial support for innovative approaches to developing principal pipelines.

This book offers a fresh approach to professional development and supervision for principals and other educators. *Blended Coaching* addresses several critical needs:

- The importance of sustained, stable, and effective site leadership for school improvement
- The increasingly severe shortage of qualified candidates for the principalship and teaching positions
- The inadequacy of traditional preservice and inservice programs
- The need for quality induction and professional development programs for educators that include a mentoring or coaching component
- The need for effective coaching based supervision for principals, teachers, and all support staff in the education community.

This book is about helping principals and other school leaders bring themselves and their schools to their highest potential—by clarifying and then achieving their goals. It is

about teaching, showing, guiding, and working side by side with school leaders to help them improve their performance. We believe the subject we address is of interest to all who are concerned with school improvement, including supervisors and faculty in administration preservice programs, central office personnel seeking to improve the quality of site leadership, and individuals now serving as coaches or mentors to school leaders around the country, as well as those charged with formal supervision.

Norma is the brand new principal of Río Dulce Elementary School. She's 32 years old and grew up in the community where she now works. She was a successful teacher for five years and served as a middle-school assistant principal for eight months before being tapped for the principalship at Río Dulce. She is bright, motivated, and very knowledgeable about teaching and learning. Two weeks into the school year, however, she finds herself struggling with an array of issues that threaten to overwhelm her.

The purpose of this book is to help you help principals like Norma meet the challenges they face, survive the rough spots, and thrive in the important work they do. By supporting Norma in her work, you help her make a difference for the teachers, staff, students, and families of Río Dulce School.

Perhaps you are another principal in Norma's district and you have been asked to serve as Norma's mentor. Perhaps you are Norma's supervisor and are only a few years out of the principalship yourself. You might be a retiree brought in by the district to assist new principals, or an independent consultant hired to provide leadership training. You might be Norma, unsure about how to proceed with the supervision of a veteran teaching staff. In all of these scenarios, Blended Coaching and Coaching-Based Supervision are likely to be helpful tools.

Rose is in her second year as principal of Elm School. The staff appreciates her knowledge of instruction and her support. Although she is highly regarded by her school community and recognized for her commitment and hard work, she describes herself as "burnt out." She is losing confidence in her ability as a principal and is frustrated by the long hours she devotes to her job and her school's slow progress. She fantasizes about quitting. Instead of giving up, however, she shares her frustrations with Raul, her coach, who has built a trusting relationship with her. Raul observes Rose interacting with staff in a variety of contexts and helps her become aware of the ways in which her desire to control and her misgivings about delegating responsibility have burdened her and disempowered others. Raul helps Rose develop new structures for delegation and set

personal limits on the number of hours she will work and the responsibilities she will take on. As a result, Rose becomes more comfortable stating her expectations and supervising her staff. By the end of her second year, she feels as if she has emerged from a bad dream—the kind where you are unable to outrun the monster that’s close on your heels. Her job as principal becomes manageable, her attitude turns positive, and she begins to look forward to her third year at Elm.

It is our hope that this book will bring you to a new understanding of the concept of coaching and how it applies to the care and nurturing of school professional educators like Norma and Rose. Skilled coaching has helped both Norma and Rose to emerge as outstanding instructional leaders who have had a significant positive impact upon their students. It is our aim to help individuals and organizations to design and implement programs that provide the intensive, individualized, and focused professional development so sorely needed by educators like Norma and Rose.

Coaches, no matter what their particular approach, must apply a variety of basic skills. These include building trust, listening, observing, questioning, and giving feedback. Coaches must also learn a number of *strategies*, the fundamental game plans that underlie coaching practice. We have developed *Blended Coaching Strategies* as a model for their application. Coaches should also come to the table with tools, those practical resources that shape the coaching relationship and from which a coach can draw to provide feedback and meet the coachee’s specific job-related needs. Each of these elements—skills, strategies, and tools—is addressed in this book.

Coaching is a complex art, and expert coaches typically bring years of informal mentoring and other experience to the process. Many coaches have training in a variety of communication and adult learning models, including peer and cognitive coaching. Even if you have this kind of rich background, we hope you will think of this book as an introduction to the profession of leadership coaching. We believe it is essential that you broaden your capability by participating in interactive training and by being part of an ongoing community of practice where you can continue to develop your coaching expertise in the company of like-minded colleagues. Coaching requires practice. Just as teachers improve over time as they plan lessons, deliver the instruction, and assess the learning of their students, the same is true for effective coaching. One does not show up for a coaching session with no plan. Effective coaching requires thoughtful planning in order to target

the time spent with the coachee on the greatest need for improvement and growth.

If we are to construct school leadership development programs that attend to the needs of adult learners through coaching and mentoring approaches, it is necessary to establish a coaching model that can be taught, implemented, and evaluated. The goal of this book is to share our model with you and to lay the groundwork for the creation of professional communities where coaching support and coaching-based supervision lead to powerful learning and efficacy for both staff and students.

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge Claire Castagna, Ellen Moir, and Betsy Warren, coauthors of the first edition of *Blended Coaching*. Their conceptual and written contributions are woven in throughout this new edition.

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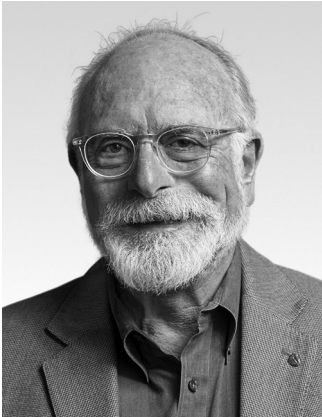
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About the Authors



Gary Bloom is the lead author of *Blended Coaching: Supporting the Development and Supervision of School Leaders*. Gary has 40 years of K-12 education experience, having served as a bilingual teacher, principal, director of curriculum, and assistant superintendent. He served as the superintendent of the Aromas-San Juan Unified School District, known for its innovative programs, such as graduation exhibitions, a teacher-led high school, and teacher peer review.

More recently he served as superintendent of Santa Cruz City Schools. He was a founder and Associate Director of the New Teacher Center at the University of California Santa Cruz. Gary is a Kellogg National Fellow, was adjunct faculty to San Jose State University's Educational Administration graduate program, and has consulted, trained, and presented on a variety of topics throughout the United States and in Latin America. He is the primary author of a number of professional development programs for leadership coaches and school principals. He has published articles in a variety of journals, most recently on the topics of teacher leadership, principal development, professional learning communities, new teacher support, and the appropriate use of technology. He authored, with his friend Marty Krovetz, the book *Powerful Partnerships*, a guide for the development of assistant principals in collaboration with their supervising principals available from Corwin. Gary currently consults with and trains in school districts around the United States and Central America, and provides executive coaching to superintendents and principal supervisors.



Jackie Owens Wilson has been an educator for 48 years. She has 30 years of experience in PK-12 education including teaching, literacy specialist, assistant principal and principal for the Indian River School District in Delaware. She was named Delaware's National Distinguished Elementary School Principal (NAESP 2002) and a USDOE National Blue Ribbon School Principal (2001). She served as the Director of Professional Accountability at the Delaware Department of Education, responsible for licensure and certification, quality of preparation programs for teachers and school leaders, professional development, and school leadership. After retiring from the public school system, Jackie served as Program Coordinator for Southern Delaware at Wilmington University for several years. Dr. Wilson is currently an assistant professor in the School of Education at the University of Education where she teaches and advises graduate students in the EDD and MED programs. She has served as the Director of the Delaware Academy for School Leadership (DASL), a professional development, research and policy center in the College of Education and Human Development at the University from 2010 to 2022. In 2015–2017, she led the merger of three professional development centers and designed a comprehensive model of professional development that includes content and leadership coaching and professional learning for teachers and principals. In her role at DASL, Dr. Wilson led a team of leadership specialists providing professional development and coaching support to education leaders in Delaware and school districts across the United States. Notable accomplishments include the development and funding of the Delaware's Governor's Institute for School Leadership; the design and approval of an alternative route state approved principal preparation program; serving as the lead consultant to NASSP for their School Leaders Academy focused on using design thinking for school improvement; and creating a principal pipeline model for school leaders that includes ASPIRE for teacher leaders, STEP-UP for Assistant Principals, and Design Thinking for Advanced Principals. Dr. Wilson is the Executive Director of the National Policy Board for Educational Leadership. NPBEA is a national alliance of major membership organizations committed to the

ment of Education, responsible for licensure and certification, quality of preparation programs for teachers and school leaders, professional development, and school leadership. After retiring from the public school system, Jackie served as Program Coordinator for Southern Delaware at Wilmington University for several years. Dr. Wilson is currently an assistant professor in the School of Education at the University of Education where she teaches and advises graduate students in the EDD and MED programs. She has served as the Director of the Delaware Academy for School Leadership (DASL), a professional development, research and policy center in the College of Education and Human Development at the University from 2010 to 2022. In 2015–2017, she led the merger of three professional development centers and designed a comprehensive model of professional development that includes content and leadership coaching and professional learning for teachers and principals. In her role at DASL, Dr. Wilson led a team of leadership specialists providing professional development and coaching support to education leaders in Delaware and school districts across the United States. Notable accomplishments include the development and funding of the Delaware's Governor's Institute for School Leadership; the design and approval of an alternative route state approved principal preparation program; serving as the lead consultant to NASSP for their School Leaders Academy focused on using design thinking for school improvement; and creating a principal pipeline model for school leaders that includes ASPIRE for teacher leaders, STEP-UP for Assistant Principals, and Design Thinking for Advanced Principals. Dr. Wilson is the Executive Director of the National Policy Board for Educational Leadership. NPBEA is a national alliance of major membership organizations committed to the

advancement of school and school-system leadership. Member organizations represent the educational administration profession and collaborate to improve the preparation and practice of educational leaders at all levels. She co-chaired the national standards redesign committee that developed the Professional Standards for School Leadership and has been engaged nationally in the redesign of principal preparation programs aligned to the PSEL/NELP standards.

PART I

Coaching Basics

In Part I, we explore the foundations of coaching as a tool for the professional development of school leaders and other educators. We define coaching, and we tie the power of coaching to what we know about how adults learn. We examine the uniquely challenging role of the principal and touch on the complex set of knowledge and skills that principals must possess. We pay particular attention to emotional intelligence and cultural proficiency as prerequisites to success as a school leader. We make a case for coaching as an effective approach for helping school leaders and other educators to develop these competencies.

All coaches, whether coaching fly fishermen, CEOs, or synchronized swimmers, use a set of universal basic skills, such as trust building, listening, observing, questioning, and giving feedback. We explore these foundational coaching skills in the balance of Part I.

An important note: Where coaching is most effective, it is embedded in the organizational culture. Individuals in roles up and down the system are offered coaching support, and coaching-based supervision, as discussed later in this volume, is practiced across the board. That is why, as we have revised *Blended Coaching* to reflect changes in our profession and things we have learned along the way, we are expanding much of the discussion to apply to coaching of teachers and of other professionals in addition to principals. Please note that while we might primarily make reference to principals and other school leaders in much of this text, the approaches we advocate are applicable to the support and supervision of virtually any professional in any role in the K–12 system.

CHAPTER 1

What Is Coaching?

Coaching is one of those words that is commonly understood but only vaguely defined. The *Oxford English Dictionary* devotes more than a page to the word coach, first used in the 15th century to describe a four-wheeled covered wagon used by royalty. In the 17th century, the word morphed from a noun describing a carriage into one denoting “a private tutor who prepares a candidate for an examination.”

A coach is someone who (1) sees what others may not see through the high quality of his or her attention or listening, (2) is in the position to step back (or invite participants to step back) from the situation so that they have enough distance from it to get some perspective, (3) helps people see the difference between their intentions and their thinking or actions, and (4) helps people cut through patterns of illusion and self-deception caused by defensive thinking and behavior.

—Robert Hargrave, author of *Masterful Coaching*

Today we coach teams, players, our kids, and our employees. There are birth coaches, executive coaches, and life coaches. In fact, tens of thousands of groups and individuals offer coaching services. Hundreds of organizations will train you to be a coach, and dozens more will certify you once you're trained. You can find many titles related to coaching at your local bookstore, including *Coaching and Mentoring for Dummies* (Brounstein, 2000). There are probably as many variations of what gets called coaching as there are flavors of music that get called the blues. There are basketball coaches who specialize in exploiting players and throwing chairs, life coaches who promise business and sexual fulfillment, and corporate

coaches who work with executives and bill in four figures per hour. At its best and at its core, coaching is a fundamental practice, something that virtually all of us experience from the time we are infants. For the purpose of this book, we'll define coaching as *the practice of one individual helping another individual or group to develop the internal capacity to clarify, set, and successfully pursue goals*. At the heart of the definition is the notion that a coach helps an individual or group to develop internal capacity. I hire a coach to help me to improve my golf swing, not to swing the club for me. Another key concept is the notion that coaching is goal driven, and that the goals have to be owned by the coachee.

The coach's main role deals with expanding the ability to see contexts, rather than supplying content. The person being coached then sees new ways to utilize existing skills.

—Julio Olalla, coach and trainer

The most effective way to forge a winning team is to call on the players' need to connect with something larger than themselves. . . . I've discovered that when you free players to use all their resources—mental, physical, and spiritual—an interesting shift in awareness occurs. When players practice what is known as mindfulness—simply paying attention to what's actually happening—not only do they play better and win more, they also become more attuned with each other.

—Phil Jackson, basketball coach and author of *Sacred Hoops*

Start measuring your work by the optimism and self-sufficiency you leave behind.

—Peter Block, author of *Flawless Consulting*

A coach is someone who tells you what you don't want to hear so that you can see what you don't want to see so that you can be what you've always wanted to be.

—Tom Landry, football coach

What coaching does is to expand the space of possibilities that someone is—an expansion that requires an external intervention

(coaching) to take place. Coaching allows the coachee to observe oneself as a self, to acknowledge the narrowness and limitations of that self, and to expand that self beyond its boundaries, beyond the horizon of possibilities available to the coachee's own intervention.

—Rafael Echeverría, author of *The Art of Ontological Coaching*

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

—African proverb of unknown origin

From Olympic gold medals to NCAA championships, Duke University Men's Basketball Head Coach Mike Krzyzewski is one of the most successful coaches of all time. He attributes his success as a coach to four key concepts, which include:

1. **Create shared ownership:** *Truly successful teams share a sense of ownership. Belonging means more than simply being on the roster. Each member of the team must be emotionally invested in the same goal and must understand what being part of a team means at its core.*

As a coach you must help the coachee come to the realization that they share ownership of the work in a school with others, and if they are going to lead others they must create shared ownership of the work.

2. **Tailor coaching to the person:** *Adaptability and sensitivity are critical to leadership. The way to coach each person depends on their personality and the situation they are in. Effective leaders think about each individual and tailor their coaching approach. It is up to the coach to use coaching strategies to help the principal or teacher to figure out what steps need to be taken next.*

An effective coach listens, observes, and adapts his coaching strategies based on the needs of the individual coachee. This flexibility and the ability to demonstrate empathy are very important in building the trust that is necessary to help the coachee solve a particular problem and take a calculated risk.

3. **Unite big egos:** *As a coach you may find yourself working with an individual who has a big ego. Rather than curbing that confidence, the coach has to learn how to use it productively and will succeed by recognizing the individual's passion and redirecting it so it focuses on the instructional success of teachers and the achievement of students.*

An example is the high school principal who is very popular in the community because of the winning football team. He knows everyone in the community because he was the high school quarterback in the school where he now serves as the principal. He is confident and arrogant and does not believe that he needs a leadership coach. He does not understand that the coach's role is to focus on instructional leadership and not football. The coach has to remind the principal to use his talents so it is a collective win for the school and not an individual win for himself.

4. **Show your emotions:** *Coaching and leadership require more than creating an image of strength. Being a strong leader requires connecting on an emotional level. This often depends on the coachee, the context of the conversation, and whether the school is improving or is in decline. There are times when the coach has to show that being vulnerable and emotional is a different definition of strength.*

Deirdra is a principal of an elementary school that serves a population of high needs students. She rules the school with a law and order style that she believes is necessary to manage student behavior. She is very concerned to show any emotion or to get too close to students or staff because she knows this has been the downfall of previous principals. She has tried to be consistent with policies and procedures, holding everyone to the same standard of performance and students to the same standard of behavior. She has been firm with parents and consistent with her communication. Deirdra's coach, Ann, is concerned that she does not appear empathetic to the concerns of teachers. One day when Ann arrives at the school, she finds Deirdra locked in her office and unwilling to meet with her. After some persuasion she enters the principal's office and finds Deirdra in tears. Deirdra confronts her with the following words: "I lost a student this morning who was hit by a car as he was walking to school. I do not know how to address the staff about this situation without appearing emotional and weak. What should I do?" Ann walked across the room and with tears in her eyes, said to Deirdra, "showing love, caring, and sadness are not signs of weakness. You are demonstrating that you are human and that you care for your students, teachers and community. Your demonstration of care and compassion are also signs of great strength." Following the conversation, Ann and Deirdra developed a plan to communicate with teachers, parents, and the community before taking a walk through each

classroom to console teachers, students, and support staff.

Reflection: Based on the quotes you've encountered in this section, what would you say are the key elements of coaching? What knowledge and skills would a leadership coach need to possess?



GARY'S REFLECTIONS ON THE FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR AS "COACH"

I learned to fly airplanes a few years ago. In many ways, this was the toughest learning challenge I have ever taken on. The learning process had many dimensions. There were the cognitive challenges of learning a new set of theories, rules, and procedures. There were the physical challenges of mastering a new set of motor and perceptual skills. There were the emotional challenges of overcoming the stress and fear I often experienced while at the controls of a small plane.

The cognitive aspects of flying were easy for me to learn and were mostly self-taught. To get a pilot's license, you have to master airspace regulations, navigation, weather, and many other things, some vital, some trivial. In order to prepare for the Federal Aviation Administration written examination, I studied a text, listened to audiotapes, and practiced with test preparation software. I scored 98% on the written exam. As proud I was of this score, I was far short of being a pilot.

The real work of learning to fly takes place in the company of a Certified Flight Instructor (CFI). This is a one-on-one relationship. From the first lesson, the student sits in the pilot's seat, the CFI alongside. A CFI draws upon a variety of strategies. Typically, new maneuvers are explained by the CFI, sometimes demonstrated, and then attempted by the student with the CFI ever ready to intervene. The CFI draws the student's attention to the indicators, the data sources that measure successful completion of the maneuver. For example, in completing a steep turn, a pilot is expected to maintain a bank angle of approximately 45°, not gain or lose altitude, and roll out of the 360° turn flying in the same direction as when the turn was started. The first time a student makes a steep turn, the CFI talks the student through the maneuver, telling him when to pull or push on the yoke and when to roll out of the

turn. After a few rounds of “guided practice,” a student should know the effects of his inputs and should be able to identify, on his own, the reasons for an unwanted altitude gain or a failure to maintain heading. Establish trust, demonstrate competence, observe the student pilot, and provide feedback—this is the work of a CFI.

But it is not this simple. Flying is a high-stakes business; small mistakes can lead to fatal consequences. When a CFI certifies that a student is ready to take the practical flight test, he or she is attesting to that student’s capacity to take friends and family safely aloft, alone, into the wild blue yonder in a flimsy assembly of aluminum and steel.

When I had a panic attack early in my flight instruction and wanted to get on the ground immediately, my flight instructor complied. He also insisted, after a bitter cup of hours-old coffee, that we go up again. He asked that I relax while he ran through a series of stalls, killed the engine, and brought the plane down to a safe and quiet landing.

When I forgot to retract the plane’s flaps at takeoff, resulting in a dangerously sluggish performance, he did not say a thing. When I turned to him and asked if something might be wrong, he suggested that I look at the plane’s controls. I never attempted to take off again without checking the flap lever.

When, in my CFI’s judgment, I was ready to fly solo, he stepped out of the plane and sent me off, linked to him only by a scratchy radio. When I was ready to fly my first cross-country flight, he reviewed my planning and released me for the trip. He was at the other end of the phone when I called to announce that I had made it back alive.

My experience learning to fly has shaped the way I think about adult coaching. Here are some of the characteristics of the CFI’s role and practice that also apply to professional coaching:

- The CFI’s job is goal-oriented: to prepare pilots to meet a set of well-articulated performance standards.
- The CFI works one-on-one with students, designing lessons and activities around individual needs.
- At times, the CFI provides direct instruction, explaining, demonstrating, and walking students through maneuvers.
- At times, the CFI observes while a student completes maneuvers independently, for the purpose of gathering

data and providing feedback and to assess and build the student's capacity to complete maneuvers without a CFI alongside.

- A CFI seeks assurance that a new pilot is able to make high-stakes decisions and can respond to unexpected events safely and independently. To this end, CFIs use both simulations and the observation of performance in real situations as coaching and assessment tools.
- CFIs attend not only to skill but also to perception and emotion. They teach pilots which instruments and feelings to trust, and which to ignore. They help pilots learn to “fly the plane,” ignoring distraction and emotion. They attend to the stress and fear that often accompany flight instruction.

I don't know which is more high stakes or unforgiving: flying a small plane, teaching a room full of adolescents algebra, or leading a school. I know that in all three cases, the support of a CFI—or a coach—can make the difference between going places or “crashing and burning.”

OUR DEFINITION OF COACHING

Coaching has been embraced by the private sector because it is a proven strategy for increasing the productivity and effectiveness of managers and executive leaders. As a means of providing deliberate support to clarify and achieve goals, coaching is also well suited to the needs of adult learners in the public sector. In *Why Can't We Get It Right?: Professional Development in Our Schools*, Marsha Speck and Caroll Knipe (2001) outline a number of research findings regarding adult learning that help to explain the success of coaching:

Adults will commit to learning when they believe that the objectives are realistic and important for their personal and professional needs.

They need to see that what they learn through professional development is applicable to their day-to-day activities and problems.

Adults want to be the origin of their own learning and should therefore have some control over the what, who, how, why, when, and where of their learning.

Adults need direct, concrete experiences for applying what they have learned to their work.

Adult learners do not automatically transfer learning into daily practice. Coaching and other kinds of follow-up support are needed so that the learning is sustained.

Adults need feedback on the results of their efforts.

Adult learners come to the learning process with self-direction and a wide range of previous experiences, knowledge, interests, and competencies.

—(p. 109)

Direct, job-embedded coaching on a one-on-one basis responds to each of these characteristics of adult learners, whether they lead classrooms, schools, or private enterprises. Effective coaching incorporates a number of key elements:

The coach constructs a relationship based upon trust and permission. True coaching cannot take place in the absence of a trusting relationship. The coachee must be willing to participate in the process—to learn, to grow, and to change in fundamental ways—and feel safe enough to open up and show vulnerability around the most sensitive issues of professional practice. It is the coach’s responsibility to encourage this by working continually to build trust and permission. While these dynamic characteristics of the coaching relationship may fluctuate from one instance to the next, they should deepen and strengthen over time.

The coach serves as a different observer of the coachee and the context. One of the most important assets brought by a coach to the coaching relationship is fresh perspective. A coach provides the coachee with data and feedback about the coachee’s behavior and the specific situation that may lead to new ways of acting. A golf pro, for example, may help a client make major improvements by pointing out what seem to be minor distinctions in the way the client holds a club. A leadership coach might use a 360° survey instrument to help a principal recognize that they are perceived as unfair because of the ways in which they interact with some staff members.

The coach and coachee recognize that problems and needs are valued learning opportunities. It was Michael Fullan who penned the words, “problems are our friends” (1993, p. 21). Every problem presents an opportunity to learn and to grow by recognizing systemic issues that, if addressed, can lead to significant improvements. In the coaching process, problems, and needs are sought out and

embraced. This concept is at the heart of most coaching interactions.

The coach must be prepared to apply a variety of coaching skills as appropriate to the context and needs of the coachee. Effective coaches must master a number of fundamental skills, including listening, paraphrasing, questioning, and assessing the specific needs and contexts of the coachee.

The coach must be prepared to apply a variety of coaching strategies as appropriate to the context and needs of the coachee. Effective coaches often use multiple strategies during the course of any given coaching session. The coach may play a *facilitative* role, guiding the coachee to learning through the use of feedback and reflective questions. At other times, the coach might play an *instructional* role and provide expert information, advice, and resources. We call this approach *Blended Coaching Strategies* and believe its use is the foundation of an effective leadership coaching practice.

The coach is fully present for and committed to the coachee. A coaching relationship is unlike most other human relationships in the degree to which the coach attends to the coachee. Some coaches describe coaching as entering an altered state, a unique place where all of their experience, skill, and awareness is focused upon one other human being. The coaching relationship is all about the coachee and helping the coachee achieve specific goals. If you watch a videotape of a coaching session with the sound turned off, you will have no trouble distinguishing the coach from the coachee. A skilled coach directs all attention to the coachee and listens on multiple levels.

The coach provides emotional support to the coachee. Many positions in education—including those of school leaders—are isolated and emotionally challenging. It is an important role of the coach to provide emotional support, offer encouragement, and help the leader maintain motivation and focus.

The coach maintains a fundamental commitment to organizational goals as agreed to by the coachee, and appropriately pushes the coachee to attain them. Although it results in more positive feelings about oneself and one's position, coaching is not intended merely to make leaders feel good, or help them be popular, or ensure that they survive in their jobs. Coaching instead is directed to the attainment of consensual goals. In the case of school leaders, this means helping them make a positive difference for students. An effective coach always

looks beyond and beneath any presenting problem, issue, or need, in order to find opportunities for growth and action that will help the coachee establish goals and make plans to achieve them. The coach also holds the coachee accountable to move forward with those plans.

The coach practices in an ethical manner. Professional ethics are critically important in coaching. Careers often hang in the balance, and high-stakes, rough-and-tumble politics sometimes come into play. Coaches must commit to confidentiality. They must carefully and explicitly negotiate their relationships with their coachees' supervisors. They must also be sensitive to and disclose promptly any personal biases, relationships, and histories that might impact their coaching, and they must comply with their agreements with their coachees and other clients.

MENTOR	COACH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal relationship, often between peers • Often unstructured and driven by the mentee's need of the moment • Volunteers for whom the role is an add-on responsibility • Expected to be nurturing and supportive often unstructured and driven by the mentee's need of the moment • Typically, senior to their mentees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A formal relationship between a client and an individual trained in the coaching role • Is built around a standards-based structure and accountability • Coaches are dedicated to and compensated for their role • Bold in providing feedback and in challenging their clients to improve their performance in ways that push comfort levels • Qualify for the role because of their expertise and may or may not be senior

WHAT COACHING ISN'T

In order to clarify the concept of coaching, it's useful to consider what coaching is *not*, and to review some of the practices that are sometimes confused with it.

Coaching is not training. Coaching addresses the needs of the individual rather than conveying a particular curriculum. While coaching can and often does support training activities, training is top-down and centered on content. Coaching, by contrast, is centered on context and designed to respond to the needs of the individual learner.

Coaching is not mentoring, although effective mentors use coaching skills and strategies. The terms *coach* and *mentor* are

sometimes used interchangeably. For the purposes of our work, however, we define a mentor as an organizational insider who is a senior expert and supports a novice. A coach is typically from outside the organization and is not necessarily senior—in age or depth of related professional experience—to the coachee. In our experience, novice principals benefit from having both a mentor *and* a coach. A mentor might be that veteran principal across town whom a novice can call to find out what procedures to follow to get her building painted, or how to work productively with the union representative, or whether she really needs to attend the upcoming meeting at the district office. Mentors can show newcomers the ropes in a number of situations. A coach, on the other hand, provides continuing support that is safe and confidential and has as its goal the nurturing of significant personal, professional, and institutional growth through a process that unfolds over time. A coach brings an outside perspective and has no stake in the status quo in an organization. Coaching is a professional practice; mentoring is typically voluntary and informal.

Coaching is not supervision, but effective supervisors coach a lot.

There are distinct differences between the roles of coach and supervisor. A supervisor has the authority to give direction; a coach does not. A supervisor has an explicit role in determining a subordinate's employment status; a coach does not. A supervisor may be obliged to report on an individual's progress and problems to a superintendent or school board, while a coach can assure a coachee of confidentiality. A supervisor may have influence over the context an individual works in and the resources available to that individual; a coach does not. However, effective supervisors use coaching skills and strategies most of the time with their supervisees (and therefore have something to gain by applying the strategies and skills outlined in this book) and understand that most of the time their role is the same as that of a coach: to nurture growth in their subordinates. We discuss Coaching-Based Supervision in Chapter 12.

Coaching is not therapy. An effective coach uses many of the same skills and strategies used by therapists. However, therapy focuses on the individual's psychological function, while coaching focuses on the accomplishment of professional goals. Therapy involves understanding an individual's past; coaching helps the individual change an organization's future. Therapy often treats issues of individual dysfunction or pathology; coaching occurs within

the boundaries of normal professional issues. It is important that coaches be aware of these boundaries; while they do not aspire to the role of therapist, coaches should be prepared to suggest that coachees seek additional help if personal situations warrant.

SO YOU WANT A COACH?

- Type “coaching for educators” into a Google search and you will get 50,000,000 results.
- EducatorsCoach.com offers to “increase your satisfaction in every aspect of your life” and to help you to “attract more of what you want both personally and professionally.”
- While there are multiple businesses and organizations that train and “certify” coaches, the world of coaching can best be described as the Wild West . . . anyone can hang a shingle and claim to be a coach.
- Our favorite is a local coach who advertises that she will help you to get out of debt, attract your love partner, and sell your real estate faster (all for a modest fee. . .).

COACHING FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATORS

School leaders and other educators are typically accomplished adult learners who are goal-oriented and have very diverse needs. They are often pedagogical experts and tend to resent and reject poorly designed and delivered professional development. However, they are likely to embrace effective coaching.

In our work around the country, we have asked hundreds of principals, teachers, and others how they acquired the many skills and the broad knowledge essential to their jobs: in the teaching role, in preservice, and in service programs, through life experience, or on the job? They report that their most important learning takes place on the job—and note that preservice programs are among the least significant sources of preparation for the principalship.

In a recent report (May 2022) funded by the Wallace Foundation, researchers were asked to find evidence regarding

high-quality principal learning. In the report, “the researchers synthesized peer-reviewed scholarship from 2000 to 2021 that addresses principal preparation and development programs and examined survey results and statewide policies. Through this review, key findings, research implications, and policy implications related to principal preparation and training emerge.” There were four key findings in the report:

1. High-quality principal preparation and professional development programs are associated with positive principal, teacher, and student outcomes, ranging from principals’ feelings of preparedness and their engagement in more effective practices to stronger teacher retention and improved student achievement.
2. An emerging focus on equity-oriented leadership has the potential to develop aspiring principals’ knowledge and skills to meet the needs of diverse learners.
3. Principals’ access to high-quality learning opportunities varies across states and by school poverty level, reflecting differences in state policies.
4. Policies that support high-quality principal learning programs can make a difference. In states and districts that have overhauled standards and have used them to inform preparation, clinically rich learning opportunities, and assessment, evidence suggests that the quality of principal learning has improved. (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022)

Finding one is significant because it makes the association between principal preparation and professional development and preparedness for the job. Preparedness is important since it leads to engaging in practices associated with teacher retention and student achievement.

And current findings from a report provided by the American Association for Teacher Education (AACTE) *Teaching in the Time of COVID-19: State Recommendations for Educator Preparation Programs and New Teachers* emphasizes the importance of continuous professional learning, mentoring support, and feedback.

Why is this research important? If we want teachers and principals who are well-prepared for their jobs, then quality preparation matters. Programs that are nationally accredited and meet rigorous standards are important. But even when the educator completes an accredited program, they may still require professional development, mentoring, or coaching

support to continue to improve and grow their skills and knowledge.

The education profession is no walk in the park. It can be brutal and lonely work. Principals and teachers often feel vulnerable and insecure. Our research tells us that their outlook and attitudes about their profession run through cycles ranging from desperation to optimism. It is no surprise, then, that educators frequently turn to their coaches and mentors for empathy and reassurance in addition to professional support.

We do not believe that coaches should serve their coachees simply as unquestioning cheerleaders. However, the coaching relationship will be strengthened if the coach communicates confidence in the coachee and if the coach recognizes that an appropriate element of her role is to convey enthusiasm for the coachee, for the coaching process, and for the value of the coachee's work.

Because a successful coaching relationship is based on trust and rapport, coachees must believe in and respect their coaches. When a coach expresses confidence in a coachee, it has a significant impact on the coachee's outlook and performance—an impact that should not be underestimated. Indeed, an important part of the coach's role is to help coachees build and maintain self-confidence and commitment to their jobs. There are times when the most helpful thing a coach can do is lead the coachee through an inventory of the things that are going right and make note of the coachee's strengths. On some occasions, a coach can provide a great service by simply pointing out that the coachee's problems are not unique and offering assurances that they will be overcome. This, of course, is accomplished without a trace of dismissiveness or discounting the nature or seriousness of the problem.

Implicit in the relationship between a coach and coachee is the agreement by which the pair has set goals and in which each party has given certain permissions to the other. We suggest that fairly early in the relationship, as trust and rapport are being built, the coach and coachee have a conversation in which each outlines his or her expectations. Included in the conversation should be considerations such as:

- Developing a shared understanding of coaching
- Clarifying specific goals and focus areas for the coachee's professional growth
- Confirming confidentiality
- Establishing frequency of meetings

- Identifying means of communication
- Affirming commitments to openness
- Outlining activities to be observed and mechanisms for data gathering
- Discussing relationships and communication with supervisors
- Devising mechanisms for reevaluating and revising the relationship

Resource B.1 at the end of this book contains an information sheet titled Making the Most of the Coaching Relationship, developed to provide new coachees with a straightforward explanation of the coaching process. Also included is a sample agreement spelling out basic expectations, to be signed by all parties in a coaching relationship.