Podcast: Leaders as Coaches

In this episode of the podcast, Steve relates the need for coaching as the leadership behavior that is required to support educators serving students today.

Read the Forbes article here.

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PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Announcer : 00:00 Take a deeper dive with Steve Barkley in one of his five books. Available in electronic and printed formats, add Steve's books to your district's resources or to your personal collection at barkleypd.com/books.

Steve [Intro]: 00:14 Hello and welcome to the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. For over three decades, I've had the opportunity to learn with educators at all levels, both nationally and internationally. I invite you to listen as I explore my thoughts and learning on a variety of topics connected to teaching, learning, and leading with some of the best and brightest educators from around the globe. Thanks for listening in.

Steve: 00:38 Leaders as coaches. Listen to this paragraph that comes from a Forbes article published in December 2019, prior

to the Corona virus' impact. The title of the article was "The leader as Coach." "Rapid, constant and disruptive change is now the norm. And what succeeded in the past is no longer a guide to what will succeed in the future. 21st century managers simply don't and can't have all the right answers. To cope with this new reality, companies are moving away from command and control practices and towards something very different in a model which managers give support and guidance rather than instructions and employees learn how to adapt to constantly changing environments in ways that unleash fresh energy, innovation and commitment. The role of the manager in short is becoming that of a coach."

Steve: 01:52 Consider how descriptive those words are for administrators, instructional coaches and teacher leaders in schools today. I'm currently working with leaders in a district where the pandemic had a heavy impact on families. Here is their current plan for this year. School is opening in a totally virtual environment, probably lasting through October. The students have been given Chromebooks purchased through the CARES act. Hotspots are also being distributed across the community. Hopefully, following the end of October, they will begin a limited hybrid model with some students in school and others at home. The plan has that being followed by a revised hybrid model, increasing the amount of time that students will be at school. Everything going well, at some point later, all students will be returning to the school. These leaders need to be tapping into teachers' energy, innovation, and commitment.

Steve: 03:25 There is no way we can be telling these educators what they should do. None of us have been in this situation before. Even in the spring, as teachers began working remotely with their students, it was with students that they had built relationships with and had set expectations with as they worked in classrooms. Right now, they are meeting students and parents for the first time virtually. Educators at every level

need to be learners in order to be teachers and leaders. As the Forbes article mentioned, coaching is becoming integral to the fabric of a learning culture. A skill that good managers at all levels need to develop and deploy. An effective manager as coach asks questions instead of providing answers, supports employees, instead of judging them and facilitates their development, instead of dictating what has to be done. Asking and listening need to be critical coaching leader behaviors. Ask and listen, replaces, tell and sell. Asking questions that spark the coachee's insights, unlocking an individual's potential to maximize their own learning is the key to being an effective coach.

Steve: 05:09 I use an approach in my coaching that guides my asking and listening. I work to make sure that I understand what the other person is thinking before I say anything about what I'm thinking. So what kind of questions can help a coach understand? Consider this example that's found in the Forbes article. An executive begins with an open ended question such as, "how do you think things are going?" This invariably elicits an answer very different from what the executive had expected. So they reformulate the question, but this too fails to evoke the desired response. With some frustration, they start asking leading questions such as "don't you think?" That phrase "don't you think" generally leads to a defensive response from the person hearing it because whatever follows "don't you think" is really what the manager is suggesting the person should be thinking. This makes it increasingly less likely that the person being coached is moving into a positive future direction.

Steve: 06:40 Eventually, the feeling that the conversation is going nowhere leads the executive to switch into a full telling mode in order to get their conclusion across. At the end of such an exercise, no one has learned anything about the situation or about themselves. I frequently find coaches in a post-conference beginning by asking the teacher, "how do you

think the lesson went?” I discourage that question as a cause for an evaluation without sufficient time for reflection and perhaps without the person having the information that the coach has observed. I suggest that one begins with questions that are more specific at first to what the teacher saw and heard and then perhaps to the evaluation of individual events or components. In reality, for coaching, there is no need to evaluate the learning experience as a whole. My questions might sound like this. “What did you see and hear as the students responded to your challenge question? How had you expected them to respond?

Steve: 08:11 Did anything during the activity surprise you? You had asked me in advance to pay attention to your English language learners as the
class occurred. What did you notice about them? Here are notes that I recorded about each of the four students. Do any questions emerge for you as you consider what I recorded? What has been reinforced in your thinking? What are you questioning? What are your thoughts on what you want to explore or tackle as you move ahead?” Here’s another example that I might employ if I were coaching teachers who were starting this school year virtually with a new group of students. If you were starting the year with your students in your classroom, what would be your most important outcomes from the first week of school? Why are those things high on your list? What are the importance of those things in a virtual setting?

Steve: 09:28 Are there other outcomes you’d add to the virtual setting? How are you thinking about approaching these outcomes? What are you wondering? What are indicators that you’ll be looking for that suggest your plan is working for you? If I can sit in virtually with your class, is there an observation role that I could play for you? What might you want me to look for and listen for? Hopefully, the reflection generated in this pre-conference combined with my, and the

teacher’s observations would lead to a post-conference that would provide insights for the teacher. I am sure it would produce insights and learning for me. For coaching to have a real impact, it needs to become embedded into the culture of an organization, a district, a school. Leaders need to communicate and model that coaching is how we as a group learn and grow. Last year, I worked with a school system where the superintendent stepped forward and asked me to coach him on the design of his personal professional growth plan as all the system administrators observed.

Steve: 11:00 Two months later, we did a follow up coaching session on the plan’s implementation, again, with the district administrators observing. Each administrator, then joined with a colleague and they coached each other on their personal professional growth plans. I had an email from one of the participating principals before the meeting had even ended asking me to repeat the process in the next week with him, with his whole staff, looking on. Those leadership behaviors begin to move an organization toward a coaching culture. The challenges and the unknowns that all educators are addressing today, as they strive to maximize student learning require organizational support that maximizes educator learning. We need a learning coaching culture that draws energy, creativity, and learning from all the members of our organization. Thanks for your leadership and thanks for listening.

Steve [Outro]: 12:28 Thanks again for listening, you can subscribe to Steve Barkley, ponders out loud on iTunes and Podbean. And please remember to rate and review us on iTunes. I also want to hear what you’re pondering. You can find me on Twitter @stevebarkley or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com