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Preface

Often when we present our leadership workshops, a participant will challenge us, suggesting that being coach-like in responding to issues that arise at work is fine for “easy” problems—and when you have lots of time. But, they continue, in the *real* world, there is too little time and too much “stuff” going on to use these skills on a regular basis.

Our response is that we have hundreds of stories about *real* clients, facing *real* problems, who consistently use coach-like skills every day with huge success. Coach-leadership is “leading from behind” as I (Linda) say. It is focused on *building the capacity of others* to resolve their own issues. The irony is that as leaders focus on developing those around them, they earn the deep trust and loyalty of staff—deeper than if they were the experts, doing the work themselves. With high trust and rapport comes high achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002)!

Our purpose in writing *Opening the Door to Coaching Conversations*, then, is to share stories of *real* school leaders who are using these coach-like skills everyday in their work to resolve their most challenging issues. It is meant to be a companion to *Coaching Conversations: Transforming Your School One Conversation at a Time* (Cheliotas & Reilly, 2010) in order to provide readers with rich examples of coach-like skills in action. We want to make the case that coach-leadership is not only possible, it is the *smartest* way to lead in the 21st century!

USING THIS BOOK

The first chapter is intended as a simplified summary of coaching conversational skills. For a fuller understanding of the four essential coaching skills, the authors refer you to *Coaching Conversations: Transforming Your School One Conversation at a Time*.

Each of the remaining chapters deals with a specific area of challenge faced by school personnel at all levels of the educational organization. It does not matter in what order these chapters are read. We have added a matrix of the included stories that summarizes the situation and describes the skills and coaching competencies used within each story so that you can read what resonates with you at a given time or when you are facing a specific challenge.

Matrix of Stories

Within each chapter, you will find several true stories illustrating how coach-leaders have used coach-like skills to recognize and grow their own skills or to help others grow professionally. We have highlighted the essential coaching skills illustrated by the stories and provided space for you to journal your personal reflections, questions, intentions, and next steps. This journaling step is really the *most important* component of this book. The more intentional and reflective you are about *how you want to be* in your school, the more likely you will hold successful coaching conversations that engage yourself and others in deep reflection and meaningful dialogue. Your *state of being* includes your mindset, your emotions, your demeanor, and how you want others to perceive you. While you may be able to enforce short-term compliance in others, you have control only over your own state of being: how you think and act in any given situation. By being a coach-leader, you provide space for other people to grow and change, build trusting relationships, and engage in meaningful, respectful interactions.

For a more complete discussion of becoming a coach-leader and learning the essential coaching skills, we recommend reading *RESULTS Coaching: The New Essential for School Leaders* (Kee, Anderson, Dearing, Harris, & Shuster, 2010). Another excellent resource is *The Elementary Principal's Personal Coach* (Williams & Richardson, 2010).

SOURCE OF STORIES FOR THIS BOOK

Our coach colleagues from Coaching For Results Global have written many of the exemplar stories in this book, and we are extremely grateful for their willingness and generosity in sharing the experiences of

Matrix of Stories		
Chapter	Story Title	Synopsis
1	Coach-Leader Man—Feeding the Hunger	A district leader dreams big and initiates a culture change for his entire district.
2	From Terminator to Hope Builder	A superintendent addresses dissention on his BOE (board of education) by helping them clarify and focus their priorities.
	A Yearning for More	A principal wants to change math instruction at his school. He holds up standards and expectations to guide staff through the changes.
	Courage at the Core	A first-year principal changes a cherished school tradition.
	Leading With Your Core Values	A principal newly assigned to a school in academic trouble has to deal with a very inexperienced assistant principal.
3	Better Late Than Never	An assistant principal deals with a teacher with a long history of tardiness.
	Language Matters	A principal uses positive intent with staff to counterbalance feelings of isolation and underappreciation often found in large districts.
	The Safest Haven	A principal recognizes evidence of high trust for her school within the community.
	From Parent Intrusion to Parent Involvement	A principal helps build bridges between an assertive parent and a defensive teacher.

Coaching Skills					Coach-Leadership Skills						
Listening	Paraphrasing	Positive Intent	Powerful Questions	Feedback	Trust	Vision	Expectations	Core Values	Purpose	Reframing	Collaboration
●	●	●				●	●	●	●		●
□	□	□	□		□	□		□			□
□		□		□		□		●	●		
●	●	●	●					●	●	●	●
●		●		●	●	●	●	●			●
●		●	●		●		●			●	
	●	●			●	●	●	●			
●	●	●		●	●	●	●			●	
●		●	●		●	●	●		●	●	●

(Continued)



What Is a Coaching Conversation?

The conversation is the relationship.

—Susan Scott, *Fierce Conversations*

Imagine you have just visited a classroom where the teacher is presenting the best math lesson you have ever observed. The room is attractively decorated with stimulating resources and learning centers. Students are actively engaged with each other as they test their hypotheses about why some of their math problems have more than one correct answer. The teacher has placed her pupils in groups differentiated by their skills and learning styles. She moves from table to table, asking the students to explain their analyses of the problems and the conclusions they have drawn. Their responses demonstrate a deep understanding of both the problem-solving processes and mathematical concepts involved. When the bell rings signaling the end of the period, the children reluctantly put away their materials and linger to discuss their thinking in more depth with the teacher.

You leave the classroom exhilarated and excited by what you have just observed, and you are looking forward to discussing the lesson with the teacher and providing her with feedback.

Let's examine two different conversations you might have with the math teacher.

Conversation 1

Observer: I really enjoyed observing your fourth period math class today. You definitely know how to keep your students engaged in the lesson. They seemed to have a lot of fun, yet they also understood the math concepts you had taught them. It's amazing how you even differentiated their instruction. I was as sorry to see the class end as your pupils were. In fact, I think that was the best lesson I have ever seen taught in our school. I know if I were your supervisor, I would be giving you an outstanding rating for that lesson.

Math teacher: Thanks for visiting my class and for your kind compliments. Come back any time.

Conversation 2

Observer: That was an amazing math lesson you taught to your fourth period math class today. You clearly emphasized higher order thinking skills that caused them to reflect deeply about their hypotheses rather than just have them practice a page of problems. I am interested in trying a similar approach in social studies and wonder what steps you took to get your students to this level of thinking.

Math teacher: As I plan my lessons, I always think about ways to engage students in reflective thinking rather than just parroting back to me a bunch of memorized information. Last year, I decided to focus on asking my classes open-ended questions rather than ones that had just a one-word answer. I emphasized that I wanted their best thinking and that there were many possible answers to my questions. I utilized this technique for at least ten minutes in every class.

Observer: What else did you do?

Math teacher: I knew I also wanted students to be active learners and to begin to differentiate their instruction. That's when I decided to place the students in small, but flexible