
Preface

WELCOME TO BLENDED COACHING STRATEGIES: SKILLS AND STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Schools need principals and other leaders who are able to build communities of practice that will enable all students to succeed. These leaders have a keen ability to promote collegiality, support 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. As the “boomer” generation of principals faces retirement, school districts must contend with a well-documented shortage of candidates who have been suitably prepared to assume leadership positions.

Recognizing the importance of quality site leadership, school districts and other institutions around the country are currently working to establish more effective models of support for new and veteran school leaders. Calls for such programs have been issued by many national and state organizations. The need is further substantiated by our work at the New Teacher Center (NTC) at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where we provide intensive support to first- and second-year principals, experienced principals, and new teachers and their mentors.

This book offers a fresh approach to professional development for principals and other school leaders. *Blended Coaching: Skills and Strategies to Support Principal Development* addresses several critical needs:

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- The importance of sustained, stable, and effective site leadership for school improvement
- The increasingly severe shortage of qualified candidates for the principalship
- The inadequacy of traditional preservice and inservice programs
- The need for quality induction and professional development programs for principals that include a mentoring or coaching component

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.

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. You might be a retiree brought in by the district to assist new principals, or an independent consultant hired to provide leadership training. We suggest you consider our approach to professional development for principals: leadership coaching through the application of *Blended Coaching Strategies*.

Through several dozen years of collective experience, the authors of this book have learned a great deal about successfully coaching teachers and principals. Our experience is informed by 15 years of research and fieldwork, mentoring teachers and principals in dozens of school districts across the country.

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 fears 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 leaders 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 school leaders like Norma and Rose.

We have organized our approach to coaching around three essential elements: *skills*, *strategies*, and *tools*. Coaches, no matter what their particular approach, must apply a variety of basic *skills*. These include building trust; listening, observing, and 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

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being part of an ongoing community of practice where you can continue to develop your coaching expertise in the company of like-minded colleagues.

In the pages that follow, we provide you with tools to help you master our approach to leadership coaching. **Narrative text** sets forth key concepts and linkages between them, providing research results and references where appropriate. **Reflective prompts** are interspersed throughout the text. We encourage you to journal as you work your way through this book, using these prompts as tools to trigger your assimilation of the material. We also suggest you complete the included **Exercises**, either individually or with coachees or colleagues. Finally, we have included a number of **Tools** in the Resources section of this book. We hope these will be useful to you in your coaching practice.

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 a professional community of leadership coaches prepared to meet the needs of principals and other school leaders.

Welcome to the new profession of school leadership coaching. We invite you to join with us in creating a vibrant community of practice dedicated to supporting school leaders. We value your feedback and we look forward to hearing about the contributions you and others will make to this important work.