

coaching *for*  
educator  
wellness

*A Guide to Supporting  
New and Experienced Teachers*

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## *Introduction*

I used to say that I was born to teach. I was the kid who lined my stuffed animals up so I could play teacher, assigning homework and reading stories aloud to them. I also taught tennis lessons and tutored others before I had my own classroom. As I've gotten older and am settling into my own self more and more, I'm realizing that these days, more than being called to *teach*, I'm actually called to *coach*. While teaching and coaching are arguably very similar, I've made a distinction between the two. To me, teaching is about giving someone information or showing someone how to do something: *Here, I know how to do this and you don't yet; let me show you*. I started my career in the classroom, where I taught English language arts to middle school students. My time was spent *teaching* students how to read, write, think, speak, and listen.

Coaching, on the other hand, is about helping people move from where they currently are to where they want to be: *I see your potential; let me nudge you toward it*. In my career, I eventually moved from teaching students to coaching adults. As an instructional coach, I was able to work beside teachers—both new and experienced—as I helped them increase their own expertise. To note, both teaching and coaching are vitally important, necessary, and noble, and the lines certainly get blurred between the two. Today, as an educational consultant, where I'm able to coach educators of all levels, I feel as though I am pursuing the career that I was born to do. Coaching others in order to help them find their own greatness and the greatness in each and every student on their roster is what inspires me to jump out of bed in the morning. This is how I tap into the highest level of Abraham H. Maslow's (1969) hierarchy of needs: transcendence. When I'm coaching, I feel

deeply connected to something outside of myself. Having worked hard to become—and stay, at least on most days—self-actualized in terms of both my career and personal wellness, I have an overwhelming desire to help others become self-actualized as well.

Along my journey, I have had the distinct privilege of being coached by some of the best, many of whom I've never even met in person and who don't even know that I exist. Iconic talk show host Oprah Winfrey (n.d.) helped me to become someone who practices gratitude on a daily basis (among other essential lessons). Runner and author Hal Higdon (2005) coached me across the finish line of both the Chicago and New York City marathons. Professor and lecturer Brené Brown (2018) helped me learn that *clear is kind* (saying what we really mean) and taught me how to step boldly into new leadership roles. Author Shawn Achor (2010) trained my brain to become more positive and thus helped me find more success and happiness in my career and life. Author and journalist Elizabeth Gilbert (2015) nudged me toward a more creative life; author and writing teacher Anne Lamott (1994) coached me to write terrible first drafts; and author and ultramarathoner Robin Arzón (2016) convinced me that I *am* an athlete. The list goes on and on, and I am forever grateful that I found these coaches exactly when I needed them.

I've also been honored to have been coached by others in person. These were people who do in fact know me on a personal level. There were mentors and building-level coaches, fellow teachers and professional learning community (PLC) members, assistant principals, principals, directors, superintendents, health coaches, writing instructors, academic advisors, friends, and family members, all of whom helped me get to where I am today. These individuals believed in me before I believed in myself and led by example. They demonstrated to me what a life well lived looks like as an educator, friend, writer, and advocate for personal and workplace wellness.

I've also had the incredible honor of coaching others. As a mentor, instructional coach, and building-level leader, I helped both veteran and novice teachers increase their expertise in a variety of instructional strategies. As a cross-country coach, I helped my

middle school runners cross their own finish lines and reach for personal-best times. As a podcaster, I coach listeners in the areas of self-care and educator wellness. Informally, I can't *help* but coach my friends and the educators that I get to work with as a consultant and author. I dare you to nonchalantly mention that you'd like to increase the level of student engagement in your classroom and not see me perk up and lean in, ready to help. Casually announce that there's a 5K that you'd like to run and watch my eyes light up and my toes start tapping. *Pick me! Pick me! Let me help!* At my core, *I believe in the greatness of people* and I truly, truly want to see everyone living *their very best* lives because I know the ripple effect that self-actualized people will have on others—particularly their students. And thus, I'm a pusher; that is, a *coach*. I push (coach) because I want to see others become self-actualized in their own lives.

*(I'm imagining you, my reader, nodding your head right about now because you recognize these traits in yourself as well.)*

I've spent the last few years centering my work around self-care and wellness for educators, hoping to help others—even those I've never met in person—move from where they currently are to where they want to be. I've published books, launched a social media platform and network, started my own podcast, and am co-director of Solution Tree's Wellness Solutions for Educators, all focused on coaching others to become their very best selves. I've also created systems of support for beginning teachers and fine-tuned my own instructional expertise as an associate for both Solution Tree and Marzano Resources. This book is about putting all of those individual pieces together in one place. Here, I'm going to help you fulfill your highest vision for yourself as an instructional coach by helping you consider ways to support both your newest and your most experienced educators as you guide them from where they currently are to where they want to be, both in terms of their instructional expertise *and* in their wellness as professionals. During the COVID-19 pandemic, *more than ever*, we began to understand the requirement for educators to take care of themselves first, so they can in turn take care of their students, both academically and social-emotionally.

As the field of education shifts and stretches and we welcome new methods of reaching each and every learner, we must hold on to the constant ideals: the desire to become self-actualized ourselves and then reach out our hands and help pull the next person up to join us—again and again and again. We cannot—and should not—do this work in isolation. Educators need each other, and as a coach, you can provide that helping hand.

## Who This Book Is For

This book is primarily for instructional coaches but will also be beneficial for all instructional leaders, including new teacher mentors and school and district leaders looking to increasing their coaching skills, particularly those who are new to their positions. From my work in the field, I know that instructional coaches and leaders often grapple with how to move from the role of a teacher (of students) to the role of a coach (for adults). They also face challenges regarding how to differentiate their coaching practices for new versus experienced teachers and because of our ever-changing educational landscape are increasingly curious about how to address their teachers' self-care and wellness needs in order to help support students' social-emotional learning needs. I wrote this book to address those needs. This book is meant to help provide guidance and hope in our ever-changing world of education.

## Our Road Map

First, I'll help you paint a vivid portrait of *yourself* as an instructional coach. In chapter 1, we'll identify the leadership traits that matter most to you, define your greater why, and outline how to live by your core values. Next, in chapter 2, we'll discover how to build trust in an effective coaching relationship through the essential skills of asking good questions, listening well, providing wait time, paraphrasing, and empathizing. From there, I'll introduce you in chapter 3 to the phases of a typical school year and how understanding each of these phases will help you match your support to what your teachers are currently experiencing. Next, in chapter 4, I'll help you differentiate your support for new teachers, teachers who have previous teaching experience but

are new to the building, and experienced teachers by focusing on physical and institutional support. After that, in chapter 5, I'll help you understand how self-care and educator wellness are foundational supports for social-emotional learning for students. Finally, in chapter 6, we'll dig into how supporting all teachers in increasing their expertise and providing instructional support promotes student achievement.

Along the way, you'll have the opportunity to interact with the text through a variety of personal and professional development tools. For example, you'll identify your core values, use a template designed to help combat decision fatigue, and incorporate targeted reflection tools into your coaching conversations. I encourage you to not skip over these invitations, as they are essential to the work of developing your skills as an instructional coach and leader. I also hope that you'll mark up this text in order to engage with it more deeply. Underline ideas that resonate with you, write your own reflections in the margins, and take time to thoughtfully respond to the reflection questions at the end of each chapter.

Whether you're new to the world of coaching or you've been coaching others—formally or informally—for a long time, you are welcome here. While some of the information that I'll share is foundational, familiar, and reaffirming, most of it is fresh and new and presented in a way that addresses teaching's unique challenges of today. I can't wait to share all of this with you. I'm so glad you're here; let's do this!



# 1

## A Portrait of You, an Instructional Coach

When I transitioned from the role of a classroom teacher to instructional coach, I was both excited and intimidated. I felt excited to step into a new position and yet intimidated because I didn't yet know who I was in this new world of leadership. It took me years to pinpoint the leader I wanted to be; this chapter is about helping you do the same. In subsequent chapters we'll consider how we can best serve *others*, but we need to start here, with *you*, first. Think of this as your invitation to devote some time and reflection space to *yourself*. Whether you're new to the position or have been serving in this role for years, it's important to pause and (re-)establish your foundation so that you can better serve others.

Here, you'll identify the qualities that you most admire in other leaders, highlight and appreciate the unique gifts that you bring to this role, identify your greater why, and explore how you can live by your values in order to inspire those around you.

### Leadership Traits

I get so giddy when I have the opportunity to work with instructional coaches. Here's why: they're always fantastic workshop participants. They're wicked smart, they're open to exploring

new strategies and ideas, they ask super thoughtful questions, and they radiate passion and warmth. They're my kind of people. I often wonder if coaches had all of these fantastic traits before they become coaches or if these traits are the result of becoming a coach. I suppose it's one of those chicken-or-egg things: a bit of both.

The instructional coaches who truly shine are *transformational* leaders. Historian and leadership expert James McGregor Burns (1979) first introduced the concept of transformational leadership, claiming that the best leaders are those who inspire others. Transformational leaders are emotionally intelligent, full of energy and enthusiasm, and are passionate about helping every member of the group find success (Cherry, 2020). To do this, transformational leaders work to garner trust, respect, and even admiration from others—all traits that are essential for developing effective coaching relationships (Choi, 2016). Results from a study published in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* even indicate that transformational leaders have a positive impact on the *well-being* of their employees (Jacobs et al., 2013).

## What Leadership Means to You

To be certain, transitioning from the role of a teacher to the role of an instructional coach isn't always easy and doesn't typically come with a guidebook. It's one thing to be good with students, but it's a totally different thing to be good with adults (imagine calling your colleagues' parents when they're not following the rules). As an instructional coach, you've been granted that important but daunting title of *leader*. Don't back down from this. Instead, I want you to own it. I want you to settle into it; feel it in your bones. I want you to step into your role and your title by deciding, first and foremost, who *you* are as a leader. *You* get to define what leadership means and looks like to you. This is your role to take on, and while the job description may have many bulleted points that serve as a starting place, it's the deeper definition we're looking for right now. See page 27 for the Defining Leadership organizer to help you get started in your thinking. Once you've completed that, come back here for the next steps.