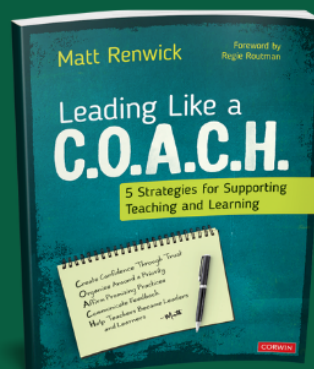


10 ACTIONS FOR SUPPORTING TEACHING AND LEARNING



Written by:
Matt Renwick



**A
Leading
Like a
C.O.A.C.H.
Playbook**

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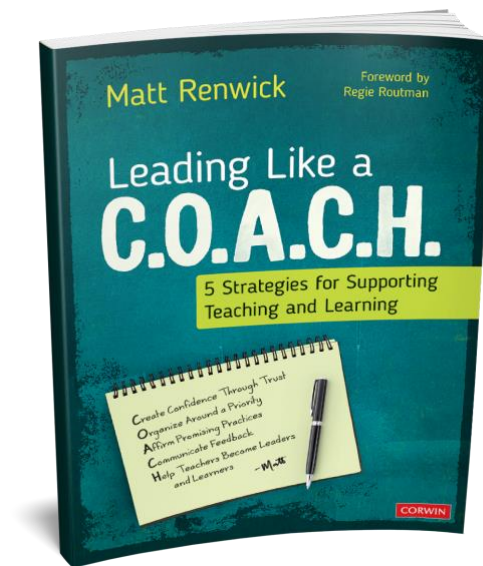
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10 Actions for Supporting Teaching and Learning

A Leading Like a C.O.A.C.H. Playbook

This guide was developed as a companion resource to [Leading Like a C.O.A.C.H.: 5 Strategies for Supporting Teaching and Learning](#) (Corwin, 2022).

The goals of both texts are the same: to enhance teaching and learning effectiveness and enjoyment; to build an equitable schoolwide culture of high achievement and professional trust; to foster self-directed learning and leadership across the school.



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Introduction: The Basic Tools and Principles

If you are reading this playbook, my assumption is you are looking for strategies and resources that will help you better support teachers and students. My goal in the development of this resource is to provide these for you.

I wrote *Leading Like a C.O.A.C.H.* because it didn't exist. It was a book I wish I had as a school leader. Now as a systems coach, I have been able to take a step back and see the forest for the trees. I can see what else might be needed for leaders to enact the strategies I described.

I also needed others' perspectives. For example, after my book was published in 2022, a colleague sent me an email with praise for its practicality and usefulness. "But," she followed, "leaders are going to need more than a book." I didn't want to admit that at first. My fingers and my brain were tired. But I eventually acknowledged that she was right. How can I help leaders take the principles and tools from *Leading Like a C.O.A.C.H.* and put them into action?

This playbook describes the ten actions any instructional leader can take to attain schoolwide excellence. Outcomes such as teachers working together productively, and all students have access to effective instruction do not happen overnight. But if there is a commitment of time and energy to developing and sustaining high levels of student engagement and achievement, this vision can become a reality.

How do I know these ideas work? First, I used them regularly over the course of sixteen years as a school leader. I fine-tuned these resources until they helped the faculty and me achieve the outcomes we desired. Second, I cross referenced the tools and principles shared here with what research has found to be effective, for example The Wallace Foundation's synthesis "[How Principals Affect Students and Schools](#)". There is close alignment.

The Tools

#1 - Instructional Walks

These daily, strengths-focused classroom visits give you a ground-level view of the teaching and learning taking place in classrooms. They are the "how" of an instructional leader's practice. (We will define these more in Action #2.) There is no other way to assess whether your school is making progress toward your goals without direct experience in classrooms. This guide will give you the resources and systems to engage in coaching conversations with faculty, using data captured during instruction walks to facilitate celebration, reflection, and growth. You will find instructional walks to be doable and something you look forward to conducting.

#2 - An Instructional Framework

If instructional walks are the vehicle that will take you to schoolwide excellence, then an instructional framework is the map that guides you to that destination. It articulates the most effective practices for engaging students in high-quality learning experiences. An instructional framework focuses on the "what" of teaching and learning. It gives you as the instructional leader a trusted resource to reference when talking with teachers during instructional walks.

#3 - Weekly Newsletter

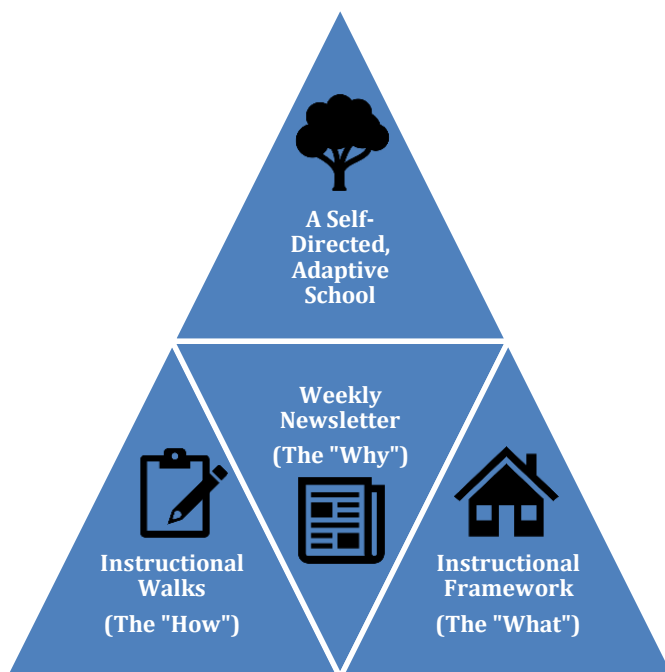
The first two tools are simple enough that they can be adapted for any context. But without a way to bring them both together, they don't change instructional practice at scale.

This is where a weekly newsletter published for staff and the school community becomes essential. A weekly newsletter is a leader's opportunity to communicate what your school is all about and where you all want to go. It is the "why" of the work.

Leaders can leverage the data from instructional walks along with the language from an instructional framework to advocate for schoolwide excellence. Images, quotes, anecdotes, and resources can capture a culture's attention and focus on what matters. A newsletter keeps everyone's eyes on the prize: student learning and continuous improvement.

Implementing these tools simultaneously, we create a foundation for success, which is twofold:

- Teachers begin to see their instruction more objectively in order to grow for **today**.
- A school builds its capacity for self-directedness and the ability to adapt to what **tomorrow** holds.



You will see this growth and potential using the strategies and structures developed in this playbook. Implemented well, you can achieve your school's goal: ensuring all students are learning at high levels. This occurs when faculty is consistently teaching at high levels.

You are invited and encouraged to personalize them to meet your own school's needs.

The Principles

While personalization is encouraged with the tools, the principles of these practices remain consistent. Think of them as both guide posts and a roadmap on your journey to excellence.

Effective instructional leaders:

- Create confidence by demonstrating trust in faculty to be adaptive and responsive to students' needs.
- Organize around priority goals through clear communication of the beliefs and values of a school.
- Affirm what is going well with instruction, using teachers' strengths as entry points for growth.
- Communicate feedback that builds teachers' capacity for becoming self-determining learners.
- Help teachers and students become self-directed leaders, influencers, and change agents.

Positioning teachers and students as agents of change doesn't lessen our authority as school leaders. Rather, it enhances and expands it. They become extensions of your leadership, making decisions as a team.

Start with Trust

"Where there is trust, anything is possible. Without it, all aspects of teaching, learning, and living are limited."

- Regie Routman, *The Heart-Centered Teacher: Restoring Hope, Joy, and Possibility in Uncertain Times*, p. 83

Before you engage in the ten actions that will empower teachers and students, it's important to first understand where you are at regarding your culture and climate. These areas can be measured through perceived levels of **professional trust**. Former principal Trena Spears defined professional trust as everyone on staff committed to all students and believing all teachers will do an effective job (Routman, 2014, p. 21).

You can start by facilitating the following Instructional Leadership Trust Survey process. It will provide insights as to what's going well as a school culture and where you might improve.

Administer it again once you have implemented the ten actions from this playbook to measure progress and celebrate growth.

Readiness Activity: Instructional Leadership Trust Survey

The following survey is an assessment tool to help you measure the current levels of trust in your school. It was developed based on some of the research literature on trust in schools (Vodicka, 2006; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). The goal is to inform your practice, not to criticize it. As a principal, I would regularly use surveys like this to gauge staff's perceptions and make changes. Being open as a learner is a powerful model for your teachers.

Directions: Read through the elements of trust along with each indicator. Then rate yourself to the best of your ability. Send out the same questions to your faculty. Ask that it be completed within a couple days.

Go to the appendix to find a copy of the teacher version of this survey.

Tabulate the teachers' responses, enter the average score in the appropriate box, and then take a moment to reflect on each feature of trust. For any gaps, consider what you could do differently going forward. For areas of strength and agreement, celebrate! Make a plan to change at least one thing about your practice.

Rating Descriptions:

1. Not yet: No action has been taken towards implementation at this time.
2. Initial steps taken: Some preliminary actions or efforts have begun.
3. Progressing: Ongoing movement or advancement toward this feature of trust is being made.
4. In place: The practice or behavior is fully implemented and integrated into one's leadership approach.

Trust Inventory			
Trust Feature and Definition	Your self-assessment	Teachers' average response	Your Reflection
1. CONSISTENCY AND RELIABILITY			
1.1 I consistently apply policies, and my actions are reliable.	1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place		
1.2 I keep the promises I make to my staff and ensure that processes are reliably followed.	1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place		
2. COMPASSION, BENEVOLENCE, AND PERSONAL WELFARE			
2.1 I show genuine concern for the personal well-being of my staff.	1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place		

2.2 I prioritize the professional growth of my staff and consider their best interests in my decisions.	1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place		
2.3 I look out for the personal welfare of the faculty members in this school.	1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place		
3. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND OPENNESS			
3.1 I create an environment where it's acceptable to discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations openly.	1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place		
3.2 I encourage staff to share their opinions, and I am receptive to hearing them.	1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place		
4. COMPETENCE AND EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT			
4.1 I manage the school effectively, ensuring that it runs smoothly.	1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place		
4.2 I am confident in my ability to manage our team and meet organizational goals.	1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place		
5. HONESTY, INTEGRITY, AND RESPECT			
5.1 I am honest and can be taken at my word.	1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place		

5.2 I place the needs of the students ahead of my political interests.	1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place		
5.3 I respect teachers' role as educators and strive to earn the respect of my staff.	1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place		
5.4 I treat my staff with respect and value their contributions.	1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place		
6. CONFIDENCE IN AND SUPPORT FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING			
6.1 I have confidence in the expertise of my teachers.	1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place		
6.2 I take a personal interest in the professional development of teachers.	1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place		
	TOTAL SCORE out of 60: _____ / 60	TOTAL SCORE out of 60: _____ / 60	

Reflect and Take Action:

1. Where are you successful in fostering trust? How might you leverage these strengths?
2. In which area(s) do you want to improve?
3. What is a first step you can take toward improvement? How will you know you are getting better?

Action #1: Commit to Daily Classroom Visits

I know of no other practice that improves and maintains trust than making daily classroom visits. Our visibility in classrooms and in the school are invaluable. They are so many benefits and outcomes from this seemingly simple practice.

- **Identity** - You are seen as a learner and a supporter of instruction vs. only an evaluator and disciplinarian.
- **Visibility** - Being visible throughout the school paints a positive picture about you as a school leader with the larger community. For example, students go home and talk about your constant presence with their families. You are not one to sit in your office all day - a breath of fresh air.
- **Frequency** - Teachers become used to your visits, which makes formal observations less of an event.
- **Accessibility** - When you are regularly available in classrooms, staff appreciate the access they have to one of the most important people in the building.
- **Understanding** - Through regular visits to classrooms, you gain a sense of the “instructional pulse” of the school. It’s inevitable. You can leverage this knowledge for professional learning, at board meetings, and decision making in general.

Mind you that these benefits don’t address the primary function of these classroom visits, which is to support teaching and learning.

When I have shared some of these benefits with school leaders, it doesn’t necessarily move the needle. I hear lots of good intentions, followed by reasons as to what’s preventing them from making this a daily habit (more on that in Action #3).

What I have found is needed to get into classrooms regularly, in addition to considering the benefits, is to **make an active commitment to the process**. Next is a process developed by Dr. Gabrielle Oettingen, referred to by the acronym “W.O.O.P” (2014). It is an evidence-based strategy for implementing new habits and systems.

Creating an Implementation Intention

In a sentence, respond to each of the four questions within the context of your current position (Oettingen, 2014).

- **Wish:** What do I hope for in the future?
- **Outcome:** How will I know if I am successful?
- **Obstacles:** What is standing in my way?
- **Plan:** How will I go about the task or project?

Here’s my example: In my first year in the last school where I was the principal, I initially didn’t make classroom visits a regular part of my day. I’d get to them when all of my other tasks were completed, which definitely wasn’t daily.

During the school year, I brought a team of teachers to a literacy conference. There we connected with Regie Routman for lunch. She is the source of the concept of instructional walks. When she asked me how the walks were going during our meal, I said I hadn't got to them yet. "What are you waiting for?" she replied. All of my teachers looked at me at the same time. I fumbled over some excuse about still getting to know the position.

If I were to have gone through the W.O.O.P. process to uncover what was challenging me, it might have looked something like this:

- **Wish:** I wish to effectively support teachers and students in their instruction.
- **Outcome:** Teachers and students would appreciate my presence, welcoming me into their classrooms.
- **Obstacle:** I am a little worried about how welcomed I will be in a few classrooms.
- **Plan:** I will keep my first regular visits positive and short to build relational trust.

This plan, along with communicating with faculty my intentions and purpose behind my classroom visits, eventually helped me establish this habit in my new school.

Try it and apply it

Use the plan you came up and begin to prepare for your visits. The initial goal is quantity, not quality. Eventually, the conversations that spring up from regular classroom visits will offer opportunities for leading like a coach.

Below are some suggestions as you get started.

1. Schedule for consistency: Block out regular times each week in your calendar for classroom visits.
2. Start Small: Begin with spending a few minutes in each classroom at a time.
3. Set Reminders: For example, set up your classroom visit appointments in your digital calendar to notify you on your smartphone 10 minutes ahead of time.

Common Question: When I initially visit classrooms, what do I do? What do I say?

For your first round (which we will discuss in more detail in the following two actions), your purpose is to be present and positive. You don't need to do or say anything. A simple wave and a smile as you immerse yourself in the instructional experience is all that is needed.

There is a purpose behind this approach. You are presenting yourself as someone to be trusted by the teachers. This trust isn't built with words only. You want to be predictable. You have limited knowledge about each teacher's historical experience with administration or even with coaching. It isn't always positive. By showing up frequently and without any agenda except a positive presence, teachers who may harbor any animosity toward positional leaders will hopefully shift their beliefs about your role and your intentions.

Eventually, you will be coming into classrooms with greater intention. To prepare for these visits (referred to as "instructional walks"), begin organizing the following resources to support your efforts.

Key Resources for Supporting Instructional Walks

Key Resource	Description	Details
Padfolio	A padfolio holds notebook paper, pens, and any documents you want to bring along with you. It's commonly seen in meetings. You will use the notebook in the padfolio to capture notes during classroom visits.	- Use notebook paper to capture notes during instructional walks. Share these notes with teachers to affirm their strengths and communicate feedback. - The padfolio can also carry additional resources such as a copy of your instructional framework, coaching tools, and a tracker to ensure you are getting to every classroom (see below).
Smartphone Notes/Storage App	Select an application that allows you to scan notes you take during instructional walks. The purpose is to create a portfolio of artifacts of each teacher's practice. The app should also allow you to upload photos of instruction and any relevant classroom documents or files.	- Free notes apps include Apple Notes, Google Keep, and Microsoft OneNote. Evernote is a paid notes app with more features and functionality. - Free storage apps include Google Drive and Microsoft OneDrive. Dropbox offers more features for a paid version.
Master School Schedule	A visual summary of each grade's or department's classes. The master schedule is used by the leader to prepare for their visits to classrooms during instructional walks.	The schedule shows teachers' preparatory time, collaboration time, and any other availability for the leader to follow up about the instructional walk with them.
Instructional Framework	Perkins and Reese (2014) describe instructional frameworks as "a vision for more effective teaching and learning" that "provide teachers with a common perspective and language while allowing adaptation to different subjects, levels, and students."	- A school's instructional framework is the lens through which leaders view teaching and learning. - Leaders can use the instructional framework to support coaching conversations with teachers. The language helps name their practices and recognizes their successes and their efforts.
Guides and Toolkits	A leader can keep additional resources with them in their padfolio, to support their instructional walk practice.	Examples: - Coaching question stems - Data trackers, i.e. teachers' goals + leader's insights from classroom visits - An article to read during a quiet time

Action #2: Communicate the Purpose, Intentions, and Benefits of Classroom Visits

Getting into classrooms daily is a means to an end. That end is ensuring all students have access to engaging, effective instruction. Leaders achieve this through and with their teachers (Grissom, Egalite, and Lindsay, 2021).

Based on this logic, leaders and teachers need to establish a partnership for this approach to supporting teaching and learning. There has to be a relationship based on trust and reciprocity between both parties.

But people don't find common ground on logic alone. Mutual trust and respect are developed through social exchanges and emotional understanding. Trust is a multifaceted concept, dependent on a variety of elements including compassion and communication (Vodicka, 2006).

That is why it is critical to communicate the “why” behind these classroom visits. What is the purpose? What are your intentions? How do the teachers and students benefit from your presence?

Just as important is *how* we communicate this information and prepare faculty for frequent, unannounced classroom visits.

So, what's the best approach? I'm not a big fan of sending out emails for any reason whatsoever, but I do like email for communicating about a new initiative. The marketing and business industries use email campaigns effectively to sell their products and services. In a way, you are also “selling” something: a better way to support teaching and learning. For some teachers, it may be a tough sell if they have previously negative experiences interacting with administration or coaching.

Next is a three-email campaign template. Each message serves a different purpose. You can personalize them for your context. Send them out at least a week prior to making your initial classroom visits. Schedule each email a couple days apart. This will give teachers time to process the last message and ask any questions.

Email #1: Explain the Purpose and Intent

Subject Line: What are instructional walks?

Good morning,

Recently, I attended a leadership institute and learned about this concept called “instructional walks”. It's where principals visit classrooms in a nonevaluative manner. They are focused first on acknowledging teachers' strengths and building relational trust. Eventually, they can lead to administrators and teachers having coaching conversations that support professional growth.

I'd like to try these out in the next couple of weeks. What do you think? If you have any questions or concerns, I'd love to hear them. Just hit reply or stop me in the halls when we see each other next.

Take care,

[Your name]

Email #2: Highlight the Benefits for Teachers and Students

Subject Line: Did you know...

...that instructional walks can lead to creating a “portfolio of wins” for teachers?

It’s true! As I make visits to classrooms, I eventually plan to capture and organize what’s happening during instruction. I will save handwritten notes, images, and scans of the resources you use to help kids learn. These artifacts will be available to you in a digital folder. You can use them for our educator evaluation system, as part of your professional cycle for reviewing your goals and objectives, or simply to reflect upon and celebrate.

There are several other benefits, including better relationships between students and me, an increased presence in the building which can help prevent negative behaviors, and “schooling” the principal about your practice. 😊

I’m excited to get started, and hope are beginning to feel the same way. Don’t hesitate to reach out with a reply or a face-to-face conversation with any of your questions or concerns.

Take care,

[Your name]

Email #3: Ask for Teachers’ Professional Goals for the Year

Subject Line: ☐ If you could wave a magic wand, what is one thing you would change in your classroom?

Think about a current challenge you would like to address, a problem you want to solve.

- Maybe it’s to see improvement in students’ behaviors so everyone can learn more.
- Maybe you are wondering how to fit an overflowing curriculum into the school year.
- Maybe you want to establish a strong, positive classroom community.

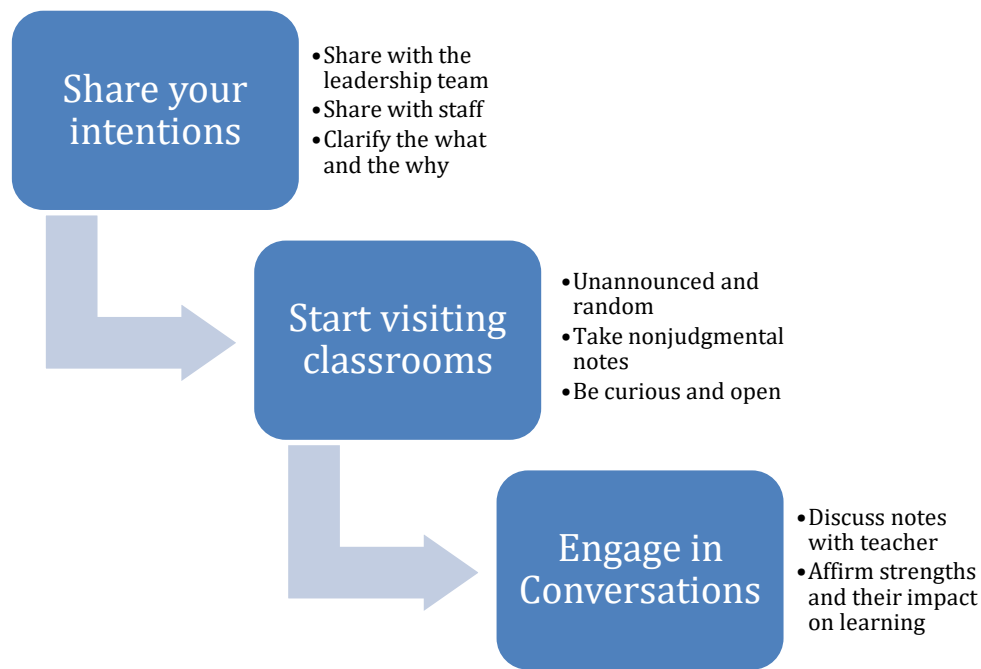
Whatever the challenge, I’d like to help. Send me your goal and any related objectives for the year. A draft of an idea is fine. This information will guide my support for you during instructional walks.

Better yet, sign up for a time to meet with me. We can talk about your challenge and goal in person. While I won’t look to fix anything, I can serve as a thought partner on your important problem.

Take care,

[Your name]

In addition to the emails, you can also share the following visual explanation of the instructional walk process.



Source: Renwick, M. (2022). *Leading Like a C.O.A.C.H.: Five Strategies for Supporting Teaching and Learning*. Corwin

Common Question: What if a teacher expresses reluctance with me coming into their classrooms?

While this has not been a frequent issue, I have had teachers demonstrate resistance to the idea of the principal coming into classrooms on a frequent and nonevaluative basis.

Their concerns can almost always be distilled down to **fear**: fear of judgment, fear of unfair observations, etc.

What I have tried to do in these situations is to a) recognize and acknowledge their feelings, and b) address their fears directly.

For example, I once had a teacher share with me that none of my visits could truly be nonevaluative. “You’re the principal. You are my supervisor. How can you ‘unsee’ something that happens in the classroom?”

First, I agreed with this teacher that I do have responsibilities as the building administrator. “You’re right; if something is happening in classrooms that is somehow harmful to kids, I would have to intervene.”

Then, I asked this teacher how often they thought I observe grossly negligent behavior by teachers in classrooms. They shrugged, then admitted probably not very often. “Hardly ever,” I confirmed.

Finally, I reaffirmed my intentions: that I would first look for strengths, let teachers know what I notice, and work toward building that trust that would eventually lead to more confident coaching conversations. “And if I walk in and the lesson just isn’t going well, you are welcome to ask me to come back another time.” This last part reduced their anxiety because I had shifted the power for the instructional walks process from me to the teacher.

Action #3: Empower Others to Manage and Lead

I have heard a lot of reasons why leaders don't get into classrooms.

- "I have too many other commitments to take care of during the day."
- "I'm constantly putting out fires, such as student behaviors."
- "I will schedule classroom visits, but something constantly comes up."

As a former principal for sixteen years, I get it. I have made comments like these at times. I wasn't making excuses. This can be the reality for many leaders.

But I also know many leaders almost always find time for the following:

- Supervising lunch and recess
- Greeting students and families at the front doors in the morning
- Checking and replying to email messages several times a day

I am not saying leaders should stop doing these things. Responding to student behavior situations and other urgent matters is part of the job.

What I am conveying is, anything can be a priority if we have the commitment and the systems to make it so.

Prioritizing the urgent over the important doesn't have to be your current reality. No, we can't simply shrug off our responsibilities when the urgent comes up. But we can be more proactive in how we determine what the response to these issues are, as well as who should be responding.

We do this by empowering others to manage and lead in common situations.

For example, you are in your office, ready to visit classrooms as scheduled on your calendar. As you walk out, in walks Michael. Michael is what you would refer to as a "frequent flyer": constantly sent to the office for negative behaviors. Your typical response is as follows:

1. Turn around.
2. Invite Michael into your office.
3. Spend the next hour unpacking what happened: listen to Michael's story, speak with the staff member who sent him down, investigate the situation, make a decision about consequences, call his parents, and enter all this information in the behavior documentation form.

My question for you is, whose agenda are you following: Michael's or yours?

We can't blame Michael. What we can do is create a system where the Michaels of our world aren't always capturing our time and attention away from instructional leadership work.

Try it and apply it: Create a task process document for every responsibility with which you want to empower others.

Here is how it works:

1. Select a task that is consistently getting in the way of allowing you to visit classrooms and is not aligned with improving student learning.
2. Break the task down into its part. Describe the process step by step.
3. Note how often it is done, how one knows it is completed, and what to do after it's accomplished.
4. Give this task analysis process to the person you are empowering with this responsibility. Ask them if it is clear what to do. If not, add more description and steps until it is clear.

Then try it out. Afterward, talk about how it went with the staff member and make any adjustments as needed.

Below is a template you can use to document any task.

1. What is the task?
2. What is the process?
3. How often is it completed?
4. What does "done" look like?

As an example, I recruited my office administrative assistant to manage students like Michael when they came down for behaviors. Instead of going right into my office and interrupting whatever I was doing, the student would sit in the office lobby while my assistant handed them a "think sheet". This sheet offered a series of questions the student would respond to about the the event. Once the think sheet was completed, the student would wait until I was ready to speak with them. If I wasn't in the office, they waited until I came back.

Below is what that task process looked like.

Task Process: When a student is sent to the office for behavior

1. **What is the task?** When a student is sent to the office for behaviors, they will be asked to sit in the office lobby and complete a written reflection. This task replaces sending them into my office immediately.
2. **What is the process?**
 - 2.1. When the student comes into the office, ask them to find a seat in the lobby.
 - 2.2. Hand them a "think sheet" and a writing utensil.
 - 2.3. Read aloud the directions and the questions to the students. Answer any questions they might have.
 - 2.4. When they say they are done, tell them to sit patiently until the principal is ready to see them.
3. **How often is it completed?** Any time a student comes down to the office for behavior reasons, unless it is a situation that requires immediate attention from the principal.
4. **What does "done" look like?** The student has completed the think sheet, you have collected it, and the teacher that sent the student to the office is notified with the status of the situation (as needed).

When we tried this process out, my assistant forgot about it the first couple of times. Old habits die hard. When it was implemented, my assistant pointed out that she wasn't sure what an "emergency" was. That led to expanding on the original process. We added a T-chart that defined what an emergency is and is not.

Below are a few other tasks to consider shifting the responsibility to someone else and how that might look. Use the blank row to brainstorm a personal task and how these processes might be deferred or delegated.

Possible Tasks to Delegate to Others

Task you are currently doing	Who could be doing it instead	How this process could work differently
Entering behavior documentation forms into software; creating data reports for analysis	An office assistant; the school counselor; a paraprofessional	Instead of teachers putting behavior documentation forms in your office, they would go to the person you designate. This process does not have to be done daily; consider entering the information 1-2 times a week.
Running attendance reports; generating letters to families	An office assistant; the school counselor; the student information system (SIS) software	Attendance processes by and large can be automated by whatever SIS software you are currently using. Help the person designated with this task to create a recurring calendar event as a reminder to complete these processes.
Submitting purchase requests and expense receipts; reconciling the budget	An office assistant	Communicate with teachers the change in procedures, that they now hand receipts and submit requests for purchases to the designated staff member. Work with this person in the beginning to help them learn the budget codes and expectations for submissions.

Common Question: What if everyone is too busy to take on one more task?

I hear this response from leaders who are unsure about giving up one of their management tasks.

Here's what I believe: As the building leader, you get to decide who does what in your school. There are some limitations with job descriptions. But as a rule, you have the authority to change the responsibilities and even the roles for the staff that work in your school. In fact, you are expected to make changes if it means the building will operate more effectively and you have more time to support teaching and learning.

When I have asked others to take on tasks and provided them with the support to do them well, they have generally appreciated it. Effective staff want you in classrooms, supporting teaching and learning. They also want to be empowered in their positions and have some level of authority in the school.

Try it: Engage in your first round of instructional walks

Start these first couple of weeks by simply visiting classrooms without taking notes or communicating feedback. You are showing up, being present and positive. The goal is building relational trust with faculty.

The objectives are:

- Stop in all classrooms briefly as a touchpoint
- Stay in three (3) classrooms a day, 10-15 minutes in each classroom
- Leave with a kind public comment
- Document a key takeaway after each visit

During your visit, you are welcome to leave behind a note of appreciation for what you saw. Just be sure that your comments are genuine and you are providing recognition for all of your teachers. Teachers will perceive that you have “favorites” if you aren’t equitable in your acknowledgments.

To help track your visits, create a table with each teacher’s name. Note the goal they shared with you, plus space to document what resonated with you during your visit.

For the key takeaway of what resonated, think of it like this: If you were to write a story for a newspaper of this instructional walk, what would be the headline?

An example of this table and what might be document is below.

Instructional Walks Tracker: September 2-13

Classroom teacher	Teacher’s goal	Key takeaway: What resonated with you?
Sarah	Build a positive learning community	Time devoted to teaching classroom routines
Aaron	Supporting self-directed learners	“What is the goal of self-regulation?” An essential question for the week
Macy	Empowering students as teachers	Books in piles, waiting for students to organize them

These notes are for you. Use them to reflect on how your school is progressing toward your organizational goals. You can also begin to think about what questions you might ask each teacher once trust is established.

As a principal, instructional walks became the core practice of my work. After a dozen years of conducting them, they went from an obligation I felt I must do, to one of the most enjoyable parts of my day. I believe that if you commit to them as part of your daily practice, you too will find many benefits for yourself, the teachers, and the students.

Action #4: Know Your Core Beliefs and Values

When contentious topics come up, and people propose ideas that run counter to what you know to be true, where do you draw the line?

Knowing one's core beliefs and values, both what we currently hold and what are striving for, is that line. We know that line is crossed in our reactions to situations. When we find something agreeable, there is a likelihood of a shared belief or value present. Conversely, we experience discomfort, frustration, and even anger when our values are crossed.

As an example, one of my core values is **integrity**. This is defined as staying true to one's beliefs and to bring our whole selves to a task or experience. Integrity is about aligning our actions with our aspirations. In the context of curriculum and instruction, the value of integrity means keeping the students at the center of our instruction. We show fidelity to the kids in our classrooms first. Resources and materials are there to support high-quality instruction and meeting students where they are at as learners.

Knowing our values help us to be skillful and remain flexible in challenging situations. For instance, I can lean into my sense of integrity when I experience resistance from a colleague not wanting to center students in their instructional plans. Paraphrasing what they are saying helps them see their own thinking more objectively. Pausing gives them space to consider their actions and beliefs more deeply. I might also pose questions to help the teacher expand their perspective and consider another point of view, such as:

- How is the curriculum helping you guide all your students to becoming lifelong learners: readers, writers, communicators, thinkers?
- What evidence are you seeing that leads you to believe students are successful?
- What is a recent adjustment you made with the resource to meet the needs your students were presenting?

These questions are meant to empower a teacher as the “curriculum decision maker” (Anderson and Glover, 2023) in their classroom. I teach and lead with integrity by trusting colleagues through the language I use in professional conversation. I live out my values by instilling them in my daily actions.

Just as important, knowing my core beliefs and values keeps me honest when I don't live up to them. For instance, instead of engaging with that colleague who is not centering students in their instruction, I am not bringing up the inequitable practice. This could be due to conflict avoidance or a lack of confidence in my own knowledge. Yet even in these situations, I can anchor my actions, reflections, and recommitment in my beliefs and values to make better decisions in the future.

Try It and Apply It

Find a list of common values.

They can be found with a simple Internet search. Brené Brown has a nice list at <https://brenebrown.com/resources/dare-to-lead-list-of-values/>.

Select the values that you current hold and/or aspire to hold.

As you read through them, circle the values that resonate with you the most. Instructional coach Elena Aguilar recommends starting with ten, and then winnowing those down to five, and eventually two to three core values (2020).

If you are struggling to narrow down your values to a core few, select those that you currently hold only in your position as an educator. It's okay to have unique core values in different contexts of your life (Harris, 2022).

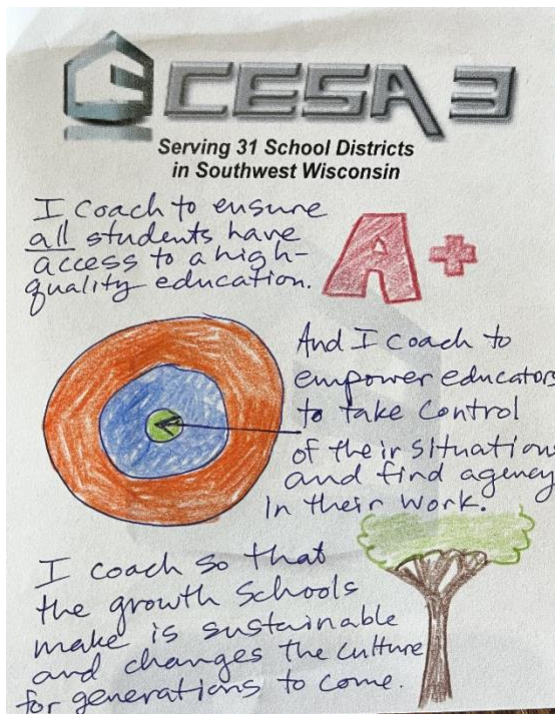
Write these values down and place them prominently where you work.

At CESA #3 where I work as a systems coach, we have a set of core values: commitment, excellence & trust, communication, integrity, flexibility, professionalism. I have them written on a sticky note, which is placed on the surface of my laptop. Every time I work on my computer, these core values are there. They become a lens in which I see my work, helping me make decisions about how I operate and who I want to be in relation to others.

You could also include your core values in your email signature. People see what you are about and may follow your lead in aligning one's actions with their principles.

Finally, considering sharing your values at the beginning of any meeting or collaboration. When you know each other's values, members of a team are more likely to be considerate and understanding when ideas are shared.

Use your values to develop vision statements that affirm and convey what you believe.



This image depicts three of my vision statements. Each statement embodies one of my values (in parentheses).

"I coach to ensure all students have access to a high-quality education." (integrity)

"I coach to empower educators to take control of their situations and find agency in their work." (empowerment)

"I coach so that the growth schools make is sustainable and changes the culture for generations to come." (justice)

These statements remind me of what I believe and where I want to be as an educator. I don't always meet my own expectations. But when I am reminded of why I do this work – on behalf of students, teachers, families - I renew my desire to commit to the work.

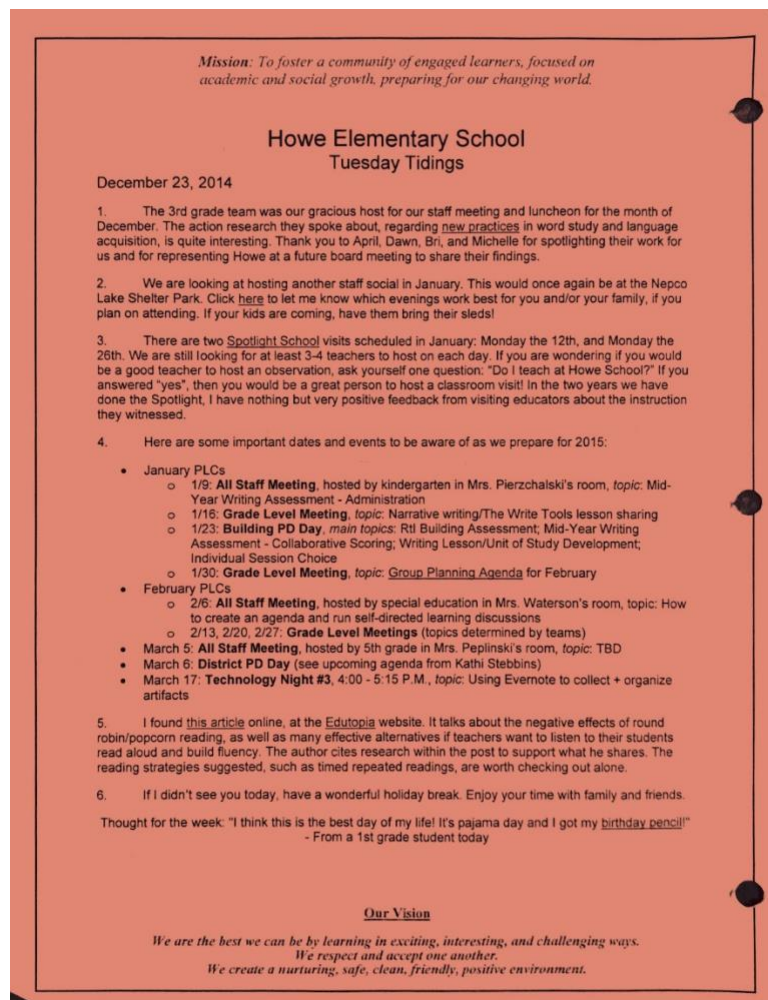
If the goal of education is to empower students to be learners in a complex world, then a pathway to success is knowing what we stand for and believe in. If we can align what we do with our vision for excellence, we are more likely to reach the desired destination.

Action #5: Share What You are Learning and Doing with a Weekly Staff Newsletter

A weekly newsletter is an effective way to keep your school informed and engaged around your initiatives. It keeps the collective focus on what you and your school deem as the priority for your work.

The key word is “effective”. A newsletter written doesn’t mean people will read it. It’s the proverbial “if a tree falls in the woods and no one was around to hear it, did it make any sound?” challenge.

Next is a less-than-ideal example: one of my earliest weekly staff newsletters.



It's basically a long email in print format. Upcoming events are helpful. The mission and vision language reminds everyone about the big picture. Yet it's not visually appealing. It is not likely to inspire people after they read it.

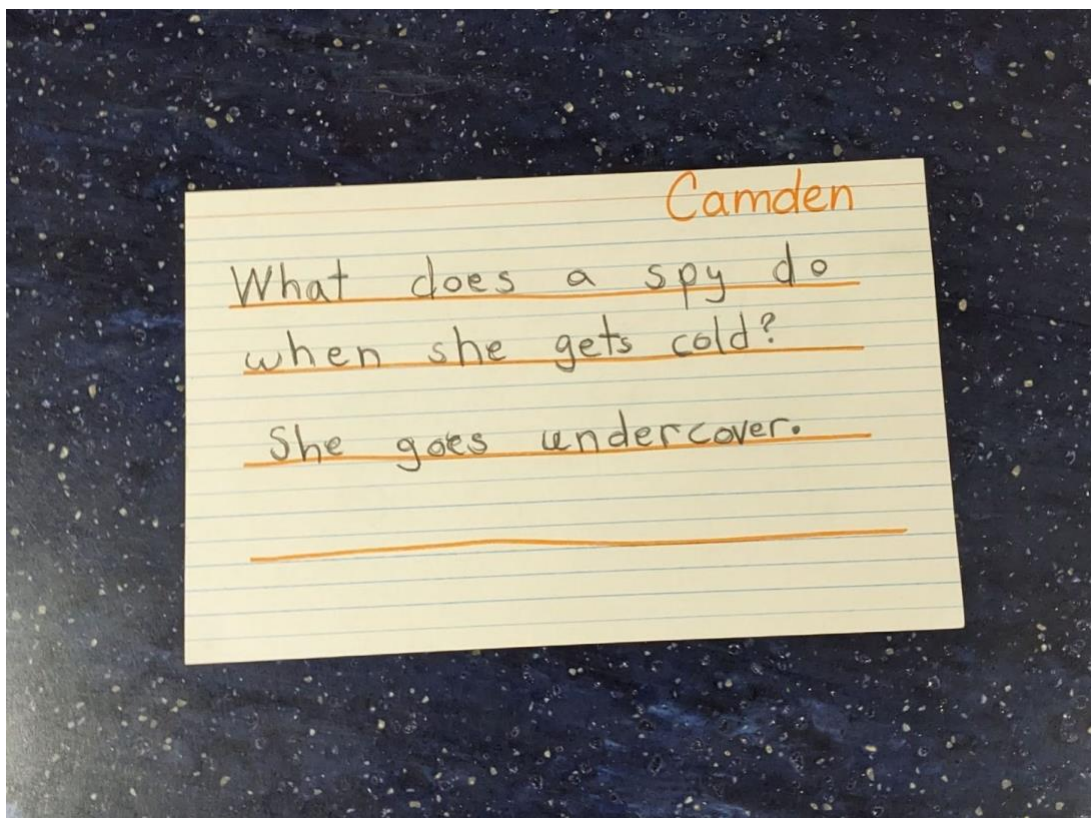
Here are **four ways I improved my weekly newsletter** over the last dozen years, to the point where at least 80% of faculty and staff read at least part of what was shared.

#1 - Start with an image of what your organization is about and becoming.

I go through my photos app on my smartphone and find an image I captured from the classroom. If I could not find one, that was a good indication that I had not been in classrooms enough that week.

After securing permission from the teacher and student(s) to post it, I added it to the top of the newsletter. My lens for selecting an image was through the effective teaching practices described in our instructional framework (something we will implement in Action #7).

For example, when I posted the picture below – a student wrote and read aloud a joke during morning announcements - I added a caption that touched on the importance of audience and purpose in writing.



#2 - Lead with an anecdote or story.

This first section of the newsletter is an opportunity to share a little bit about your experiences, professional or personal. The more it's about everyday events, especially depicting you as a leader being vulnerable and human. When we position myself as learners and mistake-makers, it gives everyone permission to do the same.

For example, in one newsletter I shared about teaching my son to drive. I portrayed myself (accurately) as a dad just trying to figure it out. Lessons on stopping while ahead and celebrating small wins when learning something new were surfaced at the end.

In another newsletter, I described an assumption I made about a classroom library, and how my conversation with the teacher clarified my misunderstanding.

When leaders are humble, they are perceived as more approachable, which helps build trust with faculty.

#3 - Provide general updates.

I briefly listed our school's activities, events, and projects in the middle.

Updates are not a dumping ground for anything on the calendar. Minutes from meetings, planned professional development, and upcoming commitments such as evaluation cycle dates always have a space. Faculty came to expect this information in the general updates; it helped ensure they read it.

#4 - Include recommended reading, listening, or watching.

At the end of the newsletter can be a summary of a recent article, a book, a podcast, or a video you found useful.

Time is the #1 constraint for teachers. Unfortunately, self-directed professional learning is one of the first things to go in these conditions. By condensing a longer piece of content to key takeaways, you're giving back a little bit of time to them for learning.

Whether you use a word processor template or a newsletter tool, what makes the difference is getting people to read what is shared.

Apply the additional recommendations to boost readership to keep the school's focus on your goal.

- Embed the newsletter content in your email and attach a file copy for printing and archiving.
- Make it visually appealing.
- Keep text brief and broken up (white space, bullet points)
- Recognize faculty, staff, and students.
- Reduce reading time to the minimum possible.
- Include only essential information in the general updates.
- Increase the value of the newsletter with relevant professional content at the end.

See below for the template I used for my staff newsletter.

Common Question: Will I create problems if I highlight certain teachers for their work?

If your newsletter is only showcasing some staff for their efforts and successes, then yes, problems will likely occur.

One way to ensure you are being equitable in your recognitions is to keep a checklist of who you have and have not recognized. Do your best to publicly acknowledge everyone through images and words before starting a new checklist.

For staff where it is a struggle for you to find something worth sharing, recalibrate your expectations. Are they too high for someone right now? Where are they current at, and what efforts have they made for improvement? Meet people where they are while being genuine in your comments.

If finding ways to recognize a teacher is a consistent struggle, it is also a potential sign that they need more support. Work with your supervisor and/or a trust colleague to discuss this matter more.

Weekly Staff Newsletter Template

Use this template to format your weekly newsletter. The goal is to a) keep the school's collective attention on your goals, and b) keep everyone informed.

Quote from Recommended Reading

- Person quoted

[Image] – (Highlight instruction in action depicting promising instructional practices.)

[Your Mission, Vision, Beliefs, Values]

[Working Title for Short Anecdote]

1. What happened? Be specific. Can be a professional or personal example.
2. Why is this experience relevant to colleagues? Make the connection for them.
3. What is the key takeaway? Try to connect it to your mission, vision, beliefs, and values.

General Update (Use bullet points for easier reading.)

Possible Updates:

- Celebrations
- Note or quote of appreciation
- Upcoming events/dates
- Important tasks to complete

Recommended _____ (article, book, podcast, quote, question, video)

- Include title, author, and link to content.
- Highlight most important ideas and/or a compelling quote.
- Connect the ideas to the school's mission, vision, beliefs, values.
- Explain the benefit your colleagues may receive if they read, listen, or watch it.

Take care,
[your name]

[Finish with a "P.S."]

- Link to a funny image, meme, or social media post. You can also share an anonymous quote or compliment from a student, a family member, or the community.

Action #6: Interview Teachers for Your Instructional Leadership Team

As a school leader, I came to realize that I could not do it all. We hear these stories of principals who work tirelessly, day and night and weekends, to get their schools to a level of success not achieved prior to their appointment. Yet what is really gained? No quality of life, a lot of stress, and the principal doing much of the work.

There are advantages to distributing the leadership tasks to faculty in a school. In fact, by sharing leadership responsibilities with teachers – especially in professional learning - we can work smarter and make better decisions on behalf of students and their families. That is why we had an instructional leadership team in my school.

The main role of this team is making professional learning decisions on behalf of the school. These decisions are based on student data, as well as on trends and patterns of classroom practice observed during instructional walks and in conversation with faculty. A critical step in developing this team is *conducting interviews with interested teachers*. The process is described in Regie Routman's resource *Read, Write, Lead: Breakthrough Strategies for Schoolwide Literacy Success* (ASCD, 2014).

The Interview and Selection Process

Send out the role description of a teacher leader along with the overall purpose of the team to staff. All teachers are encouraged to apply. Include possible questions to ask them during the interview. This helps reduce anxiety around applying. These questions can be accompanied with an article that conveys better practices. In our specific context, I made copies of the *Educational Leadership* article "Every Child, Every Day" by Richard Allington and Rachael Gabriel (2012). The interview process and article made clear the direction we would be going as a school.

Go to "Characteristics of a Highly Effective Teacher Leader: Interview Tool" at the end of this action.

Teachers set up an appointment to interview with you during their prep. You can also reach out to a few key teachers in the building and quietly encourage them to apply for the team. These are individuals who have shown promise as teacher leaders in their instruction, their positivity, their ability to take a whole school perspective on school issues, and their excellent communication skills. In particular, they are seen by their colleagues as being respectful to all members of the school community.

Also worth noting is to not necessarily prioritize grade level representation. Although you want a diverse team, you also want the best candidates to represent your collective efforts.

During the interview, be an active listener. When I led this process, my laptop and smartphone were put away. In its place was a notebook and pen. While the experience resembled a formal interview (which is always good to practice), our time together was more of a conversation. For instance, I would ask a follow up question to a teacher's response to my initial inquiry. Here is an example of this dialogue:

- **Me:** "What was surprising to you after reading Allington's and Gabriel's article?"
- **Teacher:** "Well, I found myself realizing that we don't have students writing every day in our classrooms. Right now, writing is a part of our life skills curriculum, on a four-day rotation."

- **Me:** “I can imagine that recommendation would be surprising. Knowing this as a member of our instructional leadership team, how might you see us address this situation?”
- **Teacher:** (brief silence for her to think) “Maybe we could look at our school schedule and identify ways to better incorporate writing into the literacy block. We could also integrate writing in the content areas.”
- **Me:** “Thank you for sharing! Let’s make sure your ideas become a part of a future conversation with the leadership team.”

I believe we attracted the best candidates because the role description along with the article and questions that were shared out ahead of the interview made expectations clear. Prospective team members knew what they were getting into. It also filtered out any possible candidates who were not yet good candidates.

Keeping the group size between five and eight is ideal. Selecting members for the team is informal. Often, teachers are offered the opportunity right after the interview to avoid any unnecessary anxiety. If they aren’t a good fit at the time, you can use this process as a chance to give feedback for continued growth.

Culminate the process with a celebration at the next all staff meeting. Leadership team members can be introduced to the rest of the faculty. As a principal, I used this time to remind everyone in the room that this team is a decision-making body. While we would be visible in our work, such as sharing out agendas and opening meetings for anyone to attend so people could offer input, our group had the moral authority to determine our professional learning activities on behalf of staff, students and the larger community. This transparency helps ensure that future decisions made are met with less resistance.

This process of interviewing teachers for the instructional leadership team provides many benefits.

- Principals work smarter as a school leader. For example, one or more teachers could co-lead a literacy curriculum resource acquisition process with the principal.
- It professionalizes a normally arbitrary committee and gives the team an important purpose.
- The entire staff is aware of the schoolwide focus and the direction for the future.
- Teachers are affirmed for their commitment to professional learning.
- The principal and the teacher acknowledge both the strengths of the teacher and, as needed, set goals together for mutual growth and support.

I recommend this process to anyone aiming to drive instructional change. Essential is having the principal lead the instructional leadership team. Your presence and participation are vital to the school’s success.

Common Question: Can I let anyone who wants to be on the instructional leadership to join?

I used to allow anyone who was interested to join our instructional leadership team. While I would state the purpose for the team and offer a litany of descriptors for our work, there was no formal process for selecting members. Part of this lack of any system was due to my fear that few people would want to join. This left it open for anyone to become a member.

Resistance is a common issue for a few teachers. It can derail progress without a positive culture founded on mutual trust and respect in place.

That said, it’s important to have diverse opinions on your instructional leadership team. Using a process like this helps ensure that this diversity of thought doesn’t divert you all from your schoolwide mission, vision, beliefs, and goals. This system creates value and assigns importance to the work that teacher leaders will be doing.

Candidate:

Directions: Please bring this tool with you. It's designed to support our conversation and learn more about the strengths you would bring to the instructional leadership team.

Characteristics of a Highly Effective Teacher Leader: Interview Tool	
CHARACTERISTICS	CONVERSATION POINTS
Facilitator of Professional Development: Highly effective teacher leaders play a role in organizing and facilitating professional development that is personalized to meet staff needs. They can use data to set goals and support initiatives that promote continuous improvement.	"Talk about your willingness to possibly co-lead professional learning sessions that address identified staff needs." "What are your thoughts on using data to set meaningful goals for the team? How do you monitor progress over time?"
Effective Communicator and Collaborator: Highly effective teacher leaders initiate and are open to deep conversations about their school's shared beliefs and values. They welcome opportunities to apply new practices aligned with shared beliefs into their practice.	"Share your thoughts on how to have open conversations about our school's beliefs and goals. How can we make sure everyone feels heard?" "When thinking about integrating new practices into our classrooms, what strategies do you think could help align them with our shared beliefs?"
Supportive and Responsive Leader: Highly effective teacher leaders support the design and sustainability of professional development structures. They help monitor progress toward schoolwide goals and respond to the needs of the learning community. They facilitate networking and leverage the strengths of their colleagues to advance innovative practices.	"Effective teamwork is essential. What do you think it looks like at both an organizational level and a team level?" "How can we create systems that ensure our teams are developing and fostering a culture of feedback and innovation?"
Model of Best Practices: Highly effective teacher leaders consistently employ instructional strategies that lead to engaged learners and positive student outcomes. They discuss their own teaching methods with confidence and humility. Their willingness to share their process and resources helps colleagues improve their own practice.	"What were your thoughts on the article? Which practices did you find either affirming or promising?" "When discussing teaching practices, how can we balance confidence in our methods with humility and vulnerability?"
Builder of School Culture and Vision: Highly effective teacher leaders understand the mission and vision, and how it is aligned with the school's shared beliefs and values. They set the bar for being a self-determining learner, using promising practices to create a challenging and engaging learning experience for all their students.	"In what ways can we better live out our school's mission, vision, beliefs, and values in our daily actions and decisions?" - "How can we support each other in becoming more self-directed and self-determining learners? What resources or strategies might be helpful?"

Note: Some language here was adapted from Regie Routman's *Read, Write, Lead: Breakthrough Strategies for Schoolwide Literacy Success* (ASCD, 2014, p. 289). ChatGPT was used to help synthesize the information.

Action #7: Use an Instructional Framework to Support Teaching, Learning, and Leading

If you want to see change long term change in your school, you cannot mandate it. Teachers do not want to be told how to conduct their work anymore than other professionals do. Leaders are more likely to succeed when teachers are engaged in the study and implementing of the most promising instructional practices. Using an instructional framework is an opportunity for a school to come together around what best supports teaching and learning.

Perkins and Reese (2014) describe instructional frameworks as “a vision for more effective teaching and learning” that “provide teachers with a common perspective and language while allowing adaptation to different subjects, levels, and students.”

As an example, my last school developed an instructional framework to directly support teaching and learning during the pandemic. It was a condensed version of our previous framework: we only had five different areas with a description for each one. This helped simplify instruction during those challenging times.

- **Authenticity:** Students engaged in real-world tasks; mistakes encouraged as part of learning
- **Being clear:** Multiple ways of explaining concepts, such as through shared demonstrations
- **Communication:** Proactive, using multiple modes and entry points for learning
- **Discussion:** Student-centered, around important texts and topics
- **Empowerment:** Voice and choice in what students learn, and building on kids' interests (Renwick, 2022)

What made this framework special is we used feedback from families the school year before. We had asked them to share what they appreciated most about our instruction when we went virtual for those final months of the 2019-2020 school year. The summary of their comments helped form this instructional framework.

Common question: How do you best use an instructional framework?

An instructional framework can be thought of as a lens for teaching and learning.

Teachers can use it as they prepare instruction. They can keep the framework next to their planning resources, referencing it as they consider how best to guide students toward essential learning outcomes.

In highly effective classrooms, students are offered a window into how the components of an instructional framework can support their learning. For instance, a teacher can break down the elements of student-centered discussion. They may use protocols to ensure equity of voices. Collaborative norms such as paraphrasing and pausing are also effective (Garmston and Wellman, 2016).

Leaders can also use the framework. In this playbook, it is one of the three core tools for supporting teaching and learning. On the next page, you will find a template with directions for using a framework during instructional walks. Let the framework be your eyes in the beginning. Start small and find opportunities to connect what teachers are doing with the description of an effective practice.

The following example is from my work as a principal. I connected a kindergarten teacher's writing center with the “Authenticity” element of our instructional framework (bolded text) at the end of my notes. Both my acknowledgment of what's going well and my wondering affirmed the decisions she was making as a teacher.

Template: Instructional Walks Documentation Tool (with the instructional framework language at the bottom of the page to guide observations and conversation)

Teacher, Date, Time:
<u>Notes</u>

Instructional Framework

- ☐ **Authenticity:** Students engaged in real-world tasks; mistakes encouraged as part of learning
- ☐ **Being clear:** Multiple ways of explaining concepts, such as through shared demonstration
- ☐ **Communication:** Proactive, using multiple modes and entry points for learning
- ☐ **Discussion:** Student-centered, around important texts and topics
- ☐ **Empowerment:** Voice and choice in what students learn, and building on kids’ interests

Example: Instructional walk notes in a kindergarten classroom (the writing center part of the classroom visit is bolded)

Teacher, Date, Time: Ms. McSherry, April 22, 2022, 10:00am

Notes

Students could select which center to go to:

- Math blocks
- Arts and crafts
- Animal rubbings
- Classroom library/book boxes
- Writing center
- Playhouse
- iPad word recognition game

Students knew where to go and what to do. This routine and the expectations for each center appear to have been explained and demonstrated previously.

In the playhouse, students took on roles. "Can you help me out, sister?" They were able to self-direct their own play without any support from an adult.

One student selected the writing center. She wanted to write a letter "to my moms". There was an array of writing materials: colored and white paper, markers, scissors, stick glue.

Other students were pulled briefly for a recognition they received for a previous activity.

Ms. McSherry, thank you for allowing me to stop in today and learn with your students! When you set up your environment to promote authentic writing experiences, your students see themselves as writers. Are you finding similar outcomes in other spaces?

Instructional Framework

- ✓ **Authenticity:** Students engaged in real-world tasks; mistakes encouraged as part of learning
- ☐ **Being clear:** Multiple ways of explaining concepts, such as through shared demonstrations
- ☐ **Communication:** Proactive, using multiple modes and entry points for learning
- ☐ **Discussion:** Student-centered, around important texts and topics
- ☐ **Empowerment:** Voice and choice in what students learn, and building on kids' interests

Try it: Engage in your second round of instructional walks

While it's tempting to evaluate what we see in classrooms during these informal visits, it's important to hold off on any type of judgement. This is necessary for a couple of reasons.

- When we judge and evaluate performance, permission to make mistakes is reduced or even removed.
- Evidence captured during instructional walks is designed to inform a teacher's understanding of their own practice. Our role is to support that understanding objectively so they trust what we share.
- Instructional improvement happens best when teachers feel safe to try things out and innovate.

When teachers engage in continuous improvement, so too will you. There is a reciprocal relationship in professional learning when leaders and teachers become partners in this process.

With that, start your second round of instructional walks. The following steps and tracker will support your efforts.

Step 1: Treat the instructional framework as a guide, not a checklist or a rubric.

Use an instructional framework to help you see what's already going well in the classroom. Come into each classroom from an appreciative stance. For example, the writing center with paper, pencils, and markers inspired joy and purpose with Ms. McSherry's students. I noticed this because I understood what "authenticity" is in the classroom.

Step 2: Let teachers know what you appreciate.

Like anyone, teachers want to be recognized for their efforts and strengths. Consider reading aloud your notes from your instructional walk as a thank you note. The teacher and students will appreciate your acknowledgment. You want to reinforce what you want to continue to see in classrooms before looking for opportunities for improvement.

Step 3: Capture your notes in a digital storage system.

Before I gave my handwritten notes to the teacher, I scanned them into Evernote or Google Drive. I created folders in my application of choice. Each handwritten note or image is captured as a single file. These artifacts become a "portfolio of wins" that teachers can use to celebrate, to reflect on their work, and/or to include in their evaluation systems if they so choose.

Step 4: Look for trends and patterns from your instructional walks and summarize your notes.

Like the first round of instructional walks, keep track of your classroom visits. This time, document what element of your instructional framework was present in each classroom. Continue to write a short headline of your impressions of every visit. Then look for trends and patterns in your observations. What strengths are teachers demonstrating? What areas of the instructional framework are not present? Why? This is powerful data to inform your next instructional leadership team meeting as you all prepare for professional learning.

Go to the next page for an instructional walks tracker template, including questions for reflection.

Template: Instructional Walks Tracker and Reflection Tool

Directions: Enter each teacher's name and their goal. During the instructional walk, note the primary element of the framework observed. After visiting the classroom, describe what resonated with you in the third column.

[illegible]

Reflection After Visiting All Classrooms

Respond to as many of these questions as needed to help you synthesize what you learned. Share your insights with your instructional leadership team and ask for their thoughts.

- What went well? How did teachers and students respond to your notes of appreciation?
- What was surprising? Did any observations differ from your expectations?
- What questions do you have?
- What areas of the instructional framework were not as present? Why do you think that to be the case?
- What did you learn after this round of classroom visits?
- How might you use this information to inform future professional learning? Develop an agenda topic for your next instructional leadership team meeting to discuss this data and your insights.

Action #8: Make Professional Learning a Priority

My first year as an elementary principal, the strategic plan was already set. Before I was even hired, the instructional leadership team had committed to watching and studying the professional learning series, Regie Routman in Residence (<https://www.regieroutman.com/inresidence/>). Teacher leaders agreed to facilitate the viewing of videos of Regie Routman teaching, along with discussion, reflection, and the trying out the teaching strategy.

As a new head principal, it was both humbling and wonderful to not have to take the lead on delivering professional learning. My ego would tell me that, as the administrator, I should be front and center of this experience. But once I began to engage with the professional learning, my eyes opened to this way of leading.

- I sat alongside my teachers. I took notes and engaged in discussion with faculty about the topics.
- I volunteered to try out these new strategies, such as shared writing, in classrooms.
- When I engaged in instructional walks, I held informed conversations with teachers. We spoke the same language; what we were learning in Regie's videos was also represented in our instructional framework.

This was not just a wonderful first experience for me from a leadership perspective. Evidence shows that when the school principal promotes and participates in teacher learning and development, student learning improves. Viviane Robinson and colleagues found that when leaders are "actively involved with their teachers as 'leading learners' of their school", student achievement improves significantly: an effect size of 0.84 (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

We saw this impact. Our students met the year-end goal as writers based on fall and spring assessment results.

I also recall as a school leader when professional learning took a back seat. My feedback felt stale. I would go into classrooms, unsure about what to share to promote critical thinking or reflection. What were we focused on as a school? How were we getting better together?

Effective professional learning is the oxygen for continuous improvement. In the simplest terms, effective professional learning is any experience that leads to improved instruction and subsequently better student learning outcomes.

- It gives life to new ideas and ways of teaching in classrooms.
- It offers a goal to strive for, as well as a shared language for discussing instruction with colleagues.
- It motivates educators to engage in continuous cycles of improvement.
- It is the only way schools will achieve the outcomes they want to see in their students.

What specific actions lead to these outcomes? I have found in my time as a teacher and leader that a key element of any professional learning which leads to improvement is **teachers seeing high quality instruction in action**. The depicted instructional practices are innovative and practical.

This can be difficult to facilitate in schools. Limited schedules, lack of available time, and resource constraints can inhibit these opportunities. In the experience I just shared, we had to meet after school to engage in this professional learning; we didn't have that time built into our days.

Despite the obstacles, what's possible? Remember that you now have an instructional leadership team to help make this type of professional learning a priority.

One promising approach already shared is teachers leading a professional learning initiative. It is recommended by Perkins and Reese (2014). They explain this approach by distinguishing between *political visionaries* and *practical visionaries*.

- **Political visionaries**, such as principals and positional leaders, show “conspicuous commitment to the innovation, advocating for it, making it a priority, defending it against critics, explaining it to parents, appearing at key events, and allocating resources.”
- **Practical visionaries** are “sometimes a team of two or three teachers” who “manage the program on the ground, organizing faculty groups and events and conducting some training and coaching.” Perkins and Reese note that practical visionaries need to “have significant time formally allocated” to prepare and guide professional learning.

Put another way, political visionaries like yourself help clear the pathway so that the practical visionaries can lead the group on your journey toward excellence.

Try it: Develop Strategic Goals Based on High Quality Instructional Practices

Schools and teachers are often asked to develop “S.M.A.R.T.” goal. It stands for “specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound”.

What I have found challenging about S.M.A.R.T. goals are they ask educators to try and predict the future. If you have worked in schools long enough, you understand that kids and the dynamics of learning are hard to predict. In addition, prioritizing outcomes over process trains our attention to focus on things we have little control over.

Instead of just developing S.M.A.R.T. goals, **develop a strategic goal that focuses on instructional practice**. We do have control of our actions. Student learning improves only when we examine the beliefs and thinking behind our behaviors, and then implement practices based on an agreed upon framework for instruction.

Use the design tool on the following page to develop a strategic goal that ensures high-quality instructional practices are the priority in our goals.

Strategic Plan Design Tool

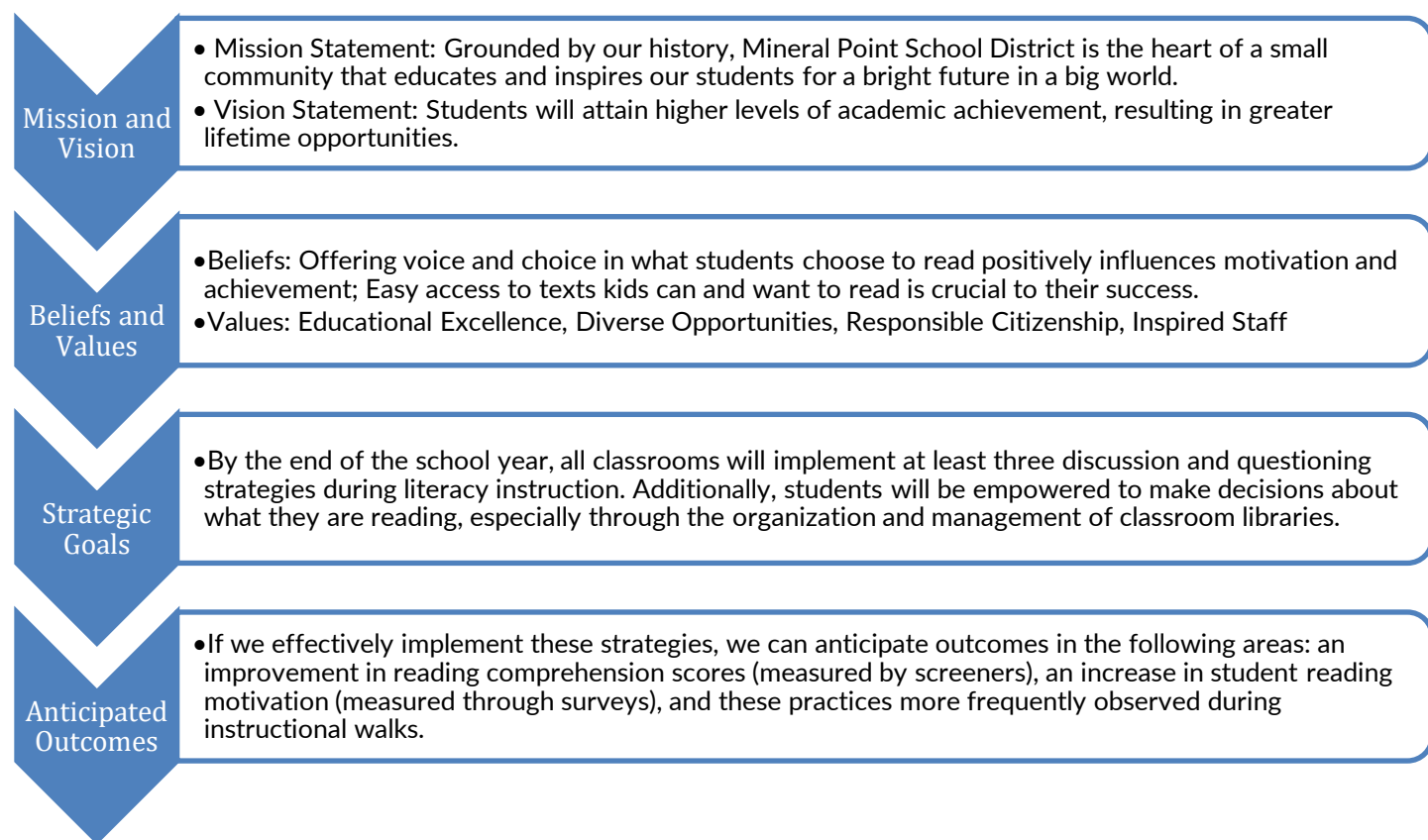
As an instructional leadership team, use the following process to design a strategic plan that will help you achieve your desired outcomes (improved student learning).

Directions

1. Find your school's or district's mission and vision. Paste that language into the top space.
2. In the second space, enter your organization's beliefs and values. They can be distilled from your mission and vision. Use the vision language and value statements that best align with your plan for the year.
3. Identify the strategic goals: the instructional strategies you will implement into your school's collective practice. If possible, avoid setting goals about implementing resources or programs. They don't improve student learning; high-quality teaching does.
4. For each goal/strategy, include the anticipated outcomes to know whether you are successful.

Before making this plan public, **ensure that your goals and outcomes are aligned with you mission, vision, beliefs and values.** Take time as a team to read through your draft. Revise to ensure there is coherence.

I included an example from my previous school. We noticed through different data, including my instructional walks, that student discussion, questioning, and empowerment were not present enough in classrooms. Therefore, we committed to learning more about the benefits of these strategies and how best to implement them in our instruction. Our professional learning plan supported this initiative using the same strategies of discussion, questioning, and empowerment within self-selected professional book studies.



Action #9: Facilitate Coaching Conversations

To review, up to this point you have accomplished the following:

- Made a daily commitment to classroom visits.
- Empowered others to manage at least one of your previously held tasks.
- Identified your core beliefs and values to guide decision-making.
- Wrote and shared a staff newsletter that highlighted your strengths and vision.
- Created an instructional leadership team.
- Introduced an instructional framework to guide teaching, learning, and leading.
- Prioritized professional learning for yourself and as a school.

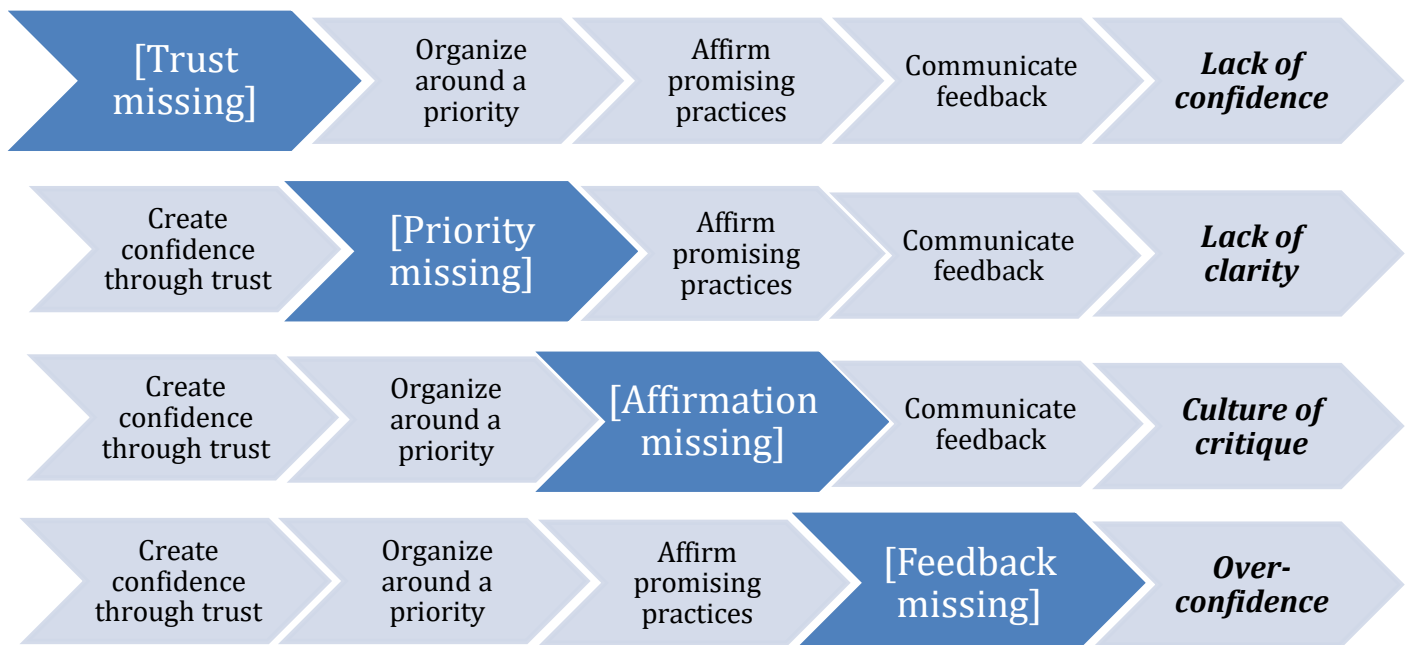
That's a lot of progress; please celebrate if you haven't already!

All this work has prepared you for the heart of your practice as an instructional leader: **facilitating coaching conversations with faculty.**

You might be wondering, "Why all this preparation for a coaching conversation?" There are several reasons. I'll highlight a few:

1. Without **trust** in place, teachers may lack confidence in your intentions and credibility.
2. Without knowing the school **priority** through the staff newsletter and instructional framework, teachers may lack clarity on how to grow as professional.
3. Without first **affirming** what teachers are already doing well, coaching conversations may create a "culture of critique", where teachers feel like they aren't doing anything well.

Don't get me wrong. Teachers need feedback. Otherwise, they may develop overconfidence or an inaccurate view of their own instruction. They may never reach their potential. See below for a visual summary.



Being able to communicate feedback during coaching conversations is dependent on establishing a positive school culture based on trust, clarity, and appreciation.

Redefining Feedback

In the context of leading like a coach, feedback is not about telling teachers what they are doing incorrectly or making suggestions for improvement. That's giving advice. Instead, we are seeking to establish the start of a sustainable dialogue around a personal challenge, opportunity, or problem identified in their work.

Feedback is both the information observed during instruction and the way that information is communicated.

- Types of feedback include but are not limited to numbers, observational notes, images, and video.
- Ways we communicate feedback include visually, aurally/in words, and nonverbally (i.e. body language, tone of voice)

Professional dialogue with teachers, in combination with these types and ways, is the primary approach to communicating feedback. You are seeking to learn more about the thinking behind the teacher's decisions. As well, you approach each conversation as an opportunity to build their capacity as a self-directed learner.

Three Key Skills for Communicating Feedback

When it has not been clear what I should say or do during coaching conversations, I have always come back to three key skills for communication feedback.

- **Paraphrasing:** Summarizing, inferring, or abstracting what you heard the other person say.
- **Pausing:** Remaining silent and holding space to process what has been shared.
- **Posing questions:** Asking the other person for their thoughts and insights on the topic of conversation.

These three coaching skills, also referred to as “norms of collaboration” (Garmston and Wellman, 2016), helps ensure you are avoiding advice or critique. They keep the thinking around the topic with the teacher.

You can use the following protocol for communicating feedback that teachers will hear and use to improve their instruction.

O.W.N.

- Observe
- Wonder
- Next Step

This basic routine has helped me organize the previously mentioned coaching skills. It's not something I adhered to all the time. Rather, it was a scaffold I could lean on when I was unsure how to proceed with a coaching conversation.

The following transcript, of me supporting a teacher in an 8th grade ELA classroom, is one example of how this protocol can be used. I had previously observed the teacher facilitating a book club conversation. The students were reading fantasy fiction texts of their choice. The teacher had allowed for a significant amount of classroom time for students to share their thinking about their book with the group.

Transcript and Analysis of a Coaching Conversation	
Conversation	Analysis
- Me: "I noticed the students were eager to share their thinking about what they had read." - Teacher: "Yes, they are a lot of fun." - Me: "I appreciate the space you are willing to give to students to be readers and develop a literate community. How do you find time to fit in everything else, for example assessments?" - Teacher: "Actually, when the students are sharing what they understood from the books they are reading with the group, I can check their understanding." - Me: "So, you use the open conversation to document each student's level of comprehension of what they are reading?" - Teacher: "Yes, although informally." - Me: "Thanks for clarifying." [pause] "I'm thinking about what you just said...is there also a formal approach to checking for student's understanding? What does that look like?"	- I shared what I had observed, using the sentence stem, "I noticed..." - The teacher confirmed what I noticed. - I affirmed the promising practice. It served as a transition to my wondering (<i>posing questions</i>) about the constraints of time with facilitating student-led discussion. - The teacher explained the thinking behind his decision. - I summarized what I heard from the teacher (<i>paraphrasing</i>), using my own language – "document" – to name his practice. - The teacher confirms and clarifies ("informally"). - After taking a few seconds to think about what I want to say next (<i>pausing</i>), I posed another question that invited the teacher to consider a possible next step in their practice.

As you can see in this example, feedback is not a one-way street. It's a conversation to support understanding for both the teacher and for me. These types of interactions feel reciprocal instead of the hierarchical process of formal evaluations. Our discussion is infused with the language of the instructional framework. Later I can publicly recognize the teacher's approach to teaching readers in our staff newsletter.

Maybe most important, I am supporting this teacher's capacity to coach themselves. The language I choose to use positions them as decision-makers. They "own" the growth they make as professionals, today and in the future.

Common Question: How do I give feedback to teachers who are struggling?

Rather than labeling a teacher as "resistant" or another simple category, consider that they are in a temporary state of mind that is not conducive to learning. States can change. This change begins when we get curious about their situations instead of certain about how to solve their problems.

Consider the following questions to support teachers as professionals, using inquiry to promote new thinking.

Ten Questions for Supporting Teachers as Professionals

Teacher Action or Reaction	Traditional Leadership Response	Leading Like a Coach Response
The teacher selects a professional learning goal that is unrelated to the school priority.	The leader communicates that all professional learning goals need to be aligned with the priority.	"How does your goal help the school move toward our collective vision?"
The teacher struggles to commit to a goal; it feels too big to accomplish.	The leader makes suggestions; they do the thinking for the teacher.	"What's safe enough to try?" (Kim and Gonzales-Black, 2018)
The teacher cannot identify what they want to work on; they have too many responsibilities on their mind.	The leader gives advice about what they see in the classroom.	"How can I help, and where do you need the most help?" (Routman, 2014)
The teacher feels stuck in trying out a new instructional strategy. They are not sure about the next step.	The leader offers their opinion on how they might proceed.	"What you faced situations like this before, what were some of the strategies that worked for you?" (Costa, Garmston, and Zimmerman, 2014)
The teacher refuses to try and apply a new/innovative instructional strategy.	The leader mandates that they must implement the strategy, or they avoid conflict and let the issue go.	"What obstacle is in your way?" (Robinson, 2018)
The teacher expresses frustration with implementing part of the new curriculum resource; they express fondness for the old program.	The leader reminds the teacher that a new curriculum resource has been approved by the school board.	"What if this could be easy?" (McKeown, 2021)
The teacher is unclear why you come in for instructional walks, writing down things they already know.	The leader continues to "sell" this approach to supporting teaching and learning.	"Which student would you like me to focus on today? What would you like me to look for?"
The teacher is getting caught up in trivial matters, things outside their control, i.e. class size.	The leader spends an inordinate amount of time discussing the issues or dismisses them outright.	"What really matters?" (Ryan, 2016)
The teacher makes an insensitive or uncaring remark.	The leader chastises the teacher publicly or doesn't respond at all.	"I heard you say _____. Is that accurate?"
The teacher is looking to you for closure near the end of a coaching conversation.	The leader, unsure about how to end the conversation, simply says "thank you" and leaves.	"Reflecting on our conversation, what value was added to your practice?" (Carroll, 2018)

Try it: Engage in Your third round of instructional walks

In the first round of instructional walks, your goal was to be present. Your regular visits have improved trust with faculty through your predictability and positivity.

In the second round of instructional walks, your goal was to acknowledge the positive aspects of their instruction. Your visit was also an opportunity to affirm any promising practice the teacher has learned and is trying and applying in their classroom.

For this third round, you are transitioning from only recognizing and affirming what teachers are doing well. You are starting to lean into the relational trust you have established with teachers as you communicate feedback about their instruction.

For example, the classroom with the wonderful writing center also had a classroom library that felt separate from each other. I asked the teacher during our follow up coaching conversation, “How might the writing center support your classroom library, and vice versa?” They eventually found some picture books about writing, which were prominently displayed in the writing center. Also worth noting is that I did not make this suggestion. Instead, I trusted the teacher to engage in self-directed improvement.

I supported the teacher through my language and seeing possibility vs. one right way to do things. Her idea of bringing in books about writing to the writing center was something she could own. I could now share this innovation with other teachers during future instructional walks. Everyone wins.

Common Question: What if it is difficult to hold a coaching conversation with a teacher during class time?

Sometimes the teacher is in the middle of direct instruction when you complete an instructional walk.

In these situations, use the master schedule in your padfolio. Select a time later that day or the next day when the teacher does not have students. Put that appointment on your calendar. Share the event with your teacher so they know you are coming in to follow up with the coaching conversation. This only needs to be a five-minute commitment.

However, don't be afraid to invite the teacher into a conversation during the walk if the students are engaged in guided or independent practice. Just as excellent teachers support students throughout instruction, so too can you support the teacher during instruction. Be clear about this approach when you start instructional walks. If you are unsure whether you can interrupt for a few minutes, ask for permission first. You might say, “Is now an okay time to talk about what I noticed?”

Action #10: Analyze Your Instructional Walk Data

Data (noun): *factual information, such as measurements or statistics, used as a basis for reasoning, discussion, or calculation*

- Merriam-Webster dictionary

When you hear the word “data”, percentages and other quantitative results are likely to come to mind.

However, if you understand the definition of the concept, then notes from our instructional walks can also “count” as data (no pun intended). What we notice and name in classrooms is rooted in evidence from our observations. When organized and analyzed, instructional walks can serve to inform professional learning discussions and decision-making. We already use this information to support coaching conversations at the individual level. Why not at the team and even the organizational level?

Next are two ways to use your instructional walk data to support improvement in teaching and learning.

Data Protocol #1: Analyze the frequency of the elements of the instructional framework

After documenting several rounds of instructional walks, tally up how frequently you have noticed each element of the framework during that period time. Create a chart or graph to visualize the quantities.

I engaged in this process when my previous school was using the observational framework from Reggie Routman’s book *Read, Write, Lead* (2014). Below is the chart I created from my instructional walk data.



It was clear from the data that student-led interaction and purposeful discussion were not common elements of our collective instruction. Paired with achievement scores showing that our students weren’t growing as

readers, the instructional leadership team determined that more professional learning was needed in these areas. When requested, I could also share this data with teams to guide their learning community work.

Data Protocol #2: Synthesize summaries of instructional walks to find schoolwide trends and patterns

During my last year as a principal, I used reflection questions like what was already shared in this playbook to summarize the “headlines” from instructional walks. I noticed six takeaways as schoolwide trends:

- Everyone is using the new literacy curriculum resource and reflecting on what is working so far.
- Teachers are personalizing the resource to meet their students’ needs.
- In general, we are trying to “go slow to go fast”: not rushing ourselves and ensuring students are staying with instruction.
- Integrating routines and skills within other areas of instruction are present.
- **Classroom libraries are at different levels of student involvement right now; the implementation of the new resource may be a factor.**
- When I asked one student what their “One Best Thing” was so far this school year, she said “reading”.

This information was shared in one of my weekly staff newsletters. The instructional leadership team also discussed these insights and subsequent implications for professional learning at the next meeting.

The bolded takeaway was one area for potential growth: empowering students to organize and manage classroom libraries. It became a point of conversation with teachers on how best to keep this established practice a priority.

Common Question: How do I keep all these processes and tools organized?

This resource offers a lot of information to take in as a leader. The next section offers two organizational systems to manage this work: the weekly instructional leadership plan and the twelve-week action cycle for leading like a coach. See the following short descriptions along with the templates at the end of this playbook.

Bringing It All Together: Tools for Developing and Sustaining a Self-Directed, Adaptive School

Congratulations! You have accomplished a lot on your journey to becoming a better instructional leader.

To keep the journey going toward developing and sustaining a self-directed and adaptive school, consider the following three tools to support you in your professional learning.

A. Instructional Leadership Trust Inventory: Staff Survey

Send out this survey to faculty once you have applied the ten actions in this playbook. Consider also completing the self-assessment again. Then compare these results with the previous results. How have you grown in the eyes of your teachers? From your own perspective?

B. Template: Weekly Instructional Leadership Plan

Use this tool to manage both your daily instructional walks commitment and all the other tasks that come with your position. Don't think of each day on Page 1 as a to-do list; treat it like a *to-done* list. Tracking the tasks you do each day will help you recognize your accomplishments. It will also help you assess what you are doing that is getting in the way of achieving your instructional goals.

On Page 2, you will find a set of blank lists with headings. They can be used as “containers” for all the tasks and requests that may come your way while you are engaged in instructional walks. For example, instead of checking on the approval status of a budget request a teacher noted they had made, you can write it down on your “Computer” list to check later. (This tool is adapted from David Allen's book *Getting Things Done*, 2015).

C. Template: Twelve Week Action Cycle for Leading Like a Coach

As I shared in a previous example, I waited too long at my last school to begin instructional walks and leading like a coach in general.

To create a healthy sense of urgency, use the twelve-week action cycle to schedule your time most efficiently. The actions described in this playbook are organized under one of the first four principles of leading like a coach. The fifth principle, Help Teachers Become Leaders and Learners is embedded in the process.

Regarding the weekly time estimates, be flexible to your context. For example, I could generally get in three instructional walks a day. But I also oversaw one school. For leaders assigned to multiple buildings, you may have to adjust this schedule.

Here are how the time estimates are established for the primary activities:

- Instructional walks = 5 hours a week (one hour a day)
- Instructional leadership team = 5 hours to set up; 1 hour per meeting
- Staff newsletters = 1 hour a week

A. Instructional Leadership Trust Inventory: Staff Survey

Directions: Please complete this anonymous survey. Your candid responses will help support our professional learning.

Leadership consistently applies policies, and their actions are reliable. 1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place
Leadership keeps the promises made to staff and ensures that processes are reliably followed. 1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place
Leadership shows genuine concern for the personal well-being of the staff. 1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place
Leadership prioritizes the professional growth of staff and considers our best interests in their decisions. 1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place
Leadership looks out for the personal welfare of the faculty members in this school. 1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place
Leadership creates an environment where it's acceptable to discuss feelings, worries, and frustrations openly. 1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place
Leadership encourages staff to share their opinions, and they are receptive to hearing what is shared. 1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place

Leadership manages the school effectively, ensuring that it runs smoothly. 1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place
Leadership is confident in their ability to manage teams and meet organizational goals. 1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place
Leadership is honest and can be taken at their word. 1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place
Leadership places the needs of the students ahead of their political interests. 1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place
Leadership respects my role as an educator and strives to earn the respect of staff. 1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place
Leadership treats staff with respect and values our contributions. 1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place
Leadership has confidence in my expertise as a teacher. 1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place
Leadership takes a personal interest in the professional development of teachers. 1 – Not yet 2 – Initial steps taken 3 – Progressing 4 – In place

B. Template: Weekly Instructional Leadership Plan

Week of:

Priority/Strategic Goal:

Monday	Tuesday
Instructional Walks: ☒ ☒ ☒	Instructional Walks: ☒ ☒ ☒

Wednesday	Thursday
Instructional Walks: ☒ ☒ ☒	Instructional Walks: ☒ ☒ ☒

Friday	Newsletter Ideas/Topics
Instructional Walks: ☒ ☒ ☒	

Task Lists: Add ideas or requests to the appropriate context to complete them later.*

- *Three questions for discerning what to add to any list:
- 1. Is this task worth doing? If not, politely decline.
 - 2. Is this task yours to do? If not, who?
 - 3. Are any of these tasks actually a project (more than one step)? If so, who can help you?

Requests I am waiting to hear back on	Phone calls to make

Emails to write and send	Tasks I can accomplish in the office

Tasks I can accomplish on my computer	Ideas to possibly consider for the future

C. Template: Twelve Week Action Cycle for Leading Like a Coach

DIRECTIONS: ENTER THIS SCHEDULE INTO YOUR CALENDAR. ADJUST ACCORDINGLY BASED ON CONTEXT.

WEEK	Create Confidence through Trust	Organize Around a Priority	Affirm Promising Practices	Communicate Feedback	Estimated Time/Week
1	Take self-assessment on trust; send out staff trust survey				2 hours
2	Send out emails about instructional walks	Organize resources for instructional walks			4 hours
3	Engage in the first round of instructional walks	Empower staff with task processes			6 hours
4		Examine core beliefs and values			6 hours
5		Publish inaugural staff newsletter			6 hours
6	Interview for and create the instructional leadership team	Publish staff newsletter			6 hours
7	[Instructional Walks]	Select instructional framework as a leadership team; publish staff newsletter	Engage in the second round of instructional walks		7 hours
8	[Instructional Walks]	Meet as a leadership team to plan professional learning; publish staff newsletter			7 hours
9	[Instructional Walks]	Publish staff newsletter			6 hours
10	[Instructional Walks]	Meet as a leadership team to continue planning professional learning; publish staff newsletter	[Instructional Walks]	Engage in the third round of instructional walks	7 hours
11	[Instructional Walks]	Publish staff newsletter	[Instructional Walks]		6 hours
12	[Instructional Walks]	Meet as a leadership team to examine instructional walks data; publish staff newsletter	[Instructional Walks]		7 hours

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