

Coaching in Action: Three School Leadership Scenarios

School leaders, instructional coaches, and teacher leaders have many opportunities each day to coach in ways that can build relationships and empower colleagues.

Use the following practical examples as a reference guide when you find yourself in similar circumstances, or as discussion starters during leadership team meetings and professional development sessions. The goal is to illustrate how listening, reflecting, and framing—three coaching mindset strategies outlined by Melinda Glowacki in her December 2025/January 2026 *Educational Leadership* article “Coach Today, Save Time Tomorrow”—can transform challenging interactions into opportunities for connection and collaborative problem solving. By studying these examples, you’ll begin to recognize patterns and develop your own coaching responses that fit your unique leadership context.

Scenario 1: The Overwhelmed Teacher

The Situation: A veteran teacher approaches you after school, looking frazzled. “I can’t handle my 4th period class anymore. They’re completely out of control, and nothing I try seems to make a difference.”

Listen: Instead of immediately offering classroom management strategies, pause and ask open-ended questions: “Tell me more about what you’re experiencing with this group. What does ‘out of control’ look like?” Listen for underlying concerns—is this about student behavior, curriculum pacing, or something else entirely?

Reflect: “It sounds like you’re feeling frustrated because the strategies that have worked for you in the past aren’t connecting with this particular group of students. You’re questioning your effectiveness, and that’s really weighing on you.”

Frame: “You have 20 years of successful teaching experience, and every class has its own personality. Let’s think about what you know about these specific students and what approaches might resonate with them. What would success look like for you in that classroom, and what’s one small step we could try this week?”

Scenario 2: The Resistant Team

The Situation: During a department meeting, several teachers express resistance to a new district initiative: “This is just another thing on our plates. We’re already doing too much, and now they want us to add this, too?”

Listen: Rather than defending the initiative or explaining its benefits immediately, seek to understand their perspective: “Help me understand your concerns about implementing this new program. What specifically feels overwhelming about adding this to your current responsibilities?”

Reflect: “I’m hearing that you feel like initiatives keep being added without anything being taken away, and you’re worried about the impact on your students and your own well-being. You want to do right by your students, but you’re feeling stretched thin.”

Frame: “I appreciate you being honest about the workload concerns. Let’s explore this together—where do you see potential connections between this initiative and what you’re already doing? And what support or resources would help you implement this in a way that doesn’t add to your plate?”

Read “Coach Today, Save Time Tomorrow” by Melinda Glowacki in the December 2025/January 2026 issue of *Educational Leadership* magazine. <https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/coach-today-save-time-tomorrow>

Scenario 3: The Parent Complaint

The Situation: An upset parent calls a meeting with you about their child's teacher: "My child's teacher is picking on him! She's always calling him out in class, and he's starting to hate school. I want him moved to a different classroom immediately."

Listen: Resist the urge to defend the teacher or explain school policy around moving students to different classes. Instead, focus on understanding the parent's experience: "I can see you're really concerned about your son. Can you help me understand what your son has told you about his experiences in class that's making you feel this way?"

Reflect: Take time to rephrase what you hear the parent say so you can be sure you're interpreting the situation correctly. "You're worried because your son, who used to love school, is now reluctant to come. You feel like he's being singled out, and as his parent, you want to protect him and help him succeed."

Frame: "We both want the same thing—for your son to feel successful and supported at school. Let me gather some more information so we can understand the full picture. I'd like to observe the classroom and talk with the teacher, and then we can meet again to discuss what we've learned and determine the best path forward. How does that sound to you?"

Key Takeaway

In each scenario, the coaching approach takes more time initially but prevents escalation, builds trust, and creates collaborative solutions rather than top-down mandates or quick fixes that may not address the root issue.

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Editor's note: This tool was created by Educational Leadership staff with the assistance of Claude AI.