Podcast: Coaching to Leverage Hardiness

How do coaches assist teachers in reframing stress from something to be managed to a catalyst for growth and improvement? How can understanding the roles of commitment, control, and challenge build teachers' **hardiness**? Highly experienced coaches, Lana Cecil and Angela Buckingham, share the application of Stein's and Bartone's work in **Making Stress Work for You to Achieve Your Life Goals** to the work of instructional leaders and coaches.

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Find the Coaching Strategies and Coaching Questions for Hardiness here.

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Podcast Transcript:

[00:00:00.290] – Steve [Intro]

Welcome to the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. As instructional coaches and school leaders, you are tasked with guiding continuous teacher growth to create student success. This podcast looks to support you with strategies from experienced guests, as well as my own insights that I've gathered over the years. I'm thrilled to have you with us. Thanks for tuning in.

[00:00:29.910] – Steve

Coaching to Leverage Hardiness. I'm excited to have two long-term coaching colleagues and previous guests team up for today's podcast. Angela Buckingham and Lana Cecil are instructional coaches for Education Service Center 13 in Austin, Texas, where they provide coaching services directly to teachers across the region and instructional coach training for both coaches and school leaders. They recently shared with me a presentation that they provide for coaches around hardiness. And hardiness comes from the work of authors Stephen Stein's and Paul Bartone's book, "Making Stress Work for You To Achieve Your Life Goals." I'm excited to have them share their insights here today. Welcome, Angela and Lana.

[00:01:23.990] – Lana

Hi, Steve.

[00:01:24.791] – Angela

Great to be here.

[00:01:25.790] – Steve

Great to have you back. So let's just jump right in with what is hardiness?

[00:01:35.240] – Lana

Okay, so I'm just going to start with the definition of hardiness and truly at the base level, what it is. And hardiness, by our definition, is a personality trait that acts as a psychological buffer, enabling individuals to remain resilient and thrive under stress. It's a mindset that helps people view challenges as opportunities for growth and maintain a sense of purpose and sustain control over their lives. It truly is a personality trait and a mindset at the same time.

[00:02:13.310] – Steve

How does it compare with grit or resilience?

[00:02:18.800] – Lana

It's funny you should ask that. Angela and I, when we first started studying this and we were looking for, we first started studying this because we were thinking about how stressed out teachers are and what could we do as coaches to really support them through stressing season, which is we have high stakes testing going on right now, and we're supporting teachers that feel overwhelmed and they need a lot of things. So we were like, what can we do? And what does that look like? And we started talking about resilience, and we started talking about grit. But then we also came across this book about hardiness, and we were like, what is the difference between resilience and grit and hardiness? And how do you support all those different things as coaches? And so what we found was resilience is the overarching umbrella. It's the way that you think about learning and the adaptability that it takes to think, okay, I'm in a learning situation and I'm going to move forward and I'm going to be resilient in this moment. And it's that overarching umbrella. Now, hardiness, though, is the mindset that it takes to be resilient.

[00:03:26.340] – Lana

It’s the mindset that you need to keep going, but that’s different grit. Grit is actually the longevity piece. How do I keep going? How do I keep being resilient? How do I keep being hardy? So even though we sometimes use these terms interchangeably, they’re not the same. They’re actually different.

[00:03:46.320] – Steve

I’m thinking about the pieces that I read about grit or about resilience, that I can make a mistake by staying gritty when I should be moving on. In other words, I’m not reading the situation and realizing the need for change. I just keep going after it. I wonder if there’s a connection with that to hardiness?

[00:04:19.380] – Lana

I think that there could be. I think that piece, Angela and I talked a lot about reflection and the importance of reflection and coaching people, how to be reflective. And so I think as we get ready to talk about the pieces of hardiness, commitment, control, and challenge, and we talk about how we coach people through that, I think that application piece is going to come forward and you’re going to see how you can coach people through that. Because it’s all about them reflecting back and realizing, okay, this is not what I want in this moment. I’m feeling stressed. And Kelly McGonigal, she wrote the book, “The Upside of Stress.” She talks about how stress with teachers makes them feel like they are not adequate in the moment. And when they feel like they’re not adequate in the moment, then they just want to shut down. And so a lot of people are like, they’re experiencing stress, but they don’t want… The thought of making change makes them feel even more stressed. And so they don’t want to make that change. And that’s where this hardiness business came about. We’re like, okay, they’re stressed, and they know that they

don’t want to be stressed.

[00:05:28.260] – Lana

They don’t feel adequate in this moment. But they also don’t want to take the step outside of their comfort zone to do that. And how can we leverage something that can help them? And for us, it was leveraging growing hearted, hardiness as a personality’s trait and as a mindset.

[00:05:47.080] – Steve

Let’s jump into then the parts that you labeled out there for us of commitment, control, and challenge.

[00:05:55.620] – Angela

I’m going to talk about the first component of hardiness, commitment. I will say, before I read this book, I thought commitment – when I heard that word, I thought, oh, it’s being dedicated to something. You’re committed to it. It’s really expanded my view of commitment because the authors defined commitment as viewing life as meaningful, having a sense of purpose. I connected at the same time I was reading, I heard a story on a podcast, and they were asking a man, those men who during construction, road construction, holding the signs of slow down, stop, and flipping that sign, asking them, “Man, that must be a boring job.” And he says, “Oh, no, I keep people safe.” And so I really made that connection with teachers and thought, in coaching, I often think about goals with teachers, but commitment is something deeper. It’s really thinking about, is my goal with this teacher aligned to their purpose? So I’ve tried to really just apply that to my coaching in thinking about really aligning any goal to purpose. So I can give you an example. I was coaching an AP Human Geography first-year teacher. And I mean, as expected, AP Human Geography has a lot of content in it.

[00:07:26.300] – Angela

And the administrator was talking to me about having a campus-wide goal of student talk. He wanted kids talking in class. But this teacher, kids were not talking in his class because he was a lecture-based class. He had a lot of content to cover. And part of the commitment is asking teachers, what's most important to you? Why did you become a teacher? And when I asked him, he gave the most beautiful answer. He said, I want to teach teach AP Human Geography because I want students to learn and know about the world around them and their position in the world around them and how they can influence that. And I want them to have critical thinking skills around that. And I thought, wow, that's powerful. And so then I followed up and asked, well, how are kids supposed to develop these critical thinking skills without talking? Is that possible? How would we do that? And you could see the light bulb go off of like, oh, man. Yeah, I can't reach my purpose and my meaning if kids aren't talking. And so that's just one example, I think, of how we have to really align goals with a teacher's purpose and meaning they get out of coming to school every day so that they want to get out of bed and come to school every day.

[00:08:53.250] – Steve

I was almost hearing the difference between I teach kids versus I teach this course. It digs you into that.

[00:09:05.820] – Angela

Yeah, for sure. That's a great way of putting it.

[00:09:10.420] – Steve

So you want to take us on to control?

[00:09:12.750] – Angela

Yeah. So control I think I was pretty familiar with this concept of control, the spheres of control, right? Thinking

about what's in our control, what can we influence, what's outside of our control. So I automatically connected to that aspect. And I think I do have practices already in place for that, asking teachers, what can we control in this situation, offering them choices, should we do this or that, and giving them some control of the decision making. But the connection I really made to was, I had also been reading a book. It's called, "Peak Mind." Dr. Amichi Jha wrote it, and it's around our attention. And it's like the world is full with so much stimulus, right? So much stimulus that our brains can only handle so much. So they choose what we pay attention to. And I don't know if it was her. I heard it somewhere else. It described every person has a flashlight in a dark room, and you point that flashlight to what you attend to. And so sometimes As humans, we point our flashlight to things that are outside of our control. And so really, coaches can help teachers reframe by pointing the flashlight somewhere else.

[00:10:43.500] – Angela

We don't need to get in a spiral of pointing the flashlight somewhere. And also just thinking about the other piece, though, that was new to me, or not really new to me, but just came to the forefront of my mind was around controlling our emotions and emotional regulation. And I think about teachers, they go all day, sometimes with barely a break for a restroom break, a quick lunch as they're eating. They help kids all day regulate their emotions with deep breaths. And sometimes by the end of the day, teachers have nothing left for themselves in their own emotional regulation. And so I've really been thinking that as a coach and how I give space for teachers to feel and not be afraid of being uncomfortable in their emotions, but let's feel it, let's name it, because it's hard to have a cognitive conversation when our emotions are high. And so I recently shared a post by Adam Grant that was like, we can't control what other people say, what other people do, but we can control our response to it. And so reflecting on that. And my example for that is last week, actually, I was

with a third grade team, and man, third grade teachers are some stressed out teachers. I mean, it's a hard year because…

[00:12:18.230] – Steve

Just one second, Angela – for my international guests, I want you to know the laugh of that is that the third grade is the big test year. And while the statewide test measures what's happened to kids the last four years, it's that third grade teacher who's wearing it on his or her head. It's a fair statement?

[00:12:41.360] – Angela

Yes. They put a lot of pressure on themselves. And they came into PLC, and I could feel the emotions. I could just feel it. And one of the teachers says, I guess we got to talk about our math intervention groups. And she said it just like that with that tone. And I was like, oh, okay. They were not in a place right then to talk about it. You can never mention groups. And so I did a quick Brené Brown's two-word activity where everyone thinks of two words of what they're feeling. It can be paradoxical, right? I can be exhausted and grateful at the same time. And you just whip around two words of how you're feeling. So everybody knows how everybody around the table is coming to the table and showing up. And it took a couple of minutes. And then without me even prompting, right after they started sharing gratitude, five minutes later, they were like, okay, let's do it. Let's talk about these math intervention groups. And just the shift in them was palpable because they were able to release and focus on what they could control and get back into balance and regulated.

[00:13:56.670] – Angela

And so sometimes I think, coaches, we sometimes, I think, have our agenda, like what we got to push through, right? We got to talk about this. We got to talk about this. But it's really powerful to just give space and listen. And so really, that's,

I think, how you build hardiness through control also, not just control of actions, but how do we control our response and how we're viewing this? And there's the event, and then there's the story we're telling ourselves about the event. So how do we bring that to light? I don't know. I've been thinking more about that as well.

[00:14:34.300] – Steve

The word that keeps going through my mind as I was listening to you walk through the whole control piece was empowerment in defining the coach's role. The teacher seeing they're being empowered through the coaching process. So whether that's what you were just describing as my feelings are okay, and I'm empowered to decide what it is I want to do with that, or my focus, I can be empowered to decide how I'm going to take that next step. It's really interesting because I was in a call with a coach today and identifying that if a coach takes on solving a problem for a teacher too soon, while the teacher may more successful in class tomorrow, the teacher doesn't feel empowered by it.

[00:15:35.750] – Angela

Exactly. Believing in their potential to make their own decisions and make their own choices, I think, is huge for coaching because you're building their efficacy and building their capacity in that way.

[00:15:50.150] – Steve

Okay. We got the one left here is challenge.

[00:15:53.590] – Lana

I'll take challenge. You let us into it really nicely with empowerment because I think that's really what this means. It's the mindset to take on a challenge. And I think there was a lot of research around just telling people, suck it up, buttercup. That's not a strategy for showing people how to

tackle challenge. And so that was something that Angela talked about a lot, was like, okay, what are the strategies to help them view challenge? And so I love what Paul Bartone said about it. He said, the mindset of challenge has to be that stress is enhancing and that stress is not debilitating. And so us as coaches, giving the teachers the tools to say, okay, I may not feel adequate in this moment, but I have the tools that I need, and just helping them learn how to reflect through that. Actually, Steve, one of the things that I like to use the most when I apply this with my teachers is your gripe to a goal when we reframe. So we look at this, we're like, we've got this gripe, we've got this thing that's making us feel uncomfortable, and then we don't feel adequate with.

[00:17:00.370] – Lana

We set that goal. I know Angela – can you tell the partners? Because I say that a lot. Angela and I do a lot of work together. That's one of my favorite things. We talk about how coaches need coaches all the time and how reflective we are in our practice as coaches together. But that was one of the things that we really reflected on was that reframing was super important and how we empower teachers to use the knowledge that they know. The other thing we talk about a lot is the importance of the goal and how you are going to be coaching heavy and you are going to be working towards a hard or a challenging mission, how important it is to have a strong goal that the teacher feels committed to, that they feel in control of, and that they feel like they have power around. And they feel like they are passionate about what they want to do. And so I think taking that mindset of stress is enhancing. I can learn something from this. It's not going to hijack my rational thought. It's not going to hijack my focus. I'm going to take this focus, and I'm going to move forward with the challenge.

[00:18:01.050] – Lana

And I love my favorite part of this. We created this matrix,

this hardiness matrix, that gave some coaching strategies and some potential coaching questions. I always love your… I always think of your philosophy on questions whenever I get ready to create questions or questions to them is we don't know what we're going to say. We don't know what to say until someone says it, right? But we always like to think about, okay, what would be a potential way to guide someone through a specific practice? But my favorite thing is, how will you feel if you succeed? Because I think a lot of times teachers are so stuck in, what if I fail? This is what it's going to look like if I fail. This is what it's… And I like to take that… You've done a positivity podcast with me before, Steve. I like to take that positive stance. But what if you don't feel, let's really manifest what we want to see when we reach this goal and how will we know what we will celebrate when we get there. And the other thing was, what lessons from past successes can I apply to this situation?

[00:19:02.880] – Lana

So when have I been successful for? And there's that empowerment piece. You already have the tools that you need, that you know and that you can grow to be successful and to be adequate in this moment. And what did that look like before in this challenge? And how can we grow off of that strength and taking that strength-based approach? And then also, who can I partner with to help me through this challenge? Because we so often feel isolated and alone and this challenge belongs only to us. And that's where professional learning communities and peer coaching and your coach, your actual instructional coach, can come and be that partner who can help you see your blind spots and see the things that you can't see. So I think that's what I love the most about challenge and talking with people about challenges.

[00:19:50.320] – Steve

So let me check my listening. I think hearing the two of you go through these components, what I'm playing with in my head

is stress is a signal to do something, and that something isn't get rid of the stress, that something is a questions I ask myself or possible actions to take, but stress is a signal. How am I doing?

[00:20:27.210] – Lana

You're doing great because there's nothing we can do about the stress. Stress happens. It's a fact of life. It's something we're going to… I was just talking this week with a group in a PLC as we were implementing a new curriculum. We were talking about our career as a whole in education is a continuous improvement career. And when you are in a continuous improvement career, unfortunately, you don't get to climb the rope, ring the bell and think, yeah, I made it. I've learned everything I need to learn and everything I need to do and be. There's always going to be that component of I'm always learning. I'm always challenging myself to be something else. So there's that.

[00:21:05.350] – Angela

I think also the stress… I love the idea of stress as a signal. And as coaches, maybe it's also a signal we need to break things down into smaller steps, smaller pieces, because stress and overwhelm can go hand in hand. And I think overwhelm can come from a lack of feeling of control. And when you think about all the things, trying to accomplish all the things just feeds into that stress. And I think coaches can really support teachers with not only just what can you control, but what's our first small step that we can take action on?

[00:21:50.590] – Steve

Yeah. I'm big in my coaching that very often teachers' first description of, "the problem," is something that's way too big. If that's what we end up setting our goal on, then we're continually coming up short, which is only adding to the

stress or adding to our lack of control, versus being able to break it down into a… This class is terrible, and then after a long enough conversation, that's three kids that you're really struggling with. It's a total different approach once I get it narrowed down. What would the first change in one of those kids look like that suggests you're making progress, and now I can build from it?

[00:22:41.020] – Angela

Exactly. I'm going to take the abstract generalizations of all the things to concrete one student, a group of students. Yeah, definitely.

[00:22:51.730] – Steve

So early on in the definition, Lana, I think you had hardiness as a trait. I want to look back. Can I grow my hardiness? Can I increase in being more hardy?

[00:23:08.260] – Lana

You know what? Maddie and Kobesa, that did the original research, they did some impact research, and they said yes. They built a lot of trainings around hardiness. Some of them were 10 days, some of them were shorter. That's where we pulled the strategies from that we've been putting in our practice and that we shared with you as an application when we shared our stories through the three Cs. The answer to that is yes. That was probably one of the most exciting things as Angela and I were looking at this as a training ourselves. As we were training coaches, we viewed it through the lens of, okay, how can we coach coaches to coach teachers how be more hardy? Hopefully, it'll also trickle down to how do teachers coach students to put this hardiness practice in there as well. But yes, the answer is all of the research overwhelmingly says that it can be trained and that it does make a difference in overall motivation and achievement of goals.

[00:24:06.440] – Steve

I'm wondering if the two of you have got some applications that you've made personally for yourselves. I know that you guys are in a spot where control can seem to be outside, where schedules and expectations can be hectic. I know that you work with a group of instructional coaches there at the Ed Service Center. Have some spots come to you where you've stopped and consciously thought through hardiness for yourselves?

[00:24:44.950] – Angela

I will say, personally, there's some practices I try to do as a coach to just be more conscious and give myself space. And so I know those would be things like, I have three questions I answer every morning. Who do I want to be today? And my questions used to be, what's most important for me to accomplish today? What's the most important thing for me to do today? And now, I guess, I don't know if it's getting older, but now my questions are really around, who do I want to be today? What energy do I want to carry? How do I want to feel? How do I want to show up? And at the end of the day, I ask ask myself reflective questions like, how was I aligned today to who I wanted to be? What was in my control that I made an impact on? And so I try to do that personally. But Lana and I were reflecting together of It's really hard also, though, I will say, to do this work without a coach because I can try to do all the things personally, but I'm not perfect.

[00:25:58.650] – Angela

There's days I miss, and I'm human. So there's days where I'm like, Lana. And it's so nice to have this common learning and understanding together because we can bring it up for each other of like, oh, okay, this is a hardiness moment. Let's talk about this. And so it also has just reminded me of how important it is, and I know you say this a lot, but really how important that everyone has a coach. I just think there's a misconception out in the world about coaching. It's just about

content and pedagogy, but it’s so much more. And so I’m very grateful for Lana, not only for the learning we’ve had together, but that we can coach each other on hardiness when you just have those human moments where you just fall off the rails a little. And she helps pick me back up.

[00:26:58.930] – Lana

Back at you. One of my favorite questions, Angela and I, we go out and coach together a lot, especially when we’re coaching coaches. I’ll say, hey, Angela, what’s our hope for today? And so we will break down what our hope is and what that looks like. Then there’s usually a phone call on the long drive home on reflecting on what was our hope for today and how did we do? Making sure that we have goals as coaches when we’re going through growth and when we are going to experience those hardiness moments, too, so that we can have that reflection. Because I really think reflection and hardiness, that’s probably one of the biggest things that I really connected as we did this learning together.

[00:27:42.260] – Steve

As we wrap up with this being the end of the school year, fast approaching on folks, any final words you might have? I’m thinking it could be for teachers who are dealing with it, for the school leaders who are dealing with it, and certainly for instructional coaches. Any parting thoughts you’d like to put out there?

[00:28:05.390] – Angela

I just want to reiterate what Lana said about the importance of reflection. Sometimes I think coaches are like, oh, it’s the end of the year. Let’s wrap things up for the school year. But really taking that time. And even last week, I was with a kindergarten team, and we were reflecting, and I asked, well, what was hard about this year? And they the behaviors. They were just like, the behaviors were so hard. And so asking,

what did we learn? And they talked about structures they implemented. And so reminding them that, okay, what from these structures that you implemented this year, will you to speak with you next year, even with a different group of kids, and just to see their smiling faces, which I had not seen a lot of that year because the behaviors were hard. And just celebrating, we can do hard things. It's It's how we learn. It's how we get better. If we didn't have these hard things, if we had an easy group of kids, we wouldn't be where we are and wouldn't have this learning and be better for it. And so I think that's a really important piece to do at this time of year.

[00:29:16.690] – Angela

And as we go into the end of the school year is just reflecting on what was hard. We did hard things, and what did we learn. And I think we build hardiness through that reflection.

[00:29:26.280] – Lana

And I think, too, to piggyback off that, it's remembering that whether you're a coach or a teacher, we need coaching. And when things get hard, we tend to shy away from coaching or think, okay, I don't want to bother them, or I'm too overwhelmed to have coaching right now. When stressing season comes, that's when we want to lean into coaching. That's when coaching really should be the heaviest and should have the most impact and support. So lean into coaching when you're stressed. Don't lean out, because we're asking you to do hard things, and everybody deserves a coach.

[00:30:01.260] – Steve

You just triggered a piece for me. I was just recently working on a rewrite of a blog that I often do this time of the year, talking to people about end of the year goal setting, how to use the end of the year to set the goals for next year. And as

I was listening to both of you, it struck me that that's probably a pretty good definition of commitment, that the end of the year isn't really about this thing I'm going to wrap up and tie up and finish and then take a breath. What did I learn from this year? What do I know from this year? How do I look at that? The piece that I've been working on is getting teachers to work with next year's teacher on goals for next year. That is almost the celebration of what I accomplish this year, if I can be talking with next year's teacher about where they're going to go with this next year versus tying it up. I hadn't made a connection before of how that activity really reinforces a commitment and a compelling "why" for a teacher compared to my thoughts being on wrapping it up and I'm done, I've accomplished this thing or I didn't accomplish this thing.

[00:31:29.240] – Steve

Makes sense?

[00:31:30.360] – Angela

It does.

[00:31:30.730] – Lana

Yeah, absolutely.

[00:31:33.020] – Steve

Well, thanks so much. I knew this was going to be great, and it certainly triggered everything I expected that it would. What's the easiest way that folks can follow up? I know the piece that you posted on LinkedIn people would probably like to take a look at as to the chart you laid out to think about coaching with hardiness. Easiest way for people to get in touch with you and and find that?

[00:32:01.830] – Lana

Well, sure. They can always email us. We have emails, and you

can just google us, Lana Cecil at region 13, and you will find us Angela Buckingham at region 13. But we're easy to find. Steve, if you want to, you can post – with our blog, we'll give you permission to post our matrix or materials with it, the one that I posted out on LinkedIn. But we're also glad to send it to you, lanacecil@escregion13.net.

[00:32:27.930] – Steve

Do you have a link for it? I can just post the link. That'll take them to a site where you have it posted?

[00:32:34.290] – Lana

Absolutely. Okay.

[00:32:35.120] – Steve

Why don't you send me that link and we'll put it in the lead into the podcast.

[00:32:38.920] – Lana

I absolutely will. Thanks so much.

[00:32:42.930] – Steve [Outro]

Thanks for listening, folks. I'd love to hear what you're pondering. You can find me on Twitter or LinkedIn at Steve Barkley, or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.