
Introduction

“Which one do you want to practice?” asks elementary principal Nikki Bridges. She’s talking about the list she and new teacher Jackson Tobin have just made together: a list of the instructions Jackson most often delivers during reading lessons, and the actions he expects his students to take in response. They’re the kind of small actions that can make or break his reading lesson—actions as simple as looking up at the teacher when listening to instructions or saving your place in a book you’re not finished reading.

And Nikki’s not one to let reading instruction—or any other kind of instruction—wait. Her school, Leadership Preparatory Ocean Hill (LPOH), serves students in Brooklyn who don’t normally have educational success. Ninety-two percent of the students qualify for a free or reduced lunch, and few are reading when they enter kindergarten. Yet Nikki has a phenomenal track record for overcoming these obstacles: by the end of fourth grade, LPOH students were number one in the entire state of New York on the state math exam and in the top 1 percent for reading. But for all her prowess, Nikki could never traverse this path alone: to get results like these, she needs every teacher to fly.

That’s where Jackson comes in. Right now, he’s furrowing his brow at the list Nikki referred to a moment ago. “God,” he says, laughing ruefully, “I want to

practice all of them.” Jackson’s in his first month of teaching second grade, and although he’s focused and eager to learn, he’s somewhat anxious, too. Like any teacher, Jackson longs for a classroom where all the simple instructions on the list before him are followed swiftly and smoothly, with every student ready and willing to learn. And like any new teacher, he’s intimidated as well as driven by the enormity of that task.

But when Jackson chooses the first direction on the list—Finger Freeze, which requires students to mark their place in the book they’re reading with a finger, then look up from the page to watch for their teacher’s directions—something changes. Nikki settles at a desk to role-play the part of one of Jackson’s students. Jackson rises, taking on the role of teacher.

Watch clip 1 to see what happens next.



Watch clip 1: Teacher Radar—Scan
(Key Leadership Move: Plan/Practice)

Jackson ends up practicing the Finger Freeze maneuver three times. The first time, Nikki suggests that he add a quick positive narration as he checks that all students are performing Finger Freeze correctly (“Nikki’s got it!”). The second time, a bit flustered, he goes through the motion of praising Nikki’s responsiveness without realizing that, in fact, she’s staring at her book and not at him. But the third time, when Nikki gazes into the distance rather than following Jackson’s directions, he makes eye contact with her, then leans in and points to the spot on the page where she should be placing her finger. He has her full attention.

“How’d that feel?” Nikki asks, slipping back out of character. Jackson grins. “Better,” he admits.

It’s true: Jackson has just become a better teacher. Without his realizing it, his voice, and even his posture, have grown stronger. He’s internalized a new teaching skill that he will be able to access immediately when he returns to his classroom tomorrow morning. What’s more, he’s learned this skill after teaching for a remarkably short time. Nikki didn’t wait until a midyear review of Jackson’s teaching to coach him on this skill; instead, she practiced it with him in depth just a handful of weeks into his career. The result? Jackson got better faster than he could have without her guidance.

It would be easy to underplay the impact of Jackson's learning such a small skill. Teaching is a vast, complex art—there's still so much more for Jackson to master on that list of reading lesson procedures alone. Considering this long path ahead, Jackson and Nikki could throw up their hands in discouragement, forgoing coaching and leaving Jackson to learn almost exclusively by trial and error. Or, just as dangerously, Nikki could give Jackson a long list of broadly worded feedback, leaving him with fifteen things to work on at once on the grounds that each is too important to implement later. Despite the good intentions of both leader and teacher, Jackson would be hard put to respond to all this feedback at once; the likely result would be all fifteen pieces of teaching wisdom falling through the cracks.

But what Nikki and Jackson's work goes to show is that there is another way: that skill by skill and week by week, teachers can get better far faster through coaching than they ever could without it. Over the course of Jackson's first year, improvements like these, ones that looked infinitesimal on their own, had an enormous impact. By June, when the second graders Jackson worked with were preparing to make their way to third grade, all his students were reading at or above grade level. The following year, Jackson had even more success. Jackson's results matched those of a seasoned virtuoso, even though it would take many more years for him to reach that level of artistry himself. He's like a violinist who wouldn't yet book a solo concert, but who can certainly contribute great music to an orchestra of other musicians who are among the most skilled in the nation.

This book tells the story of how school leaders guide new teachers to success. It reveals the practices of master teaching that every new teacher can learn and replicate within a few months of beginning to teach, and it breaks down the tools great leaders use to pass those practices on. More important, it will show you how you can use these tools, too.

CHANGING THE GAME

“What made you better?” Nikki asks Jackson next. “What enabled you to be so effective just now?” At first, Jackson focuses on the specifics of how he redirected Nikki when she was off task. He gave clear, precise instructions, he remembers; and he made direct eye contact with Nikki when she didn't comply, letting her know that his instructions applied to her.

But while all these actions are important, the one that interests Nikki most is something much more basic. All Jackson’s newfound success was possible because of two key root actions: identifying what he would have to do to implement Finger Freeze effectively, and practicing doing exactly that.

Imagine if Nikki had instructed Jackson simply to “make sure your students are following your instructions.” That sounds like a straightforward direction, but in fact, it’s fairly abstract. What does a teacher actually have to *do* to “make sure they’re following”? Exactly what actions—or inactions—on the part of the students constitute nonresponsiveness? Even the leader delivering this direction may not know, and the first-year teacher almost certainly doesn’t. But checking that all students have their fingers on their books, their feet on the floor, and their faces forward—that’s something Jackson could, and did, master with great precision. And more important still, it’s something he could, and did, master in an empty classroom, in the isolated space between one school day and the next. By practicing the concrete actions that would improve his ability to lead his class, Jackson gave his students the gift of not having to wait for him to grow as a teacher. He returned to them the next day already measurably better.

It’s this focus on the actionable—the “practice-able”—that drives the success of Nikki’s coaching.

Core Idea

Focusing on the actionable—the “practice-able”—drives effective coaching.

When Nikki works with her teachers, her focus is not merely on motivating and inspiring them (though she’s more than capable of that, too): it’s on teaching them concrete skills they can practice, perfect, and put into action. That’s how she ensures that the time she dedicates to leading professional development sessions, supporting lesson planning, and observing classes is time well spent—time that has a direct impact on what teachers do and how well students learn. It’s how she boils down the wisdom of her own experience as an educator into concrete skills that any new teacher can practice—and perfect—one by one.

Nikki’s approach is a great departure from what teacher training usually looks like. As Robert Marzano and colleagues noted in *Effective Supervision*, the vast

majority of teachers are observed one or two times per year at most—and even among those who are observed, scarcely any are given feedback as to how they could improve.¹ The bottom line is clear: teachers aren't receiving much coaching. As a consequence, educators are very rarely asked to practice the micro-skills that will make them better at teaching—especially not under the supervision of an expert who can help them get better on the spot. Unlike soccer players, actors, or doctors, teachers tend to have to learn on their own. And when they do get some attention, it comes in the form of a single annual observation and a multipage list of written feedback: an evaluation rather than a coaching session.

Nikki revolutionizes this paradigm by making her goal not to evaluate teachers but to develop them. She gets in the game with her teachers, focusing relentlessly on the specific, crucial actions she knows will win them the championship.

Core Idea

The purpose of instructional leadership is not to evaluate teachers but to develop them.

The challenge of such microcosmic coaching is that in addition to boiling down the wisdom of her experience into specific, practice-worthy actions, Nikki must engineer her feedback to land like a perfectly placed set of dominoes. Going into immense depth on one skill at a time, each building on the last, is precisely what makes Nikki's approach to coaching effective. Pile on too many skills at once, and the chain of dominoes will tumble and scatter: the teacher will run out of both the time and the energy to internalize them all as we saw Jackson do with Finger Freeze. But teach the right skill at the right time, and the result is a steady chain reaction of success.

The short-term result is what looks like agonizingly slow growth. But what would have happened if Nikki had instead asked Jackson to practice everything on the list they had made—if she'd attempted to provide a fully outfitted teaching toolkit instead of a single helpful strategy? The same thing that usually happens when you give someone a large box of unfamiliar tools. At worst, the box will go unopened. At best, the person will eventually figure out how to use the most essential tools—but not as many of them, as quickly, or with as rich a level of understanding as if you'd introduced him or her to each tool one by one.

This book is far from the first in recent years to attest to the power of isolating and practicing individual skills in depth. Among the most significant has been Daniel Coyle's groundbreaking *The Talent Code*, which sets out to identify the secrets of the most successful professionals in fields from athletics to astronautics and regions from Japan to Brazil. What, Coyle asks, do top-twenty tennis players, pop stars from Dallas, and the Brontë sisters—three canonized writers all from the same “poor, scantily educated British family”—have in common?²

The answer: not in-born talent, but practice. At Moscow's Spartak Tennis Club, trainees practice holding their racquets in just the right position for untold hours before they even try swinging completely or hitting a ball. At the Septien Vocal Studio, singers spend years perfecting their vocal technique piece by piece—a preteenage Jessica Simpson worked for two years specifically to eliminate the vibrato from her voice. And in the small British town of Haworth, the seeds of *Jane Eyre* were planted as young Charlotte Brontë and her siblings entertained themselves by scribbling fantastical tales in the series of notebooks scholars call “the tiny books,” giving each other an unconscious but highly intensive training in the art of building a story. Olympic athletes, chart-topping pop stars, and literary giants alike became great not through innate gift but through hard, smart work: by practicing minute aspects of their craft over and over and over again.

What Nikki accomplishes in the field of education is no less remarkable than what the athletes and artists Coyle observed have done—and her methods are no different. In the moment we just witnessed, Jackson rehearsed like those Olympic tennis players with their frozen racquets: he practiced one essential component of teaching a great lesson until it was cemented into his muscle memory so deeply that tomorrow, when he returns to his students, he'll put it into action almost automatically. And over the course of his first year, Jackson will repeat this process with dozens of other skills. His newly improved ability to scan for responsiveness will make it far easier for him to, for example, scan students' independent writing assignments as they work on them, so that he can give them the in-the-moment support they need. The one skill he learned today will make an immediate impact on his teaching, will pave the way for him to grow even more as a teacher, and—above all—will stick. That's what makes that skill powerful.

Core Idea

Great instructional leadership isn't about discovering master teachers ready-formed.
It's about coaching new teachers until the masters emerge.

This book is based on the success not just of Nikki and Jackson but of a rapidly growing community of educators like them. From the coast to coast (and beyond the sea), thousands of educators are finding extraordinary achievement as a result of building—not just finding—great teachers. Some of these are individuals you'll get to know over the course of this book: they hail from the following cities (listed from west coast to east):

San Jose, CA

Ogden, UT

Denver, CO

Dallas, TX

Tulsa, OK

Shreveport, LA

New Orleans, LA

Chicago, IL

Santiago, Chile

Rochester, NY

Alexandria, VA

Philadelphia, PA

Wilmington, DE

Newark, NJ

Brooklyn and Queens, NY

New Haven, CT

Boston, MA

These teachers and leaders come from nearly every type of public school: small, large, district, charter, turnaround, start-up—and many other designations unique to their cities. They have pioneered the practices in this book and have either provided their testimonials or graciously (courageously) volunteered to have some of their best work filmed to show what truly exemplary coaching looks like.

Over the course of the book, we will break down the most critical actions leaders and teachers must enact to achieve exemplary results. We'll show what skills new teachers must learn to ensure that their students' learning never has to wait, separating what's important generally for them to know from what's urgent for them to know now. We'll reveal the coaching techniques that school leaders can use to teach them those skills. And perhaps most important of all, we'll provide every tool you need to make all these strategies work for you so that you can guide your own cohort of teachers to the same levels of success.

WHY FOCUS ON NEW TEACHERS?

Teacher coaching is a vast topic—and, at the time of writing, a hot one. In the past few years, thinkers in education have published on everything from who should be responsible for conducting training³ to the role of technology in training⁴ to whether teaching is a trainable skill at all.⁵ Why, in the midst of all this conversation, would this book be focused so heavily on *first-year* teacher development? Why does the first year, in particular, matter?

Success for All Students

First and foremost, the first year matters because a first-year teacher is a professional in action, doing the urgent daily work of teaching. He or she is entrusted with students who will be in first-grade language arts or tenth-grade chemistry only once. It may be their teacher's first year of delivering instruction, but it's the students' *only* year to learn the content.

The risk that great teaching won't happen that year, then, is one those students can't afford for us to take. It's all too likely that the result will be a year of learning lost to them forever. And while this would be an intolerable outcome in any circumstances, it would be nothing short of disastrous at this moment in the United States, because more classrooms than ever are being led by new teachers.

As Richard M. Ingersoll has put it, our nation is currently experiencing an overall “greening” of its teaching workforce; that is, more teachers have fewer years of experience than was the case in previous decades. The most common teacher in 1988 had fifteen years of teaching experience; but by 2008, the most common teacher was a first-year teacher, and a quarter of all teachers had been teaching for five years or fewer.⁶

So if we leave the development of new teachers to chance, we're putting a greater-than-ever proportion of our students at an unacceptable disadvantage. This book is about our best and only other option: embracing the task of getting new teachers better faster with determination and focus, so that they and their students will both thrive. It's about passing down whatever we can of our experience as educators, because if we leave our new teachers to learn exclusively from their own experience, we're leaving students in a position where they might or might not get great instruction this year. Instead, we must insist that they *will*. As the leaders cited throughout the book will testify, the work with new teachers is fundamental for guaranteeing consistent student achievement from year to year.

Success for New Teachers

Giving quality guidance to new teachers is critical to the development not only of the students but also of the new teachers themselves. In fact, coaching may be one of the most important factors that determines both how successful a teacher's career is and whether the teacher chooses to continue along that career path at all.

Recently, prominent sources such as *Education Week* and the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) have chronicled a worrying trend: more U.S. teachers than ever before—40 to 50 percent—are leaving the profession within their first four or five years of teaching.⁷ Worse still, these sky-high attrition rates tend to peak at the schools that can least afford to spend time handpicking a new crop of teachers every year. “The consequences of high teacher turnover are particularly dire for our nation's low-performing, high-poverty schools,” the NCTAF reports. “Many of these schools struggle to close the student achievement gap because they never close the teaching quality gap—they are constantly rebuilding their staff.”

What's spurring this mass exodus? The experts agree: our newest teachers aren't getting enough on-the-ground support.⁸ When new teachers take on their first teaching jobs, they too often land in much less collaborative communities than the ones they thrived in while earning their college degrees. In college, they are open to a constant stream of insights from both leaders and peers. When they reach the school classroom, however, they are asked to do the real work behind closed doors; they have nowhere to turn when challenges arise. When they need guidance the most, it's hard to find it.

Even at schools that promise guidance and teamwork, the pervasiveness of this closed-door teaching culture can inhibit attempts to deliver on those promises.⁹ “Many states offer some form of mentoring for brand new teachers,” concedes the National Education Association's Cynthia Kopkowsi—indeed, she adds, twice as many new teachers are mentored now as were ten years ago. “But there's a broad range from an involved, routine presence to a sporadic visitor.” With ineffective coaching, as with no coaching at all, new teachers tend to jump ship.

But with *good* coaching on their side, new teachers stick around. As extensive studies by Ingersoll show, when schools do provide new teachers with meaningful leadership and partnership, the new teachers are significantly more likely to remain in the profession.¹⁰ In fact, Ingersoll discovered, the more support we provide, the more new teachers we tend to hang on to. Teachers who receive just one

or two basic forms of support—such as “regular supportive communication” with a school leader—are only slightly more likely to continue teaching than their peers who aren’t given any support at all; but those who receive a comprehensive induction package that also includes professional development and lesson planning support are dramatically less likely to do so.

Why would coaching make teachers want to stay—more, even, than financial incentives do? Because by and large, teachers are motivated by their desire to do well by their students. When they’re left floundering, they see little hope of accomplishing what they set out to do. But when, with the help of a leader, their start-of-year anxieties are swiftly transformed into triumphs, their desire to teach is fueled rather than diminished. They’re working hard in either case, but this way, they’re working smart, making progress that’s just as visible to them as it is to their coaches. They see their success reflected in that of their students, and they remain eager to do more.

What all this means is that if we want to keep new teachers teaching—if we want to build a generation of educators who will do their work well and passionately for many years—we must reach them when they come to us, not a few years down the road. We must spend the first year guiding every teacher to build outstanding teaching habits by trying the right strategies and watching them work. If we don’t, they’re likely to leave us; but when we do, they can become the all-stars our children need.

Success for All Teachers—and Yourself

Not only new teachers can benefit from the guidance in this book. Given that most teachers were not supported effectively in the early stages of their career, many of the skills and practices in this book apply to them as well. In fact, when we piloted this sequence of skills in our schools, we noticed that most teachers had areas where they could improve their instruction, and these skills helped close that gap. In the end, great coaching works for all teachers, and getting better at coaching new teachers makes you better at coaching any of your teachers.

Over the course of the past ten years, we have coached more than fifteen thousand school leaders. When discussing the challenges of leadership, we have seen an overwhelmingly common pattern emerge: the classrooms of a small handful of teachers create 80 percent of the problems for a leader. They contribute to more discipline problems, more office referrals, more disgruntled parents, and disproportionately more work. Just as teachers leave the profession when they struggle,

so do leaders: according to a 2014 study by the School Leaders Network, scarcely more than 50 percent of principals remain in the profession for more than three years, and many flee specifically because they hunger to spend more meaningful time on instructional leadership tasks than is typical in the culture of our nation's schools today. Learning to target your coaching on these teaching “hot spots” can dramatically improve not only your success rate but also your satisfaction as an instructional leader.¹¹ Successful coaching has a positive ripple effect on every aspect of school leadership.

MYTHS AND REALITIES OF COACHING NEW TEACHERS

Every action recommended in this book emanates from an unshakeable core belief: effective coaching makes people better at what they do. This may sound like something it would be easy for any educator—anyone who believes in the power of teaching—to agree with, but the rarity with which coaching is used effectively to train teachers reveals that that's not necessarily the case. What follows are a few common myths that frequently prevent school leaders from using coaching to drive teacher development—and the realities that debunk them.

Myth 1: Practice Doesn't Make Perfect—Experience Does

How long does it take to become proficient at teaching? Many in the profession would say that the answer is ten years. In this view, it's only experience that can teach you how to teach.

Yet that commonplace answer isn't sustained when looking at the teaching profession. Ten-year teachers are not all alike: some are vastly more developed and successful than others by any measure.¹² Teachers develop at extremely different rates for many reasons. The one thing we do know, however, is that effective coaching can greatly accelerate that growth. Great teaching isn't limited to those who have a certain amount of experience or some innate, indefinable spark of talent. It's accessible to those who can learn what makes great teaching, and practice it until it becomes their teaching.

Myth 2: Just Any Practice Will Make Perfect

Recently, what had been a widely accepted truism about practice came under debate. Known as the 10,000-hour rule and popularized by Malcolm Gladwell, this common

wisdom held that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to master any given skill. Get thousands of hours of practice in, and virtuoso-level success is all but guaranteed.

Now, a team of scientific researchers believes that they have proven this to be false. The findings have been displayed in many publications with titles like “Practice Doesn’t Always Make Perfect.”¹³ The number of hours logged practicing, this study finds, is erratic at best as a predictor of future success. The popular conclusion many professionals have drawn from this information is that innate talent must be a better indicator of success than practice.

In fact, both versions oversimplify the reality: practice does make perfect, but it has to be *quality* practice. The quality of the time you spend practicing a skill, rather than the sheer quantity of time, is what affects your results. We’ll describe in more detail what quality practice looks like in the second section of the Principles of Coaching chapter of this book, “Plan, Practice, Follow Up, Repeat.” For now, however, suffice it to say that perfect practice does make perfect, and a knowledgeable coach can make sure perfect practice happens all the time.¹⁴

Core Idea

Practice doesn’t make perfect, but perfect practice does.

Myth 3: Teachers Need to Master Management Completely Before They Can Focus on Learning

Too many educators assume that an early focus on school culture and classroom management must trump student learning altogether—you must wait for months to think about learning. But in reality, fostering student learning is like planting a seed. It’s true that certain environmental factors need to be in place for what you’re trying to grow to become strong and thrive: students need an ordered classroom to learn, just as seeds need water, air, and light to bloom. But the seed doesn’t magically shoot up into a fully grown plant all at once when the seed has been nourished by a set amount of water, air, or light. Instead, you water it for a few days, and its roots emerge. You continue a bit longer, and the plant begins poking up out of the soil. Keep watering and place the new sprout in the right spot on the windowsill, and leaves appear. The creation of the right environment and the growth of the plant are ongoing processes that happen side-by-side.

In just the same way, student learning can't wait to take root until after the perfect classroom environment has been established. That's why we've set up the management and rigor skills that we believe teachers must learn within the first few months of the school year to be mastered in tandem. They're two separate threads of teacher development, to be sure, and are presented in this book accordingly; but our students cannot afford for us to wait even a few weeks to begin attending to their learning, regardless of whether flawless classroom management is in place. Management needs to be a greater focus in the earliest days of the year than it will need to be after the first ninety days, but rigor is a focus at all times, and the results of the teachers in this book show that making room for learning from the beginning pays off.

WHAT IS "BETTER," AND HOW FAST IS "FASTER"?

Better: A Scope and Sequence of Skills

We set out to determine what a teacher needs *first* in order to be better at his or her job as quickly as possible. What do we mean by "better"? More able to meet students' most immediate needs. If we do our work with new teachers well, their students should be able to learn as effectively in their classrooms as in those of more experienced teachers, never having the chance to fall behind.

There are many others who have documented the skills of better teaching—in particular, Doug Lemov in *Teach Like a Champion* and Jon Saphier in *The Skillful Teacher*. These are both invaluable books for any educator interested in *Get Better Faster*; many of the skills that appear in this book are ones that could never have been identified without them.

But neither book will tell an overwhelmed new teacher what's most important to master first. Prioritizing all these incredibly important teaching skills is the goal of this book. *Get Better Faster* orders essential teaching skills in terms of what is most important for new teachers to learn first. These skill areas are then broken down into even more specific actions a teacher needs to take to perform each skill effectively. As you'll see, those specific actions are what a leader practices with a teacher, as Nikki did with Jackson. This level of specificity is what made Jackson's practicing effective, and having determined those types of actions for all these most highly prioritized skills is what this book does for you so that you can get to the work of coaching teachers around those actions.

Faster: Ninety Days

Get Better Faster also proposes a ninety-day timeline for mastering the skills. This book is far from the first to zoom in on this period of time. In his professional handbook *The First 90 Days*, Michael Watkins claims that close to 75 percent of leaders he interviewed agreed with the statement, “Success or failure during the first few months is a strong predictor of overall success or failure in the job.”¹⁵

Get Better Faster, however, focuses on the first ninety days with a slightly different philosophy. For a teacher, succeeding early is more than a predictor of the trajectory his or her career will take. It’s a matter of immense urgency, because the more quickly a teacher masters the most important skills of teaching, the more quickly students get to develop the skills of being students. Getting to that level of competence within the first three months of teaching is an extraordinarily ambitious feat—but it’s possible for a teacher who follows the methods in these pages, and for the sake of our students, it’s well worth striving for.

While most applicable to the first ninety days of school, this sequence of skills and trainings can be started at any time. If a teacher starts later or develops less rapidly, this ninety-day plan can be used to close the gap. More experienced teachers could pick a later starting point on the trajectory (if they’ve mastered everything listed in the first thirty days, they could start with the next thirty days). The coaching techniques presented here will help teachers develop at an accelerated rate wherever they begin, and can help throughout the year.

HOW THIS BOOK IS STRUCTURED

Here is a quick overview of how this book is structured.

Principles of Coaching

Technique	Description
Go Granular	Lasting growth doesn’t come from trying to learn everything at once: it comes from working on just one or two skills at a time and polishing those skills down to the smallest detail.
Plan, Practice, Follow Up, Repeat	The plan-practice-repeat cycle—planning how the teacher will implement a piece of feedback, guiding him or her in practicing, and repeating this with the next piece of feedback—is the essence of getting better faster.

Technique	Description
Make Feedback More Frequent	Some feedback is best delivered in the moment. The section on principle 3 describes how to give real-time feedback—a practice already embraced in disciplines from medicine to music—to teachers.

The First Ninety Days in Five Phases

Phase: Date	Coaching Blueprint	Management Trajectory	Rigor Trajectory
Phase 1: Dress Rehearsal	Professional development, including the final PD before school: the “dress rehearsal”	Develop Essential Routines and Procedures	Write Lesson Plans
Phase 2: Days 1–30	Feedback schedule and first feedback meeting	Roll Out and Monitor Routines	Independent Practice
Phase 3: Days 31–60	Weekly data meeting	Engage Every Student	Respond to Student Learning Needs
Phase 4: Days 61–90	Real-time feedback for rigor	Set Routines for Discourse	Lead Student Discourse 101
Stretch It	(All the above!)	None (focus on rigor!)	Lead Student Discourse 201

This book is divided into two basic parts: an introductory guide to the leadership principles that make coaching powerful, and a breakdown of the skill-by-skill coaching that is most urgent for a new teacher to receive during each of four phases. Let’s take a more detailed look at what each part of the book will include.

Principles of Coaching

The following are the core principles of coaching described in the first major section of the book:

- **Go Granular.** Coaching new teachers on just one or two skills at a time and polishing those skills down to the smallest detail may feel tedious, but it’s the

key to dramatic, lasting growth. This section will show why precise feedback is so powerful—and how to tell if your granular feedback is granular enough.

- **Plan, Practice, Follow Up, Repeat.** In a nutshell, the cycle of planning, practicing, and repeating is the essence of getting better faster. Once you have the right piece of granular feedback in hand, the key is perfect practice: planning the execution, implementing the plan, and repeating until mastered. This part of the book will explain how.
- **Make Feedback More Frequent.** The more immediate the feedback, the quicker the turnaround. This section shows the value of a practice already embraced in disciplines from medicine to music: giving real-time feedback. The section provides a guide for bringing real-time feedback to the classroom while still respecting the teacher's role as the class leader.

Phase 1 (Pre-Teaching)—A Dress Rehearsal

Phase 1 takes place in summer before students even enter the classroom. Summer professional development incorporates as many opportunities for new teachers to practice new skills as possible, culminating in an all-staff dress rehearsal of the first day of school from start to finish.

- **Coaching Blueprint.** Phase 1 focuses on leading summer professional development, and particularly the final PD before school starts: the dress rehearsal.
- **Management Skills: Develop Essential Routines and Procedures.** New teachers will design, to the smallest possible detail, the routines and procedures that will keep their classrooms running smoothly, so that they can roll them out when students arrive.
- **Rigor Skills: Write Lesson Plans.** New teachers need routines for one reason: to be able to teach the content. In Phase 1, teachers set the foundation for rigor by learning the basics of writing and revising lesson plans: starting from the end goal (assessment and objective) and building the most essential pieces.

Phase 2—Instant Immersion

School has started! While a few new skill areas will be introduced to new teachers during Phase 2, the major focus will be on getting new teachers to perfect what

they began learning during Phase 1, now in the context of having their students on board as well.

- **Coaching Blueprint:** Phase 2 focuses on building an observation and feedback schedule and planning the first feedback meeting.
- **Management Skills: Roll Out and Monitor Routines.** Having designed their classroom routines and procedures during Phase 1, new teachers must now roll them out with the students and polish them so that they work just as well in practice with the students as they did when planned during the summer. New teachers revise or tweak any routines that aren't translating well into the classroom and develop the basic classroom management skills needed not only to get students to follow basic procedures but also to keep them on task for the work that matters most.
- **Rigor Skills: Independent Practice.** Effective independent practice is the end game of student learning: if students aren't practicing, they won't learn. This stage is about providing adequate time for independent practice and monitoring whether students are completing it proficiently. Learning how to monitor independent practice is the foundation for targeting instruction to students' most urgent learning needs.

Phase 3—Getting into Gear

By the second month of the year, new teachers have enough foundations in their class to start pushing for 100 percent: 100 percent of students on task, 100 percent intellectually engaged, and 100 percent learning.

- **Coaching Blueprint:** Phase 3 focuses on using student work to drive teaching, and on a powerful way for leaders and teachers to support each other in doing so: the weekly data meeting.
- **Management Skills: Engage Every Student.** At this phase, management is in a place such that most students are on task and the classroom generally looks well managed, and the new teacher's focus is on bringing the remaining off-task students up to match the pace of the rest. This will allow the learning to take off.
- **Rigor Skills: Respond to Student Learning Needs.** With more students fully engaged, a teacher can start to target instruction to identify and close the gaps

in student learning. It all starts by collecting the evidence: getting students to reveal their thinking both individually and as a group, and verbally as well as in writing. This information gives the teacher the ability to reteach on the spot when students need something modeled again.

Phase 4—The Power of Discourse

With lessons now highly attuned to the needs of every student, a teacher can start to turn the heaviest intellectual work over to the students. The key to accomplishing this is to foster rigorous student-driven discourse.

- **Coaching Blueprint:** Phase 4 focuses on giving real-time feedback for rigor, a natural but often overlooked resource for the leader.
- **Management Skills: Set Routines for Discourse.** The importance of management is always that it creates a foundation on which rigor can be built stably. The link between the two becomes ever clearer over the course of the Scope and Sequence, and is never more evident than during Phase 4, when the management techniques a teacher will need the most all directly function to set the stage for rich student discussions. These include perfecting pacing to create ample time for student talk, and facilitating engaged small-group work to pave the way for better whole-class discourse.
- **Rigor Skills: Lead Student Discourse 101.** Leading class discussions effectively is one of the greatest art forms of instruction—and one of the most difficult. The challenge arises when students give incorrect responses. Here teachers will learn how to accelerate and target learning through the fine art of asking the right student the right question at the right time.

Stretch It—Ready to Paint

Congratulations! You and your teachers have built a foundation for effective teaching for years to come. Where to go next? Stretch It is just that: an opportunity to stretch oneself further on the journey to lifelong learning as a teacher and leader. What's included in the Stretch It section of this book is by no means an

exhaustive list of everything else teachers can learn after the first ninety days (that would entail multiple books!). Instead, it describes our recommendations for the *next*-most-urgent skills to begin tackling. Here's what those skills are, and why they're so important.

- **Coaching Blueprint:** The primary coaching focuses of Stretch It are ensuring that all the progress that the teacher has already made remains in place, and continuing to shift the bulk of the intellectual work being done during class to the students.
- **Rigor Skills: Lead Student Discourse 201.** Phase 4 Rigor focused on getting the teacher to prompt students to voice great insights during discussion. Stretch It Rigor takes this a step further, focusing on getting students to do the prompting themselves, too. The teacher will train the students in the habits of discussion that allow intellectuals of every age to collaborate—not compete—to arrive at meaningful conclusions.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is designed to be a toolbox you reach for again and again in your work as a leader and coach—to give you all the materials you need to build a cohort of successful new teachers in ninety days. It strives to pass on the expertise of educators who are scaling the greatest heights in teacher coaching and student achievement on a national level. In theory, a written instruction manual for school leaders should be sufficient. But our experience in coaching tells us there will always be more to perfecting a skill than reading about it. Leaders learn much more when they can “see” it, and they become masters by doing.

To that end, *Get Better Faster* is designed to help you see it, name it, *and* do it. Each chapter described in the previous section of this introduction includes not only text (naming each skill) but also a selection of videos of leaders in action (letting you see it). The final step—doing it—falls to you. With the right guidance included, you will know you are not alone in achieving this level of success!

Here are a few guidelines for using all this material to your advantage.

Have a Pencil Handy

The goal of *Get Better Faster* isn't just to read about all this—it's to be able to put it into action. So the text is broken up by tools that will help you see, plan, and implement each technique that is being described. These include:

- Videos. These show how the skills presented in this book look in action. Just as a student (or a new teacher) needs modeling, most of us need to see what a skill really looks like in order to be able to DO it. The clips capture the techniques we're describing better than words ever could. They take you directly into the classrooms of the top teachers and leaders in the nation who are getting the results which show that these techniques work.
- Stop and Jots. These are moments to process, think critically, and develop conclusions on your own before reading on. We remember more when we write while we read; this is a way to “learn by doing” even as you're reading this book.

These are meant not as bonuses but as core aspects of the book—the thinking and planning you get to do yourself as you go. The book is written, but you're writing the story of your school—so keep a pencil in hand and use it!

Don't Skip the Coaching Principles and Blueprints

The coaching principles that launch this book—and the coaching blueprints found in each phase—aren't the cherry on top to the specific coaching actions recommended in each phase. Rather, they're essential techniques without which delivering the coaching actions will be much less likely to bring about lasting change. If you skip ahead to one of the phases, you will be missing the coaching foundation that will allow you to dive effectively into the specific coaching techniques listed for each teaching skill.

We recommend this even for readers who already know about the coaching techniques from a workshop or from the observation and feedback chapter of *Leverage Leadership*. Here, each principle has been honed to focus on specific, critical aspects of teacher development in more detail. Going granular, practicing relentlessly, and giving more frequent feedback are practices we always knew were powerful, but we have learned more recently exactly how much they determine the impact of observation and feedback, and why.

In addition to those blueprints, there are over fifty “Findings from the Field” embedded throughout the text from educators just like yourself: coaches, principals, and even teachers sharing their own tips based on using this material. Enjoy each unique nugget of wisdom!

Use It—Your “Blueprints”

Once you’ve read the book, it will be easy to pick off the shelf and turn to the most important sections for your use. To make those sections even more accessible, we have consolidated the key points of the book into a few documents (some embedded in the book and others in the appendix and on the DVD) that can be printed and carried around as you walk the school.

Here’s an overview of the most critical ones:

- **Get Better Faster Scope and Sequence.** This document is the most frequently referenced throughout *Get Better Faster*, and the summary Scope and Sequence breaks down every action new teachers must be performing in order for them to master each of the teaching skill areas this book presents. This is the perfect resource to have at hand when conducting classroom observations.
- **Get Better Faster Coach’s Guide.** The Get Better Faster Coach’s Guide takes the Get Better Faster Scope and Sequence and adds key probing questions, scenarios for practice, and cues for real-time feedback. This is the go-to guide for planning your feedback meetings with your teachers.
- **Six Steps for Effective Feedback.** First introduced in *Leverage Leadership*, the Six Steps for Effective Feedback one-pager has been revised and improved to reflect the best practices of the highest-achieving leaders. It is a one-page guide for giving feedback effectively.
- **Real-Time Feedback PD.** On the DVD you’ll find full PD materials to coach instructional leaders around the keys to effective feedback and real-time feedback. These materials, including session plans, PowerPoints, and hand-outs, will allow you to run your own PD on feedback for the leadership team in your school.

Please note that both the Scope and Sequence and the Coach’s Guide are designed to be as printing-friendly as possible, which means that the information they provide will be slightly more concise than the corresponding sections in the book.



Findings from the Field: Print Them Out and Create a “Rainbow Guide”

I’ve found for myself and fellow school leaders that the greatest barrier to using the tools is the start. To eliminate that barrier, I created a “Rainbow Guide”: a bound version of the [listed resources], each one on a different colored paper as we were given in Leverage Leadership Institute, and then I added a simple tab to each resource. The impact has been palpable. Now, during our monthly principals’ training, we have our Rainbow Guides in hand and jump right to the Get Better Faster Scope and Sequence. It has made my leaders’ ability to access their tools both fun and more expedient. Now famous, the Rainbow Guide is like the Sorcerer’s Stone: it made my leaders better faster.

—Erin McMahon, principal manager, Denver, Colorado

DIVE IN—MEET YOUR TEACHERS WHERE THEY ARE

Once you internalize the coaching principles and move on to the part of this book that breaks down the Get Better Faster Scope and Sequence piece by piece, it’s less crucial to read straight through each chapter of the book from beginning to end. If you have time to do this, then by all means do so! If, however, you’re in the midst of coaching a teacher and need to just dive right in, the book is set up to accommodate that. Simply begin by reading over the Scope and Sequence itself, then jump to the part of the book that specifically addresses in greater detail what your teachers need the most.

Here’s the best way to navigate the book.

If you are using the Scope and Sequence before the school year begins . . .

- **Read the Coaching Principles and then the Phase 1 Coaching Blueprint.** The Phase 1 coaching tips will help you prepare summer PD sessions that train teachers in the skills they’ll need most from the first day of school onward.
- **Start from the top—the first Phase 1 action step.** A strong foundation is critical to beginning the year. Therefore, start with the first action steps in Management (Routines and Procedures 101 and Strong Voice) and Rigor

(Develop Effective Lesson Plans 101 and Internalize Existing Lesson Plans). Do not move forward until a teacher is proficient in these areas!

If you are using the Scope and Sequence at any other point in the year . . .

- **Read the Coaching Principles.**
- **Identify your teacher's action step.** Go to the Get Better Faster Scope and Sequence (first pages of the book; a printable version is on the DVD) and determine the highest-leverage action step for your teacher. Remember to think waterfall: start from the top and stop as soon as you hit a problem area for the teacher.
- **Go to the appropriate phase and read the Coaching Blueprint.** For example, if your teacher is struggling with getting students to cite evidence, jump to Phase 3 and start with the Phase 3 Coaching Blueprint.
- **In that same phase, jump to the Rigor or Management section (depending on your action step) and go to the page that matches your teacher's struggle.** Use the Quick Reference Guide that appears at the beginning of each Management and Rigor section to identify the challenges that the teacher is most struggling with, and skip to the corresponding section that presents the skills that will help him or her overcome those specific challenges.

READY TO DIVE IN!

Every school year will bring new challenges and opportunities that are unique to each school. But one thing is constant: worldwide, a legion of new teachers will enter schools, fresh from college or other jobs, ready to make a difference but not sure how. That's where you step in.

Let's begin the journey of serving each of our teachers to maximal impact! Time to turn the page.

