

# Solution Tree | Press

## **Now We're Talking!: 21 Days to High-Performance Instructional Leadership**

*By Justin Baeder*

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### **Study Guide**

This study guide is a companion to the book *Now We're Talking!: 21 Days to High-Performance Instructional Leadership* by Justin Baeder. *Now We're Talking!* details an effective instructional leadership method of daily classroom visits that can enhance teaching and learning far more than traditional walkthrough feedback models.

This guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers to either work their way through the entire book or focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular chapter. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or an entire team to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, assess conditions in a particular school or district, and suggest steps that might be taken to promote a healthy school culture.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide is a useful tool in your efforts to create a healthy culture in your school or district.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Understanding Why Instructional Leaders Belong in Classrooms**

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1. How can instructional leaders learn the importance of spending substantial time in their school's classrooms from what the Toyota manufacturing system expects of its managers and supervisors?
2. Define *decisional information*. What essential questions can effective managers answer with this information?
3. Why do instructional leaders need to form strong professional relationships with the teachers they instruct? How can instructional leaders strengthen these professional relationships and enhance professional development in the process?

## **Chapter 2**

### **Following the High-Performance Instructional Leadership Model**

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1. Describe the criteria that instructional leaders' classroom visits should meet to ensure these visits positively influence student learning and are professionally rewarding.
2. Considering the information this chapter provides, how frequent, brief, and substantive do you think your classroom visits should be based on the nature of your role and the number of teachers you supervise?
3. Why should instructional leaders make open-ended, evidence-based, criterion-referenced, and conversation-oriented classroom visits?

## **Chapter 3**

### **Acknowledging Related Instructional Leadership, Supervision, and Walkthrough Models**

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1. What are the typical features of a formal teacher observation process, and how can the high-performance instructional leadership model fit into an instructional leadership plan that requires formal observations? Why does Kim Marshall advocate for replacing the formal observation process with a system of mini-observations?
2. For what reasons are data collection walkthroughs problematic, and what problems and unintended consequences arise from feedback-focused walkthroughs?
3. Why can supervisors never act as true coaches?
4. Briefly describe what should occur during learning walks and during instructional rounds.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Conducting Your First Two Cycles of Visits**

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1. What two key planning issues should instructional leaders consider as they resolve to make regular classrooms visits?
2. How can instructional leaders recoup the time they spend visiting a few classrooms each day? How can instructional leaders minimize the chances that their classroom visits get disrupted or experience interference?
3. For what reasons should instructional leaders just start visiting classrooms without any kind of formal announcement for the first visit cycle? Why should they avoid heavy feedback during this first cycle?

## **Chapter 5**

### **Thinking Ahead to Your Third Cycle of Visits**

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1. Name the two notes of caution instructional leaders should have awareness of as they move to the third cycle of their classroom visits.
2. What should instructional leaders say and explain to their staff to prepare the staff for the third round of classroom visits?
3. Consider the options for taking notes on classroom visits that this chapter describes. Based on these options, what form do you think your notes should take, how detailed should your notes be, and how should you share your notes with your staff? Why do these note-taking decisions best meet your needs?
4. Why is the third round of visits a key point in an instructional leadership trajectory? How can instructional leaders forge stronger links to their instructional framework during this third round?

## **Chapter 6**

### **Making Time to Visit Classrooms**

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1. Provide a few examples of true emergencies that justify interrupting a classroom visit and a few examples of near-emergencies that don't warrant interrupting one.
2. Why should instructional leaders schedule brief, frequent blocks of time for classroom visits, and why should they schedule more blocks than they need? What can you learn about viable scheduling from the examples set by John and Susan?
3. Why do instructional leaders need to keep track of which teachers they visit and when? Which of the tracking methods described in this chapter would you most likely use, and why is this the case?

## **Chapter 7**

### **Keeping Your Communication Channels Under Control**

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1. What does it mean for an instructional leader to *stay current*, and what does a failure to stay current create? Why should leaders make decisions in a current mindset instead of a fear-driven mindset?
2. List the information sources you currently have at school. How do you think you can streamline your information sources so you minimize the number of inboxes you must consult in determining your action items?
3. How should instructional leaders go about doing brutally honest triage on their inboxes and processing their voicemail, email, and hard-copy items? What is the two-minute rule, and how can it help instructional leaders get through their inboxes?



## **Chapter 8**

### **Managing the Work You're Not Doing Yet**

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1. What is the most important purpose that a to-do list serves, and why is this use most important?
2. Why must instructional leaders separate the process of planning their work from the process of doing their work? What is a time-consuming task you must complete that illustrates this reasoning?
3. What downside arises from having too many choices? How many options can people handle at most, and what happens when someone has more than this many options?
4. Define what the acronym *SWOT* stands for and what questions instructional leaders can ask themselves to determine their qualities related to SWOT. What do your answers to these questions tell you about your leadership role?

## Chapter 9

### Organizing Your To-Do List

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1. What does *PEEP* stand for, and how does this process save time and effort? Into what specific batchable groups could you naturally group emails that you typically receive?
2. Why should instructional leaders not leave tasks labeled *due today* unfinished or unreviewed in their task-management app, letting them become overdue? For what reasons may you use *time required*, *context*, *energy level*, and *location* properties to label tasks in your app?
3. What freedom do instructional leaders gain from adopting an effective system for keeping track of their work?

## **Chapter 10**

### **Maximizing Your Mental Energy With Habits**

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1. What common types of cues exist, and what other components besides a cue make up any habit?
2. What sources may lead us to habits that bring on automaticity?
3. In your own words, define *ego depletion* and what factors cause it. Under what conditions have you felt ego depletion at work, and how do you think you could have best addressed this ego depletion based on the factors this chapter describes?
4. Briefly describe the five ways in which people can change their habits that this chapter offers. Which of these tactics have you used in the past, and what outcomes did you have? Which of these tactics would you use now to change one of your habits?

## **Chapter 11**

### **Going Beyond Data Collection and the Feedback Sandwich**

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1. Why should instructional leaders avoid narrowing the focus of their conversations with teachers on data collection?
2. What does the author suggest as a more economical and useful way to collect quantitative data than to include data-collection activities in classroom visits?
3. Describe the components of the feedback sandwich. Why does the feedback sandwich not form a desirable foundation for instructional leadership interactions?
4. Why should teachers not equate unsolicited suggestions with feedback? What do teachers want more from instructional leaders than feedback?

## **Chapter 12**

### **Facilitating Evidence-Based Conversations**

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1. What features do evidence-based questions share? Fill in the blanks of a few of this chapter's sample evidence-based questions so the questions fit your needs.
2. In your own words, describe what makes questions *genuine questions*. Why do genuine questions form the foundation of professional conversations, and what should instructional leaders ask themselves to make sure they ask genuine questions?
3. Why do teachers start out at a disadvantage in evidence-based conversations? What unique ability do instructional leaders have as outside observers of classrooms?
4. Why do instructional leaders need to withhold judgment and suggestions based only on brief classroom visits? At what point can instructional leaders make suggestions?

## **Chapter 13**

### **Bringing a Shared Instructional Framework Into the Conversation**

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1. What differing motivations usually arise between a teacher and an instructional leader when they have a one-on-one conversation after a brief classroom visit? What dynamic do these differing motivations lead to, and why should the teacher and instructional leader not rely on personal judgments during such a conversation?
2. When teachers and instructional leaders have a shared instructional framework that defines good teaching practice, how does it influence the conversations they have about classroom evidence?
3. Briefly describe the sets of expectations that work together to form a set of common expectations for ideal teaching practices—a teacher evaluation system, professional development, and adopted curricula.
4. In what ways can instructional leaders close the gap between their judgments and teachers' self-assessments and keep leader–teacher conversations on track?

## **Chapter 14**

### **Developing Skills for High-Impact Conversations**

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1. What factors do professionally unrewarding conversations often have missing? Consider a professionally unrewarding conversation you recently had. Which of these factors and what other factors made this conversation unrewarding?
2. What must instructional leaders keep in mind when teachers ask them for feedback on specific aspects of their teaching? Why do great instructional leadership interactions often take place in these situations when teachers seek this specific feedback?
3. Briefly describe the steps that instructional leaders should take to make sure they have authentic, evidence-based conversations that are linked to a shared instructional framework.

## **Chapter 15**

### **Handling the Toughest Conversations**

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1. What forms does teacher resistance to instructional leadership classroom visits often take?
2. Describe a situation in which a teacher sought to put on a dog-and-pony show when you arrived for classroom observation. How can instructional leaders discourage this type of behavior?
3. In what ways may teachers intentionally or unintentionally divert conversations that instructional leadership seeks to have?



## **Chapter 16**

### **Building Your Feedback Repertoire**

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1. Why should instructional leaders not feel obligated to write all their teaching feedback from scratch? Provide a few examples of carefully crafted language you could add to your feedback repertoire.
2. What can you learn about how to adopt professional, curriculum-specific language in your teaching feedback from the author's experience as a new principal?
3. What tools can instructional leaders use to manage their feedback repertoire in a phrase database? In what ways can maintaining a phrase database help instructional leaders over time?
4. Why should instructional leaders maintain templates for their written responses and feedback? How can they best avoid having a canned feeling to their written feedback?

## **Chapter 17**

### **Balancing Your Formal Evaluation Responsibilities**

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1. Why does no separation exist between instructional leadership support activities and instructional leadership evaluation activities for teacher evaluators? What is the main purpose of distinguishing between formal and informal observations?
2. If school policy prohibits instructional leaders from using evidence from unannounced informal classroom visits, what approaches may they be able to use as an alternative to these visits?
3. How does the 80:20 rule help instructional leaders allocate formal evaluation time? Why does the 80:20 ratio represent the sweet spot in formal evaluation?
4. Briefly describe the components and the function of the CEIJ format of evaluation. Why does this format provide invaluable help to instructional leaders if they have to prepare a high-stakes negative evaluation?

## **Chapter 18**

### **Identifying Improvements From Classroom Visits**

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1. In your own words, define *relational trust*. When does relational trust grow, and what can damage relational trust?
2. What information can instructional leaders gain from frequent classroom visits that they could not otherwise gain? From what two sources do they obtain this information?
3. How can increasing instructional leaders' classroom time lead to the development of a focused, shared school vision?

## **Chapter 19**

### **Opening the Door to New Models of Professional Learning**

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1. Why do school leaders find it tricky to publicly honor teachers for instructional excellence? What approaches may they take to effectively celebrate teachers' practice in meetings and in writing?
2. Briefly describe the three steps that instructional leaders can take to engage teachers in video-based professional learning and the benefits that come from using video for professional learning purposes.
3. What takes place during the models of instructional rounds and teacher rounds? What should these rounds focus on, and what kind of learning do they facilitate?
4. What is student shadowing, and what is the goal of shadowing students? How can school leaders have staff members take part in shadowing?

## **Chapter 20**

### **Choosing an Instructional Focus for an Observation Cycle**

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1. Why may instructional leaders want to choose a focus for their third observational cycle and beyond, and why is choosing a focus optional?
2. List and briefly describe the three criteria that instructional leaders need to have in mind as they choose a focus for a cycle of classroom visits.
3. What barriers will an instructional leader likely encounter if he or she chooses a specific instructional strategy as the focus for classroom visits?

## **Chapter 21**

### **Scaling Classroom Visits Across Your School and District**

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1. What may a school's sole administrator do to scale high-performance instructional leadership within his or her school?
2. What first step must a member of an administrative team take to scale high-performance instructional leadership within a school?
3. How should readers promote high-performance instructional leadership across their district, network, diocese, or association?