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COACH
APPROACH
— to —
SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

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Introduction

This book is the product of a journey embarked upon by three educators separated by geography and diverse experiences, but connected by a commitment to coaching as a means of improving our own practice and the quality of teaching and learning in our schools.

The three of us “met” on Twitter during the spring of 2011 through our shared interest in how school leaders might incorporate the approaches of instructional coaches to support professional learning for teachers. We created and have co-moderated #edcoach, a weekly Twitter chat, ever since, developing a friendship unlike any other we have ever experienced. Through the years, without actually meeting in person, we have communicated weekly, preparing for and participating in this chat. Beyond our chat, we have coached one another through numerous career challenges and aspirations.

Although we are all educators, our experiences are quite different. Jessica is a public school principal in rural Wisconsin. Shira is an independent school principal who has served in suburban and urban schools in the greater New York City area. Kathy is an education consultant focusing on instructional coaching, literacy, and English learners who works with educators in many different schools throughout Iowa and across the United States. We all believe in the importance of coaching and being coached as educators, learners, and leaders.

As we engaged in meaningful conversation (albeit in 140 characters or less), we recognized that the substance of our weekly Twitter chats was helping us stretch ourselves as educators and leaders. We felt a book emerging through our conversations. It is a book that has been written gradually, over the course of several years. The slow development of this book is not only the result of the busy lives we lead and our difficulty dedicating time to write, but also the result of developing ideas through global conversations with educators via social media and in conversations with educators within our own schools. We invite you to engage with us and stretch yourself as an educator, a learner, and a leader and to help those around you to stretch themselves as well.

What's in This Book?

When principals function primarily as learning leaders, the influence on the quality of learning in our schools is profound. Yet the pressure for school leaders to focus on evaluation and management rather than learning is tremendous. This book is for principals and other school or district leaders who want to lead teachers to higher levels of effectiveness and incorporate the principles of instructional coaching as a necessary part of serious school improvement.

In Chapter 1, we reframe the role of the principal, discussing the continuum of roles from judge to team captain to coach, and ultimately land on the importance of the coach role. Although a school leader could never fully play the role of an instructional coach, we delve into what it means to wear a coach's hat as a learning leader and explore how to make the shift from primarily being an evaluator, a supervisor, and a manager to being a learning leader using coaching techniques.

In Chapter 2, we show you what it looks like to put on your coach's hat by sharing what principal-coaches do each day as the learning leaders of their school. We challenge you to expand your classroom visits beyond

the minimum requirements of your evaluation process and provide you with guidance to combine coaching with evaluation requirements.

In Chapter 3, we examine the most critical elements at the heart of every school: the relationships and culture. We ask you to reflect on yourself as a leader and how your staff perceive you. We dig into the partnerships that are essential to create in order to lead with a coach's hat.

In Chapter 4, we address feedback, the necessary component to support our teachers to grow professionally and improve the student learning in each classroom.

Leaders cannot effectively get into classrooms or spend time in coaching conversations with teachers if they cannot manage their time and workload effectively. For this reason, we provide you with strategies and resources that we have found to be effective for managing time—our most precious resource—in Chapter 5.

Finally, in Chapter 6, we invite you to consider ways to empower teachers to take ownership of their professional learning and support them to work together as a team.

Throughout the book, we provide a variety of vignettes from practitioners' perspectives, because so much of our growth has stemmed from learning from others' experiences and accomplishments. Teachers often say that they didn't learn what they needed to learn in their college coursework; it was actually teaching in a classroom that they learned how to teach. The same is true for school leadership. Our work is complex and challenging, and we have learned both from success and from missteps. In the process, we have been fortunate to develop a robust professional learning network (PLN) via social media and have connected with many school leaders, instructional coaches, and teachers, learning together and benefitting from one another's wisdom and firsthand experiences. The names used in this book are pseudonyms, but all of the vignettes are based on our own experiences or on stories we have heard from colleagues in our PLN. We are grateful for our colleagues' honesty and generosity in sharing their learned wisdom throughout this book.

We have made some of this book's tools available as blank forms for you to use in your own practice. You can access these resources in the Appendix and at <http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/books/CoachApproach2017forms.pdf>. Use the password "CoachApproach117025" to unlock the PDF. In addition, at the end of each chapter, we ask you to reflect on your current reality and provide actionable next steps to help you move forward in your practice.

As you read, we encourage you to reach out and connect with us or our PLN on Twitter via the hashtags #educoach and #coachapproach. If you have not yet discovered the power of a PLN on Twitter, then you are in for a great deal of rich learning and insight from and with others in the field.