

# 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* (Cheliotis & 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

their clients who have successfully used coaching conversations and become coach-leaders in their school communities. While all stories are true, we have changed the names and certain details of coaching clients' stories to maintain their confidentiality. Our Coaching For Results Global associates are all experienced school leaders and coaches, and we invite you to learn more about these gifted individuals at [www.coachingforresultsglobal.com](http://www.coachingforresultsglobal.com).

## GETTING STARTED

Here is an exercise you can do right now to begin your practice of being a coach-leader. Consider your current status and that of your school. What are your greatest challenges? Do your expectations and vision match the reality? If you woke up tomorrow morning and during the night a magical change had occurred and you and your school were now exactly as you had envisioned them, what would be different? What would you see? What would you hear? How would people act? What would you touch first?

Journal below about these ideas and let your evolution to coach-leadership begin!

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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 dissent 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
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Matrix of Stories		
Chapter	Story Title	Synopsis
4	Finding Your Leadership Voice	A new principal in a school with a veteran staff learns to lead without being a dictator.
	Being Contagious Makes You Better	A principal challenges her staff to use high quality lesson planning EVERY day.
	Turning Around a Failing School	A principal is assigned to a school which has failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress. She has to organize the staff to quickly make a collective difference for students.
5	I Want to . . . But	An assistant principal wants to become a principal, yet he is resistant to change.
	The Crucial “Aha” Moment	A principal overcomes resistance to change by working on herself.
	Changing a Relationship Through Language	A new principal learns that providing unexpected positive feedback opened the door to change.
	Acting Out My Future—Life Is Just a Performance	An assistant principal uses positive intent to encourage a challenging student to change.
6	Reflected Glory	A high school principal gains commitment from staff by showing his support of them in his actions.
	Scoring With the Music Teacher	A principal is challenged by a teacher who does not buy in to a new district policy.

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Matrix of Stories		
Chapter	Story Title	Synopsis
	It's in the Details	A principal feels micromanaged by his supervisor and discovers he is doing the same with his staff.
	Change Happens One by One	An assistant superintendent changes the climate within a leadership team.
7	Moving Staff Up or Out	A new principal has some fierce conversations with a few of her staff members.
	Reflection: A Closer Look	A district leader uses reflective questions to understand his new program responsibilities.
	A Marginal Teacher Spurs the Evolution of a Coach-Leader	A principal gets improvement results when she focuses on staff strengths.
	Facing Our Dragons	A principal tackles problems with his secretary.
8	Softening Discipline at the Edges	A new principal finds her biggest challenge to be creating a discipline climate with which she could live.
	Caught in the Middle	A principal is caught in the middle of a dispute between a teacher and the school board.
	"Nobody at This School Gets Me!"	A principal works with a student who blames the school system for his anger and frustration.
9	Monkey Collector	A principal takes on responsibility to handle issues that really belong to others.

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Matrix of Stories		
Chapter	Story Title	Synopsis
	Whose Problem—Whose Solution?	A new principal learns ways to handle staff issues without giving advice.
	Just Call Me Mom	A principal learns to communicate caring without becoming “mom.”
	Middle School Under Attack	An area superintendent works with a principal to strengthen communication without being directive or giving advice.
10	Sitting on a Seesaw	A new technology director learns that her “being” is as important as her “doing” in both her professional and personal life.
	The 180-Degree Turnaround	A department chair learns how to reduce his stress with a challenging teacher.
	Reframing Balance	A principal has trouble sorting “important” tasks from “urgent” ones.
	Running in Circles	An assistant principal feels diminished by ratings she received on a leadership inventory.
11	Rewiring	A principal prepares his staff for his impending retirement.
	I Feel Like a Failure	An assistant principal feels trapped in a position she does not like.
	Investing in the Next Steps	A curriculum leader is feeling unfocused and directionless about her approaching retirement.

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