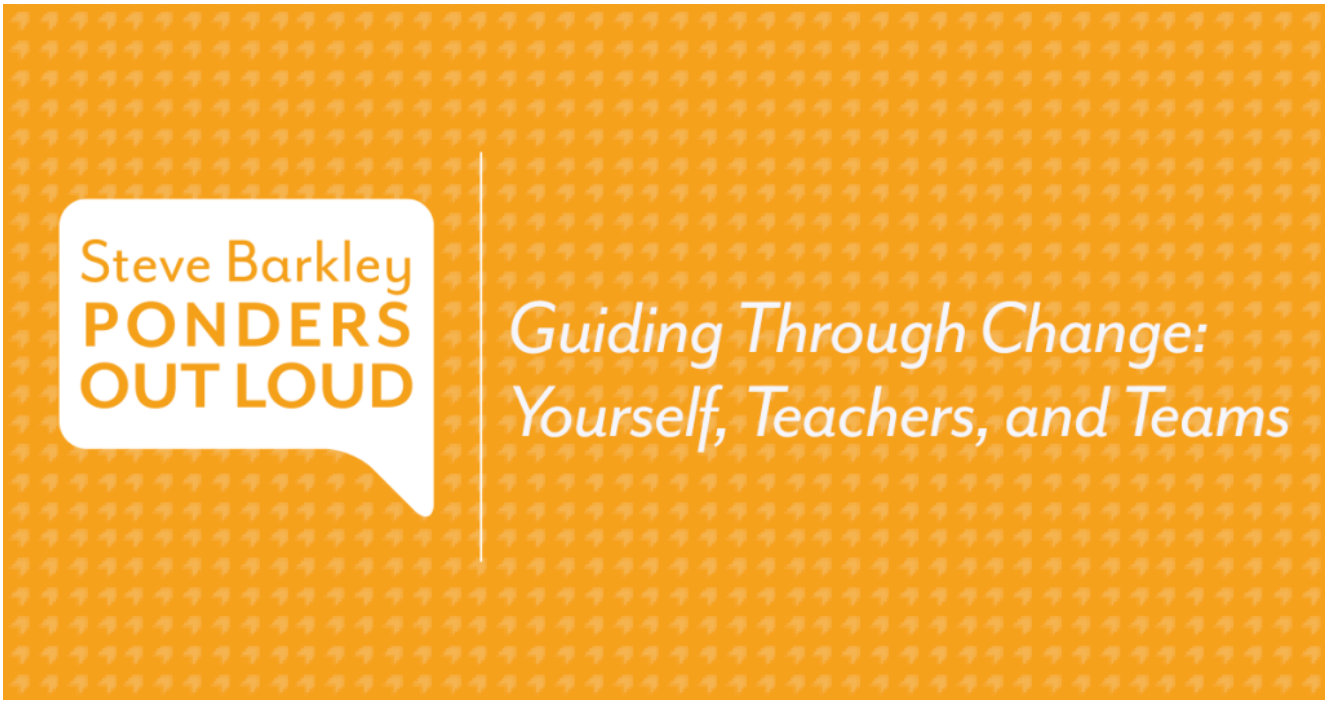
Podcast: Guiding Through Change – Yourself, Teachers, and Teams



Dr. Kim Richardson describes that change is inevitable and manageable. As coaches and school leaders we need to be competent in guiding ourselves and others during change. Kim describes the need for emotional intelligence and resilient leadership. Knowing people are unpredictable requires coaches to observe and communicate. Change is a process not an event.

Visit Kim's website here.

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Podcast Transcript:

[00:00:00.310] – 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.

[00:00:30.110] – Steve

Guiding Through Change: Yourself, Teachers, and Teams. I'm excited to welcome Dr. Kim Richardson to the podcast. I recently participated in an instructional coaching conference and had the opportunity to attend Kim's keynote and breakout session where she explored dealing with change. Dr. Richardson is a professional certified coach accredited by the Internal Coaching Federation, and she is the Induction and Development Director for Hampton City Schools in Virginia. Kim is also the creator of the Radical Learners course, Coaching for Connection, Certainty, and Autonomy in collaboration with the Jim Knight Instructional Coach Group. Welcome, Kim.

[00:01:17.710] – Kim

Thank you so much for having me.

[00:01:20.290] – Steve

I'm delighted. As I was thinking about change, I remember my early explorations where I read about Heraclitus and the thoughts that change is constant. The quote was, "You can't step into the same river twice." And then there was Permanides, if I pronounced that right, Permanides. And he claimed that change is just an illusion and that reality is unchanging. So as I was thinking about that, I pondered, is there a Kim Richardson view of change?

[00:01:53.310] – Kim

Oh, yeah. I think, and thank you for sharing those two

mindsets, but I think it’s inevitable. It’s inevitable. And I think we’re in a false sense of hope that something is going to stay constant, but it’s also manageable. And I think it’s inevitable because either I am always changing as I grow, learn, interact with different people, whatever it may be, or the context is changing. So I think my view on it is it’s inevitable. So if we know this, let’s manage it. And one of the biggest things That’s what I’m just a champion for, it’s not heavy research that I’ve done, but when I see a topic such as this begin to impact multiple layers of a hierarchical organization, I think that leaders really have to make sure we understand this. Whatever your title is, I believe, especially coaches or leaders, and we have to be able to be adept and thrive in this environment that we know is always going to be evolving. So that’s my view.

[00:02:57.520] – Steve

So is it fair to say that change is inevitable, and that’s good news and bad news.

[00:03:03.460] – Kim

I think so. I also think about the whole pendulum swing, right? When we see things swing to the left and then gradually come on back and to the other side. And I’ve been in education long enough to have seen that. And I always remembered as a younger educator, when the veterans would say, oh, we did that. Just a different name. We did that before. And I couldn’t understand it until now, but I do understand why the pendulum changes because it’s so extreme on either end that you have to make adjustments. For example, when I founded and started the coaching program in the school district that I work in, it was because there was not a good clarity on what and who was supposed to be supporting the teachers. And there were not enough supports as the needs became greater, as the standards that were being taught began to become more robust and rigorous. So we created and separated people that were

outside of the classroom that strictly worked with students. But then we had another position that was the coach and that they were there to support teachers. And at that time, they reported to a division level.

[00:04:16.080] – Kim

They reported and then did their work in the school. But then along the year, some of the principals began to not feel like they had a lot of opportunity to personalize that experience in their school to meet their changes. So the pendulum swung and then they became school-based. And now I'm seeing, but now we're confused about what the roles are. So the pendulum, I think, is also a part of that change because of the way that we respond to the things that are happening. And it does swing, however fast or slow and how long it stays on the up or the down, I think we have to consider that as well.

[00:04:54.990] – Steve

I know that you've been doing some research in leadership and change, and I know that you've looked at fields outside of education from the presentation that I was able to sit in on. What are some of the insights you gained that have brought application to being in a leadership role during change?

[00:05:14.980] – Kim

I know this is going to sound so simple that it might sound too simple, but really all the research speaks to our emotional intelligence that as leaders, we cannot operate as managers, that we have to be able to be self and socially aware and manage that. And then I was actually in a session with the World Business Executive Coach Summit last year, and they were talking about resilient leadership and how we have to be able to be resilient in the midst of that, because usually leaders, coaches, they are seen as managing the change, but sometimes it happens to them as well. And what time sometimes do they have to turn that around, to process it

themselves, to figure out the why before I turn around and sell it, usually to the stakeholders that I am impacting. So the emotional intelligence, for sure, is coming up in the research. And then also the fact that you have to be able to adapt. So when we think about a 21st century leader, we are well into the 21st century, but if we have not shifted from being manager to leader, we have to for that very reason, because we cannot just follow a script any longer.

[00:06:27.850] – Kim

We have to be able to read the room to know what is going on inside of me to manage all of those things and then to adapt and be resilient in leading through those changes.

[00:06:39.760] – Steve

As I'm listening to you, I'm pondering a thought. So if I'm stepping out too far here, you can bring it in for me. But I'm almost hearing you can't manage change. You work with it, you lead through it. But does the word manage suggest a control that you don't have?

[00:07:00.610] – Kim

Well, I think with some of the changes, I think it's appropriate. In the keynote that you heard, I was speaking about different types of organizational change, which was a little quick peek. It could be something that impacts the whole organization. It could be personnel change. It can be a change because of remediation in some way, shape, or form. So I think certain types of change, when we think about an implementation of something, that's usually where educators live. An implementation, we can manage it as best as possible, but we have to remember the nuances of the complexity of it. So you can only manage as far as you think about all the different pieces, and sometimes they're all known, and sometimes they're not. So that's where that emotional intelligence comes in and looking at models such as the

managing through complex change to make sure I have addressed all the components. And then the other unknown is the people. People are not predictable. So your staff one year might have been able to react and respond in a whole different way than your staff this year. So you can manage to a point, but I don't feel that that's all that you would have to be able to do.

[00:08:11.590] – Steve

It sounds like planning a lesson.

[00:08:13.720] – Kim

It's the human experience.

[00:08:15.150] – Steve

You can plan a lesson. That doesn't mean you're going to be delivering what you plan.

[00:08:22.250] – Kim

Absolutely.

[00:08:23.360] – Steve

So there's preparation. Preparation is good leadership, but parts that you've got to be able to to modify, change, and adjust based on what you find.

[00:08:34.190] – Kim

I think the communication part, of course, we're planners, we're leaders, we are educated people. We can plan the communication, we can plan the rollout, but we have to remember, it's a process. It's not going to happen overnight. Do we ever plan for the full 2-3 year implementation that most things actually need it? And also because it's a human experience part that we're dealing with in leadership, we have to address it and walk carefully with empathy. There's no way

that you can demand something, expect it and evaluate it within a week. So where's the give and take? Where's the true plan for the rollout? And then we, leaders, if we have not been trying to in some neuroscience, we have to know that people are hardwired to do what they do. That is how the human brain works. So we also have to remember all of what needs to happen to change the wiring of that particular practice, if that's what it And then remember that it takes time, attention, repetition, and positive feedback to even get new wiring going. So if leaders have not been trained in that, they're not aware of that. People aren't just trying to be resistant.

[00:09:44.480] – Kim

They actually are doing what they've been hardwired to do. So that takes a lot of undoing, and we may not always know how to do that.

[00:09:54.220] – Steve

So as a leader, what would you say I need to be aware of concerning myself as how I'm responding to change, maybe especially change that I wasn't part of initiating?

[00:10:06.910] – Kim

Just your own emotional response. Is it a, "oh, my gosh, here it happens again?" And it doesn't mean that you shouldn't feel it, but you do need to be mindful of your own emotional response to change, especially when you're not the initiator, because what could tend to happen is you slip into victim mindset, you slip into, "oh, this doesn't or this impact me," but you don't maybe fully own it the way you should because it didn't come from you. So whether it came from you or not, you have to act like it did, and you have to really dive in and give yourself the time needed to either ask the questions of the source, whether it was your district leadership, state departments of Ed, other places. Get the why and get it under

your skin enough for you to say, okay, I get this, or at least I get their why, so that you feel comfortable enough because I have seen more than often, and my phone will ring all the time, about leaders that will say, “well, they did it to us again,” and things like that. It’s a rally cry to try to get some camaraderie, that whole social identity piece, us versus them.

[00:11:19.810] – Kim

We know that’s going to happen, but that’s not good for the leader to do. So they have to get their own emotional response and their thinking wrapped around whatever this change is. And remember that even though this didn’t come from me, I am the leader. I am the leader of these people or this work. And so I have to be prepared to step into that place with high emotional intelligence, but also maturity so that we can do what we need to do because it’s not going to go away. And that has happened also. People just say, it will pass. No, it may not. And so you also don’t want to set yourself up for failure. Or your stakeholders.

[00:12:02.960] – Steve

So I know that you’ve got a responsibility for supporting and training coaches where you are, and you do that work with other leaders. What are some of the specific skills coaches should look to be developing to assist them with the consistent change?

[00:12:25.360] – Kim

Well, part of what I mentioned in the keynote at the conference was just the competency component. We have to think a little broader to not a checklist of skills, but competencies. Actually, one of the biggest things that leaders and coaches can do is develop their self-management competency and to be able to really think about what is the achievement orientation that I can take on to be able to manage this

change for myself, but then also to turn around and help others. How do I go about setting goals? How do I look at the priorities, what's needed? Because when we're able to do it, we are able to know how to turn around and model and show that and teach that to other people. And that is recent research that has come out that is one of the most important competencies that a coach can have to impact change on behalf of the other person is that self-management of me. And it's not the emotional part, but it is the actions that I take to do something that I need to do. What do I filter out? What do I zero in on? How do I determine what's priority, what's urgent, what's not?

[00:13:39.640] – Kim

All of those things. And then also turning around and using our great coaching questioning. That is one of the most powerful things that we can do to help the other person, whoever it is, a leader, a principal, a teacher, to be as thoughtful and open with their thinking as possible. Because when a person that is being asked coaching questions and they have the opportunity to think or learn or create within that space that is created, they own their own solution, and they will be able to move forward versus, you told me to do this, so I guess I'll do it. When they own their own solution, they're going to be displaying more buy-in, they're going to be more attached to the outcomes, and isn't that what we want? Versus a teacher saying, Well, you told me to do it. It didn't work. I told you it was going to not work. So that is one of the most important competencies that a coach can demonstrate is that self-management, and then turning around and asking those questions and helping another person begin to manage that change. And one of the other things that I am included in the course that I worked on with Instructional Coaching Group is helping people understand what is in their span of control and what's not.

[00:14:54.350] – Kim

Sometimes just asking that question, “what is out of your control?” is in itself, an opportunity to surrender that and I can control the surrender. Our brain needs autonomy. And so while it seems like you don’t control any of it, I can control the opportunity that I can surrender that I don’t control those pieces. It’s powerful. And when people give that, their shoulders go down and they give that exhale, you know that you can then move forward with talking about the elephant in the room.

[00:15:27.480] – Steve

I think you’re touching on the piece that I was working on in my head. I frequently find coaches dealing with change, run into teacher’s resistance to that change. Then the coach has the difficulty of personalizing the teacher’s resistance to the coach versus the teacher’s resistance to the change that’s been imposed.

[00:15:59.580] – Kim

Well, so lots of coaches like to… yes, people do become resistant, but lots of coaches like to just say they’re resistant and combative, and then they get into combat mode.

[00:16:13.300] – Steve

I’m wondering if that combat mode comes because they’re personalizing the resistance.

[00:16:19.040] – Kim

Yes. I mean, we are what we do. And if a person has personalized that change and they own it, or it could have been, this is what I’ve decided we do, we all are what we do. That was my whole dissertation was professional identity development and so a teacher is who they are and what they do.

[00:16:38.960] – Kim

So now we are talking about each other, and this change is what I feel is best and the teacher is holding on, but this is how I've been operating. And so we do have to put those barriers down. I was trying to put my eyes on a quote that I had just come across, but I could not find it. But way back in the day with the National Staff Development Council, Now Learning Forward, they spent so much time in their coaching academies, helping coaches have strategies for the resistance to change and the components that they can think about, because somebody might be resisting or look like they're resisting because they literally do not understand or have this…

[00:17:18.660] – Steve

They don't know.

[00:17:19.200] – Kim

Yes. Versus I'm resisting change because the workload is too much and so I've decided to not do what it takes to make this change. I know I need to make it. I'm going to make it later because I have other things on my plate. So how do we help people do that? Or some people don't see the change as credible. So what do you do in that case? Well, you have to explain some more of the why versus some of the ways that you respond. If we take a little bit of time to coach, to have conversations, and maybe figure out why versus why aren't you doing this? Okay, you're already going to now have an even bigger problem. And Steve, I know that you probably can see that you've experienced this, but unfortunately, most of us have had a negative experience with change in the past. So we tend to remember what happened the last time. And so you might be dealing with some of that. I shared before Or one of those organizational change types is personnel. And a lot of people in the last 10 years are experiencing having been left behind by people, their colleagues, their educators leaving.

[00:18:29.070] – Kim

It feels like you've left me. So a lot of people are hold up and shelled up, and it may not even be about that change. It may just be what I'm dealing with in my context. So how do we open ourselves up, ask the right questions to determine is this vision? Is this person lacking support? Is the school climate and culture able to properly sustain the learning necessary for this change or to give that grace for risk-taking, for trying it and failing it and practicing it? That is another huge component of change. Some spaces are not as safe as others. Sometimes that climate and culture in a particular place does not allow for the risk-taking and the failure that is needed when we're trying something new to happen.

[00:19:20.510] – Steve

I remember a line that came to me in the midst of a teacher who was quite upset about a change that the system was was requiring. And after our coaching conversation went on for a while, I looked at the teacher and I said, "so if I'm hearing you, you'd like to change as little as possible and still meet the requirement? You got it." And I said, "okay, I'm on board." And then it was totally easy to work with her. She knew that I had this picture of where she wanted to go. And now we could build a relationship and she could make discoveries, and the whole coaching piece could go on from there. But you had to be able to separate yourself from that, that that's okay to take this little piece of a step versus I'm here to sell the whole systems project?

[00:20:18.760] – Kim

Oh, my gosh. That makes me think about there's an image in Cathy Perrette's book, Compassionate Coaching, where there are different components. I don't have enough blank to do this now. And, oh, I wish I could think about all of those pieces.

But one of them was, I have a little bit more on my plate than I need to. I don't have the right environment right now. Then how do you respond? I don't have the right process This is in place to do this right now. I don't have the power. I don't have the community. We got to remember, this is education is a space where we're supposed to be able to do this together. So what are the things that you don't have? And do we, as coaches, have enough patience to step back? This is not about me. Let's figure out how it's feeling. Is someone isolated? Are they failing? Is there a lack of confidence so I can properly respond? Isn't that what we're there to do? Because if we're beating people up, there is another issue there. There's a whole other issue. I don't think you want to talk about that in this section.

[00:21:25.490] – Steve

[laughter] That's when the coach needs a coach.

[00:21:28.580] – Kim

Yes, that and.

[00:21:34.510] – Steve

Looking at the time of the school year here, many educators are going to be starting the year with new members of their PLC, their grade level, their department. And what can coaches and school leaders do to assist staff in growing through those changes that pretty much come every year?

[00:21:57.940] – Kim

One of the biggest things that I share with the folks that I work with is to just start with building that community amongst the team and the school as best they can from whatever their role is. I mentioned earlier, the school climate and culture has to be one of – and not to push a program or anything, but are we a community of learners here? And then

you have all of those sub teams and components within a school or in another type of educational organization. So how can they help promote the community and the trust? We know the research from Chicago from those years ago about the trust that has to be on teams. So how can they help engender that. Engendering trust is one of the competencies in the National Document for Teacher Leadership Competencies. So how can we help do that? Because the other work will need to sit on that foundation. We won't be to talk about data honestly and openly. We won't be able to have conversations about, yes, I feel like I'm struggling. I need help if the trust isn't there. So you can't make it happen, but we can certainly help to build some of those bridges and authentically to do so.

[00:23:17.670] – Kim

Candy and jeans are not going to do it. It will help, but it has to be your authentic self, and it has to be also partnering up with the other champions in the building, the other teacher leaders, whether formal or informal. We have those informal teacher leaders out there that get it done, and they don't have not one title. So figuring out how to connect. And nowadays, a lot of that new personnel are novice educators, sometimes so novice, they haven't been through an education program. So just remembering that some of the school functioning, what the school looks like has not been exposed to some of our educators that are coming in now. They might not have been in a school setting since they were students themselves. So helping them, I almost call it draw back the curtain, draw back the curtain and take people behind or take them in the kitchen. If you're in the restaurant, show people and help them really understand the processes. Our novice teachers always get so surprised that I just can't stand up and talk all day to these children. No, there are other pieces. You have to plan, you have to anticipate.

[00:24:28.970] – Kim

Those are two of the biggest things. Pull back the curtain on what this work really looks like, what it means to really be an educator, and then also, how can we start to build that community and trust so that the real work that's going to come up can happen.

[00:24:47.210] – Steve

When you describe the real work, one of the pieces that I've been working with in building teams faster is getting to common goals. So when an instructional coach or school leader can cause teachers in a grade level or teachers within a department to set a goal that's common to all of them, that gives them a reason for working together. It gives them a reason to go look behind the curtain. It gives me a reason to show you behind the curtain in my classroom because the common goal has put you and me. Actually, it has almost required us to be vulnerable to speed that process.

[00:25:41.870] – Kim

It doesn't feel like being vulnerable should be a part of our work, but it absolutely is necessary. And we can't do that if I don't feel like I can. So that environment is paramount, and coaches can help with that. Sometimes the coaches are seen as outsiders also. You're not one of us. So they have a very delicate walk to walk and how to balance that because they're not administrators. They may or may not be considered teaching staff. So as they ebb and flow in the midst of figuring out their dynamics in a building, that is one of the things that they will also have to do is be vulnerable.

[00:26:28.070] – Steve

I was just going to say they need to model the vulnerability.

[00:26:30.040] – Kim

Yes. And it's hard, especially if you're a new coach in a new

space, you know no one, and you want to be able to show your competency. I'm here. I deserve to be here. I know what I should know. So that is very hard. But one of the biggest things that impacted a group of coaches I worked with in Illinois one year is that they all got up and they said, "we're all new to this. We have no idea what it looks like, but we hope that you give us the grace to figure it out along with you." And I was speechless, which is not often. And I said, Wow. And I looked around and the other people were like, Okay, so they don't know what they're doing either. Okay, so it doesn't mean that we get in the same place where they are in the combat field, but you also can share what it might look like for you. It might not be the same stressor, but I also have a stressor, or it might not be the same change, but I'm experiencing it, too. It's a little stressful. Well, we can do it together.

[00:27:28.870] – Kim

So that is part of that balance that you still show that I'm going through it with you, but I can't stay there with you. We can't wallow together. We got to come up out of that so that we can move forward. That is the strength of an effective coach.

[00:27:42.820] – Steve

Yeah, you've got me pondering that. That's really a leadership skill, isn't it?

[00:27:46.570] – Kim

And that's why coaches are leaders. That's really why… not that I don't focus on instructional coaching because it is such a vital position. It is one of those positions as Nicole Turner, our partner says to help ensure equity for every kid so that they have access to amazing education. But they are leaders in their own right. And so we have to be trained that way. We have to understand some of that mindset and realize

the power of our actions and decisions because they will ripple out.

[00:28:16.600] – Steve

Yeah. Well, thank you so much. I'm wondering if there's any last thoughts that you'd want to leave with knowing the listeners to this podcast are often instructional coaches as well as school-level administrators. Any last thoughts of things that we perhaps didn't hit as they're looking at the issues around change?

[00:28:40.880] – Kim

I think between the two of us, we've said it all. We really have to have our communication skills, that active listening, not always having an answer already ready in my head and solving the problem before it even comes out of their lips, but really developing the active listening skills, recognizing that emotional intelligence is just as important as the knowledge and skills you bring to the table and making sure that I am able to be flexible and to adapt and then to step into that space to be able to support teams with conflict resolution, with collaborative problem solving, with whatever the components are to help ease those transitions and build more stronger teams and to help be a part of that. Sometimes they're on the team, sometimes they're coming in and out of the team. And then just start to embrace whatever the change is and recognize, I may not agree, I may not understand it, but it's an opportunity for growth. We want to get past just surviving the change every year, or we're going to just be holding on every year. What change is coming this year? I survived it. We want to get beyond that and see it as opportunities for growth as leaders.

[00:29:49.090] – Kim

And then just remember that because that is growth, am I able to continuously learn and be in that space? It's all going to

be about our positive outlook and mindset, which was one of those sub components of self-management, being able to thrive in that environment and be positive and manage my emotions, even if I don't understand them all. So that can be an all-year thing and not just a beginning of the year thing.

[00:30:12.570] – Steve

Yeah, for sure. You flag another piece there for me. So even though I was closing this down, I can't resist putting it out here to you. But as I was listening to you, I'm almost hearing that part of our role is assisting teachers in developing as many of those leadership skills that we've been identifying for coaches and instructional leaders. The more that teachers have those skills, that really builds the ability for teachers to collaborate, the ability for teachers to build collective efficacy?

[00:30:52.280] – Kim

Absolutely. I mean, teachers are the leaders of their room. They are making thousands of decisions. I know that data is out there every day. They are responding to every environmental thing happening. And when we think about teachers becoming leaders, we don't think about a role that they take on, but being able to broaden their mindset to – yes, me and my kids, but also what's happening- with my colleagues. And then we say, and I try to push, when I'm able to have a leadership mindset, I'm not just looking at me. I can understand, oh, yeah, no, that two need to have their resource time first because so and so, even though I want… It's not just about being selfish, but I'm able to think more broadly about the system. And that's one of the biggest things that a teacher can begin to do. But that's not easy either because I have to be able to say that I am feeling competent enough in my classroom to then begin to think out there. Remember how you said with the person you were talking to, I can't do that right now? Well, teachers cannot begin to think

outside of the four walls of their classroom until they feel like I've got this now.

[00:32:08.850] – Kim

Not to take on something, but I can think about something else and add that level of consideration to my mental plate.

[00:32:15.860] – Steve

Well, I'm glad I tugged a little further because you gave me my big walk away. Leadership mindset for everybody. Because actually, we probably take that back. That's what we're hoping kids are going to walk out of our school choice.

[00:32:29.340] – Kim

Oh, yeah. Every kid, no matter what you teach, we have to try to keep in our mind that every kid is a future graduate. So what are the skills, no matter where I am, that will prepare them for life or for post whatever it is? If we don't think about that as a pre-k teacher, as a sixth grade teacher, every kid is a future graduate. And so how can I not only teach my content, but how can I teach and model and provide opportunities for my kids to communicate and collaborate? I saw a kindergarten teacher within two weeks have small groups running in her room, and then our sixth grade teachers forget that that is what they learned how to do. We can't be scared of giving them the opportunities to be in small groups, to have cognitive dissonance in the classroom, or we're going to be sending out unprepared people that might be passing every test and maybe won't be prepared for a neighborhood watch meeting where they don't agree with something. So we just have to remember the bigger picture. We are creating future neighbors, citizens, and how can we best support that in this amazing field and industry that we have.

[00:33:39.780] – Kim

It’s an honor and a privilege every day to think about that.

[00:33:44.070] – Steve

So, Kim, what’s the best way for people to follow up, learn more about the work that you’re doing, maybe get in touch with any questions they might have?

[00:33:53.330] – Kim

Oh, the best way is just drkimleadership.com. I’ve got some free resources up there. You can contact me that way. My calendar is filling up, but I’m really excited about the opportunities that I have been given to be able to be in front of coaches. That’s such an important role and so close to my heart because I just had the opportunity to see my own life be transformed through becoming a coach. And so I know how powerful it is to be in that role. But I also know how empowering it can be when you are truly developed in all of the areas, including leadership. That’s really where my why is. And I just have on my desk, the sign of a good leader is not how many followers you have, but how many leaders you can create. And so any opportunities to be able to speak to anyone about where they are, what they want to do, help them reflect on what it is that they are dealing with. I am open to all that. Drkimleadership.com, and I’ll support anyone in any way I can.

[00:34:52.520] – Steve

You got it. We’ll put it in the lead-in to the podcast, make it easier for folks to find.

[00:34:56.870] – Kim

All right. Thank you.

[00:35:01.870] – 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.