

# The Coach Leader Mindset

---

## *THE COGNITIVE SHIFT*

If you picked up this book on coaching, you are probably searching for a more influential and inspiring way to interact with others to achieve the expected high level of results for students today. As a school leader, you have perhaps functioned in a variety of capacities—mentor, advisor, supervisor, counselor, facilitator, and consultant. You might be curious about this role of coach. How does it compare to these other roles? You may be asking, “What is coaching all about?”

Roles that have been present in our business for years include the following:

- Supervisor
- Consultant
- Presenter or Teacher
- Mentor
- Advisor
- Specialist
- Counselor

Every role has the intention of helping the student, the teacher, or a staff member to more successfully function in their roles or responsibilities. Sadly, many of the terms and titles have become muddled with a wide variety of uses and purposes. While all the roles have a specific intent and purpose, there is only one role that can enhance all roles—that of the coach.

As schools today prepare students to compete in this new world that is interconnected, ever changing, and dynamic, new skills and intentions are required. We must prepare students to be thinkers who think what

## 10 • RESULTS Coaching

they have never thought before, who do what they have never done before, and who can be what they have never been before. We must prepare them to find solutions to questions never faced before; we must prepare them to assess multiple forms of information and draw accurate and new conclusions; and we must prepare them to communicate effectively and respectfully in many languages with many different points of view, attitudes, beliefs, or backgrounds. This kind of education requires new habits of mind, new language, and new skills. It requires the mindset of coaching.

*Webster's* defines mindset as a "frame of mind; mental or intellectual climate." The mindset of coaching often relates to our past knowledge of and experience with athletic coaching. We have incredible stories of amazing coaches who influenced and motivated others to incredible results. We bring that spirit, energy, passion, and knowledge to our new role of "thinking" coach in schools, a mindset that believes deeply in the potential of others and believes that hard change is possible if we provide time and structures for focus, repetition, reflection, and reflective feedback.

One challenge for the "new essential coach leader" is the "way-we-have-always-done-it" attitudes and beliefs. The following gorilla story provides a powerful example of how hardwired behaviors and actions become.

This story starts with a cage containing five gorillas and a large bunch of bananas hanging above some stairs in the center of the cage. Before long, a gorilla will go to the stairs and start to climb toward the bananas. As soon as he touches the stairs, all of the gorillas are sprayed with cold water. After a while, another gorilla will make an attempt with the same result: all are sprayed with cold water. Every time a gorilla attempts to retrieve the bananas, each is sprayed with cold water until he quits trying and leaves the bananas alone.

One of the original five gorillas is removed from the cage and replaced with a new one. The new gorilla sees the bananas and starts to climb the stairs. To his horror, all the other gorillas attack him. After another attempt and attack, he knows that if he tries to climb the stairs, he will be assaulted. Next, the second of the original five gorillas is replaced with a new one. The newcomer goes to the stairs and is attacked. The previous newcomer takes part in the punishment with enthusiasm.

Next, the third original gorilla is replaced with a new one. The new one makes to the stairs and is attacked as well. Two of the four

gorillas that beat him have no idea why they were not permitted to climb the stairs or why they are participating in the beating of the newest gorilla.

After the fourth and fifth original gorillas have been replaced, all the gorillas, which were sprayed with cold water, are gone. Nevertheless, no gorilla will ever again approach the stairs. Why not?

Because that’s the way it’s always been done.

---

*Source:* Excerpted from “A Trainer’s Companion: Stories to Stimulate Reflection, Conversation, Action” by Walter R. Olsen and William A. Sommers, PhD. (2004). Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved. [www.ahaprocess.com](http://www.ahaprocess.com)

## THE COGNITIVE SHIFT

The mindset of coach leader shifts reframes from responding “how we have always done it” with new possibilities never thought before. A coach leader is one who will challenge his or her educators to break away from the norm, to be creative, to use their imagination, to initiate something new, to act in new ways. A coach leader is a facilitator of a new mindset that is critically needed in schools today. Principals and teachers must model this new mindset for a generation of students for whom it will mean survival.

The coach leader mindset reflected in the chapters of this work include the following:

Shift From		To
<b>Listening to respond</b> with one’s own point of view		<b>Listening to understand</b> with others’ point of view
		<b>Listening to hold up</b> standards-based expectations
Shift From		To
Using Language		Using Language
Not to correct	but	to connect
Not to confront	but	to respect
Not to tell	but	to bring self-insight
Not to provide constructive advice	but	to encourage other’s assessment
Not to ask questions relying on familiar habits	but	to ask questions that provide clarity and stimulate great thinking

## 12 • RESULTS Coaching

The coaching mindset is about using powerful new strategies, skills, and scaffolds that support another human being in reaching his or her greatest potential and accomplishments. The authors of this work desire to rekindle and reconnect us to our deep belief in people. We see this so clearly when our country is threatened and people rally to fight to defend our basic freedoms; when there is a natural disaster, and people everywhere open their homes and wallets to help those in danger or need; when a child goes missing and citizens step up to seek and find our most precious. Where is it more essential to believe in others than in our schools? As teachers, we know our ability to teach and influence is greatly diminished if we do not believe in our students, regardless of the challenges each may have. The same is true of leaders. We must believe in the potential best of every member of our staff. Either we must hire those who share our vision and goals, or when we begin a new leadership of a campus or district, communicate at the start our beliefs or expectations so all staff members have an opportunity to choose if this workplace is aligned with the beliefs of the leader or system. If there is someone who does not adhere to the expectations or standards of our system, our coach mindset is not to demean or belittle but to offer workplaces more aligned with the individual's beliefs and goals. Moreover, for those who have similar goals and beliefs, the coach leader's belief in them must be seen always in actions and language. Some examples might include the following:

- “Knowing this is a staff who always puts what is best for our kids first—what targets do we want for this year that align with our beliefs?”
- “Since we have a covenant with one another that ‘failure is not an option’ for our kids, what strategies are you thinking will take us to the next level?”
- “I know how important it is to you that your students have a strong foundation in math, so I’m looking forward to hearing about your next steps to accelerate their skill development.”

## LESSONS FROM NEUROSCIENCE

The work of David Rock (2006) and the field of neuroscience offer research that has brought new discoveries about the way people think. We have recognized that if we really want to increase results and improve performance, our leadership language must be refined to increase and improve people's thinking about their work. For years, we have known that the brain has trillions of layers of connective wiring. We often

thought that as we learn new things, that wiring is, over time, replaced with new wiring. Today, we know that the wiring always remains. As we learn, we are creating new wiring that informs our emotions and actions. The bad news is that change is difficult because we cannot change the wiring; we must change the thinking about that wiring, and in doing so, we create new wiring with new behaviors. The good news is that new wiring can be created that provides connections with new choices for thinking and behaviors. It just takes time, repetition, and positive feedback (Rock, 2006).

Think about the student who was repeatedly told by his parents and teachers as he was developing into a young person that he was not very smart. Then at a pivotal time in this young person's life, a teacher lovingly peels away the layers of insecurity and introduces the student to a special gift or talent he never knew he had. He soars in his knowledge and skills and goes to college and into a vocation. As a young man, when the boss reprimands him for some mix up or problem, the young man perceives the boss's words in such a way that his brain goes directly back to when he was a child. His insecurities reemerge and replace his confidence with doubt and a sense of failure. Through the good fortune of a special teacher's influence, our student was creating new wiring about his confidence and capabilities. However, always lurking deep in the brain is the old wiring of insecurity that will emerge when the environment or language of fear and doubt reconnects to that "old time and place" wiring.

Another example is that of the smoker. After smoking for many years, the person learns about the damage to her health and long life. She decides she wants the health benefits more than the addiction of smoking, so she quits. Her habits and behaviors change as she builds new wiring for a healthy life style. One evening after dinner with a group of old friends, some people light up. Instantly, she feels the urge and desire to smoke. The environment and old habits rekindle the old wiring.

## **THE ESSENTIAL MINDSET**

There is a mindset about coaching. People are attracted to coaching because they believe in the capabilities of people—those talents and abilities that are often unknown even to the person. Coaching draws to it those who either believe deeply in the potential of others or have witnessed transformation within themselves or others. Coaching offers a safe place to think, to reflect, to speak truthfully, to ask questions—about self and others. Very few places is that a possibility in this world. The authors' mindset questions why the environment of education is not this place.

## 14 • RESULTS Coaching

What has happened along the way that changed the halls of learning to a road race to accountability? We know part of the answer. The answer is that along the way, our egos forgot that our focus was the children, not the adults. We celebrate that the difficult journey of accountability in education means every child will experience meaningful teaching and learning, we celebrate that no children are left behind, and we celebrate that there are no more excuses for why every child does not learn at high levels. Now is the time when we must scaffold and support those with the responsibility to teach and motivate while they inspire, care, and guide learners of all ages to a new place and time in society—a time when all children experience high levels of learning.

Our new world today, as so many have described (Gardner, 2006), is not like any we have ever known before. Our world is interconnected and interdependent. There is instantaneous knowledge and information. It is a world with its ubiquitous search engines, multipurpose devices, invisible banking, faceless relationships, paperless photos, satellite maps—all requiring knowledge and skills that before were for the few geeks, not for every person walking through the corridors of education. We are in this new world; we must act in new ways; we must respect differences and tolerate different points of view. We must talk to one another in new ways, as collaborators and partners, not workers or children.

Since the quest for the magic bullet has not turned up cures or even changes, let us return to the new basics of 21st-century knowledge. First, is a review of the new knowledge of how we learn and change and then a description of the type of intelligence required for this new world. In education, we have spent a decade sharing what we have learned about the brain, how the brain works, what it needs, why we forget, and what we need to remember. With all the information, presentations, trainings, and book studies, it shocks us when we see so little application of this groundbreaking knowledge. In the most recent years, neuroscience is teaching us the central ideas about how to change human behavior. Neuroscientists today are providing information to us that has the power to fundamentally rewrite the rules for nearly every human endeavor involving thinking and learning, including how we educate our children, how we train our teachers, and how we develop our leaders (Rock, 2006).

The greatest challenge in education is positive openness to change—change in how we view teaching and learning, change in how we determine structures for learning, change in the roles in schools, change in the purpose of schooling, and on and on. In all our efforts to improve performance, we continue to focus on processes that produce results. Today, we know from neuroscientists that if we want to improve performance, we

must improve thinking. Learning to think critically, problem solve, or predict outcomes rarely comes from a kit or program. It comes from real interactions that continually model the expectation of thinking to achieve results. Therefore, whether we are working with students or teachers and staff, the critical *new essential* is believing in people's potential in such a way that we stop telling them what to do and teach them how to decide what is the best action to take or task to do given the standards, the expectations, the rules, or the outcomes.

For years, we have known that the brain is a connection machine. Our thoughts, skills, and knowledge are big connectors or “maps” joined together via complex chemical and physical pathways. In that wonderful head on one's shoulders, is the wiring of the house. To understand the complexity of this wiring, add wiring for every memory, every word learned, every relationship, every experience, and every meaningful encounter. Thus, every thought, bit of information, skill, and capacity we have is a complex wiring of connections between pieces of information stored in many parts of the brain. When we are thinking, we process our thinking by comparing it to the trillions of pieces of information we previously have connected to thought patterns. Subconsciously, in a fraction of a second, we look for links for similar patterns. If we find a link, we create a new connection that becomes part of our massive brain wiring. Because the brain loves order, it will then reorder the connections in a way that makes us feel comfortable. We get a sense of the “gestalt.” When this happens, we learn to predict and differentiate.

Remember our first cell phone with all the features and how we read the directions over and over or had someone show us all the features and how the phone worked. Now, you are probably on your fourth or fifth cell phone, which is more than just a phone. Notice how you glided through the operation of it and probably didn't have to read the directions or have much of a lesson on how to use it. That's your wonderful brain; it has ordered all those similarities from the simplest wiring into a huge core of “fiber optics.” It's amazing, and oh, so taken for granted. When we make those connections and have those “aha” moments, we form new neural pathways, and with that new insight or epiphany, comes a burst of energy. When we make new pathways, we feel motivated to do something. Our eyes and face light up. There are small “aha” moments and big aha moments—simple things made clear or powerful revelations.

When we think new thoughts, work through a problem, unravel a delicate issue, or process a new skill, we are creating a new wiring or map in the brain. It is important to know that this is still the case if we are told what to do or what we should do. Unless that “to do” or “should

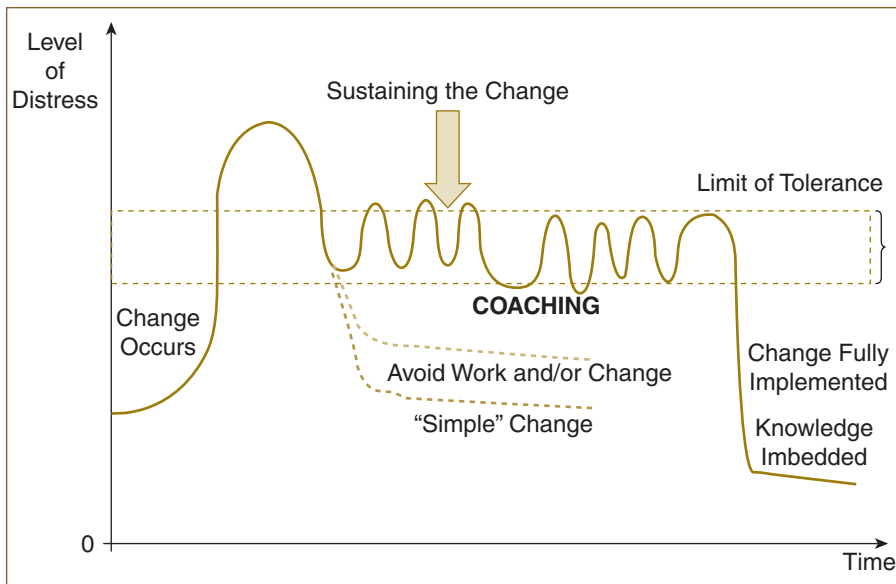
## 16 • RESULTS Coaching

do” fits with our wiring, we will have to expend the energy and effort to create our own map or new wiring. Today, neuroscientists are reporting the following:

1. To truly be committed to a new course of action, people need to have thought through issues or situations for themselves.
2. The act of having those moments of insight and epiphany give off a kind of energy needed for people to become motivated and willing to take action.
3. From the energy burst that has been expended on the new motivation, a degree of inertia can be expected.

This brain sequence also gives meaning to what Michael Fullan calls the “implementation dip,” which is the small setback that often occurs when you begin implementing something new or a change in practice—the small setback in momentum during a change process. You must work through that “dip” or setback in order to make real progress. Eva Wong’s (Wong & Heifetz, 2009) research at Harvard illustrates how coaching is the process that sustains the change during the critical time typically encountered before dropping or returning to old habits.

**Figure 1.1** Sustaining the Change



*Source:* Adapted from Eva Wong, President, Top Human Technology Ltd. China and Ronald A Heifetz, Co-Director of Center for Public Leadership, Harvard University



This new learning about what is happening in the brain offers great insight for understanding. People aren't being difficult; they are not losing motivation; they are requiring the additional support moving from insight to continued action. Conversations about first steps and reflecting on potential and possibilities offer support during that natural tendency to lose motivation or guard for the many other initiatives pulling on time and effort.

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Educators come into this field because they want to make a difference. What we say and do can change patterns in people. Throughout our history, there are thousands of stories of how teachers have impacted the lives of children. We all have a story. We hear the stories of others. Wouldn't one guess that a huge percentage of *Chicken Soup for the Soul* stories are about teacher or student situations?

Kathy Kee tells the story of her own child, who struggled in school, particularly in math, and the tutors and specialists who supported her during elementary, middle, and high school years. She was a child who did not think she was smart, but several teachers saw her organizational skills, her interpersonal skills, her flair for the dramatic. Even with the continual and constant belief in her from her parents, it was her theater teacher who, by putting her on stage in front of an audience and by giving her events to organize, changed her doubts to confidence. The more her teacher asked of her and told her she could do, the more she did. Even as she went off to college, even when she encountered obstacles with her math requirements, her belief in herself was now different. She knew she could, and therefore, she did. Her resume today includes television journalism, video editing, working for Steven Spielberg, working for Universal Music, and working for Steve Jobs as senior producer at Apple iTunes. What kept her going? She had been told she "could" so many times; she had been praised for her selected skills; she had learned that if she worked hard enough, she could do whatever she desired. Her brain was rewired through the positive language that surrounded her and the experiences given that supported her for success. As a result, this insecure child became the competent and capable adult she is today.

The new essential skill for educators today is a renewed mindset. It is a mindset of believing in the best of mankind. Our journey as educators has taken us through many concepts, theories, and studies that have ultimately formed and defined our core values about people.

When Kathy Kee began her career teaching remedial eighth graders—each seemingly eager to disrupt, disengage, and drop out—it

## 18 • RESULTS Coaching

was William Glasser's books from *Reality Theory* (1965) to *Choice Theory* (1998) that proposed a new approach to reduce school failure, an approach based on increased involvement, relevance, and thinking done by the student that brought success to an unlikely classroom. Learning that her students were trying to satisfy the genetically driven need for power that only human beings have, unlike all other living creatures, she was able to satisfy that power need by respecting her students through learning and using language of choice.

Somewhat later, Robert Greenleaf (2002) developed his concept of *Servant Leadership*, an approach and philosophy that asserts that when we look after the needs of followers, through our respect for their knowledge and thinking, employees reach their full potential and motivation toward the work. Steven Covey (2006) supports Greenleaf's concept as he reminds us, "the old rules of traditional, hierarchical, high-external-control, top-down management are being dismantled; they simply aren't working. This has changed the role of leader from one who drives results and motivation from the outside into one who is a servant leader—one who seeks to draw out, inspire, and develop the best and highest within people from the inside out. Leadership becomes an interdependent work rather than an immature interplay between strong, independent, ego-driven rules and compliant, dependent followers" (Covey, 2006, p. 1).

Another powerful strategy that has been successful with parents and teachers is *Love and Logic* (Fay & Foster, 2006). This approach of choice teaches that each intervention technique with children must preserve or enhance the child's self-concept. It is based on the research that one's view of self has significant motivational influences on behavior and cognition. The research further proposes that one's self-efficacy comes directly from one's cognitive appraisal of difficulty, one's abilities, and whether effort or struggle will yield success. The key concept guiding this program is that children only develop problem-solving skills under two conditions:

1. When they are required by the adults around them to think about and solve the problems they create
2. When the adults teach problem solving by modeling and instruction

A very important message for educators was found in the research examining the behavior change process: When the rigid applications of behavioral principles were applied to human relationships, there was no long-term, positive change. However, when behavioral principles of change were combined with high levels of trust, empathy, and warmth, students were more likely to be cooperative and copy the modeled behaviors of adults (Fay, 2010).

Another gift to Kathy Kee was the book *The Gift of the Promise* by Gary Smalley (1993) that takes sound biblical doctrine and applies common sense to how we should regard children. It offers a powerful model of how educators might view children—not as empty vessels but as promises to be unfolded.

Smalley reminds us, in one of his five elements, that words have incredible power to build us up or tear us down. It is critically important that children, husbands, wives, partners and co-workers hear words of love and acceptance. Words are powerful. *The Gift of the Promise* reminds us from the core of those we love most, the critical importance of seeing the promise in each other and in our children—our future.

In recent years, the evolutionary concept of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has also become part of our mindset. AI deliberately seeks to discover people's exceptionalities—their unique gifts, strengths, and qualities. It teaches that by recognizing and amplifying successes and strengths that already exist, new images of the future can be created that are so compelling that we consciously and unconsciously move toward it. As AI has come into schools, it has brought the fundamental approach of seeking to discover, honoring the person, and emphasizing what works. The results are being seen at all levels, with individual students, teacher-student relationships, classrooms, schools, school districts, and communities.

One example in our world of high stakes accountability was at Shaw High School in urban northeast Ohio. Shaw's graduation rate was less than 65%, and less than 40% had passed the mandated test for graduation. A pilot project identified 25 students who had failed the exam at least three times and whose teachers gave no hope of graduating. Using the AI approaches to discover and spotlight the abilities each student already possessed, the AI consultant designed a rigorous program for their core subjects and study skills. At the end of the five-week, five-hour-a-day program, 19 of the 22 who stayed in the program passed the tests on the first try, and all said they were going on to college. The greatest insight of the pilot was that years of failure can be turned around when the focus is on strategies for successful achievement of a goal (Henry, 2003).

RESULTS Coaching aligns with the core value and philosophy of believing in the capabilities of people from quality schools to AI. Coaching aligns with what years and decades of research continues to support: that as human beings we do our best, think our best, and work our best when others believe in our best. Once evidence of our best stands on solid confidence of what we can rather than what we can't, the world becomes the recipient of our best—our students, our schools, our future.

## 20 • RESULTS Coaching

Coaching is the new mindset to get us there. . . . Let's consider a few definitions that demonstrate this new mindset and inspire the opportunity to support others through the power of coaching.

- Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential (International Coach Federation, 2009).
- Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximize his or her own performance. It is helping him or her to learn rather than teaching him or her (Whitmore, 2002, p. 8).
- Coaching is an ongoing relationship, which focuses on clients taking action toward the realization of their visions, goals, or desires. Coaching uses a process of inquiry and personal discovery to build the client's level of awareness and responsibility and provides the client with structure, support, and feedback. The coaching process helps clients both define and achieve professional and personal goals faster and with more ease than would be possible otherwise (ICE, 2009).
- Professional coaches provide an ongoing partnership designed to help clients produce fulfilling results in their personal and professional lives. Coaches help people improve their performances and enhance the quality of their lives (Ellis, 2006, p. 3).
- Coaches are trained to listen, to observe, and to customize their approach to individual client needs. They seek to elicit solutions and strategies from the client; they believe the client is naturally creative and resourceful. The coach's job is to provide support to enhance the skills, resources, and creativity that the client already has (International Coach Federation, 2009).
- Coaching closes the gap between where you are now and where you want to be. A coach points out things you can't see, motivates you to be your absolute best, and challenges you to go beyond where you normally stop. A coach helps you tap into your greatness and enables you to share it with the world (Miedaner, 2000, p. xvii).

Coaching believes and assumes that every person has untapped, inspiring potential. Within this core of potential—which is derived from past and present capacities of achievements, assets, innovations, strengths, elevated thoughts, opportunities, high moments, lived values, traditions, stories, expressions of wisdom, insights into the soul, visions of a future—all of these possible elements tap into the core of potential for change. Every person has potential,

much like an inherent talent. Talents must be recognized and practiced in order to develop. As our confidence grows, our trust grows, and we begin to listen and to be open to other possibilities. This new energy, these new connections, insights, and “ahas” free people to be open to possibilities. When that happens, they become mobilized to change in ways never thought possible.

It has been evident that the role of a leader is to help people make their own connections and pathways. What we find is that most leaders spend their time and energy telling people what to do or doing the thinking for them. The “results” seem to keep education going in the same circle it has for hundreds of years. The new essential is a new mindset concerning how people change. This mindset is learning a set of skills for the coach leader, which does the following:

- Creates the environment and scaffolding for thinking in new ways
- Creates environments where deep thinking is sought and valued
- Facilitates processes of dialogue for deep thinking and expanding one’s insights and experience from different points of view
- Presumes the best in thinking and doing in others
- Amplifies the strengths and successes of others
- Communicates clarity of visions and goals and supports the success of all who take up the call
- Holds up the standards and expectations of the profession to guide solutions and decisions
- Respects other values, models, and assumptions as effects of experience and knowledge
- Believes in the best self that is within each of us
- Uses language of appreciation, respect, possibility, and clear expectations and outcomes

The skill of coaching offers a vehicle where by every level of our society can connect with the best of self. As Barack Obama began his first days as the 44th President of the United States, he wrote a letter to his two daughters, Malia and Sasha. He said,

I ran for President because of what I want for you and for every child in this nation. I want all our children to go to schools worthy of their potential—schools that challenge them, inspire them, and instill in them a sense of wonder about the world around them. I want them to have a chance to go to college—even if their parents aren’t rich. And I want them to get good jobs; jobs that pay well and give them benefits like health care, jobs that let them spend time with their own kids and retire with dignity. . . . These are the things I want for you—to grow up in a world with no limits on

## 22 • RESULTS Coaching

your dreams and no achievements beyond your reach, and to grow into compassionate, committed women who will help build that world. (Obama, 2009, p. 2)

The world described is the world courageous and dedicated educators desire for all children. What will it take to get there? It will take a way of speaking and teaching to each other, a language of possibility and belief in each and every child in our world.

### SUMMARY

RESULTS Coaching—the new essential—offers a new (or perhaps a renewed) mindset that is about honoring educators where they are and walking with them as they polish their brilliance toward accomplishment, competence, and unlimited results for our future, our children.

The essential mindset of the coach leader is to

- support another person taking action toward his or her goals;
- be a partner with another person to plan, reflect, problem solve, and make decisions;
- be nonjudgmental while giving reflective feedback;
- use highly effective skills of listening and speaking;
- focus on the assumptions, perceptions, thinking and decision-making process; and
- mediate resources, clarify intentions, and identify multiple options for self-directed learning and optimum results.

In order to have this mindset, it is nonnegotiable that the coach leader must

- believe in another's ability to grow and excel,
- recognize that "Advice is Toxic!" and
- use intentional language that aligns with his trust and belief in others.

All that is required is to

- set aside or suspend unproductive behaviors,
- see each person as whole and capable, and
- be a model of committed listening and speaking.

How prepared is your mindset to focus totally on another and support his or her goals?