SchoolStatus
Boost Coach

Next Steps

My Calendar

MON	TUE	WED	TUE	FRI
1 Walkthrough with Ted Johnson	2	3	4 Observe As	
8	9 Co-Teach with Henry Langle			

Cycle Phases

- Plan (25%)
- Act (25%)
- Reflect (50%)

2/3 Next Steps complete

View goal

EBOOK

How to Build Coaching Systems That Support Teacher Growth

Strategies for Instructional Coaching Leaders to Create Sustainable, Human-Centered Support

When instructional coaching works, it transforms classrooms. But without the right leadership structures, even the best coaches can be thrown off course. As a district leader, you're constantly navigating the uncertain terrain between urgent needs and aspirational goals. Joshua Thom, Instructional Technology Facilitation Specialist at Loudoun County Public Schools, calls this dynamic space the "liminal moment," a term borrowed from sociologist Susan Beaumont. It's the threshold between what was and what is yet to be.

For the past eight years, Josh has led a team of technology-focused instructional coaches through this very transition. What began as a group primarily tasked with troubleshooting IT issues has evolved into a team deeply focused on integrating technology into instruction.

After speaking with him, we've compiled a list of strategies any coaching leader can use to create a high-impact coaching system. Whether you're leading a small team of scrappy instructional coaches or a seasoned group, you can find insight in the pages that follow for growing coaching programs that scale, centering relationships, and staying rooted in student outcomes.

> **The Liminal Moment** — Navigating the dynamic space between urgent needs and aspirational goals.

1. Align for Scale: Build a Structure That Distributes Leadership

When you lead a large team, staying connected to what's happening in schools gets harder, and the risk of burnout grows. With 96 instructional technology facilitators serving 102 schools, Joshua Thom knows that effective leadership doesn't mean being everywhere at once. So, he's focused on building collective capacity.

Each Instructional Technology Facilitator in Loudoun County belongs to a geographically based Collaborative Learning Team (CLT), and every CLT elects a representative to serve on an advisory council. This structure distributes leadership across the district and ensures every coach has multiple levels of support.

CLT leaders surface trends, help plan professional learning, provide immediate feedback on district initiatives, and flag potential issues early.

If you're leading a large team of coaches, it's essential to design systems that offer layered support. Creating additional leadership roles not only lightens your load, but it also helps your coaches grow as leaders themselves.

IN ACTION: HESPERIA USD

At Hesperia Unified School District, 22 instructional coaches meet monthly in regional cohorts, each with its own mascot and team shirts. These gatherings foster community, collaboration, and shared learning. Coaches conduct peer observations and support one another across campuses. According to Keri Livingston, Coordinator of Professional Development and Teacher Induction, these regional teams are a big reason coaches feel seen, valued, and supported.

TRY THIS

Leadership Pulse Check

Start small. Each month, check in with a few instructional coaches and ask:

- What's going well in your building?
- What are we pushing too fast?
- What aren't we pushing hard enough?

These conversations could be the early start to a culture of collaboration and distributed leadership in your district. The answers could reveal which of your coaches has a keen eye for trends, which coaches might pair well together in a learning community, or help surface new responsibilities that would transform your team.

2. Start with Trust: How Coaches Build Relationships That Stick

> **"Measure your success in the relationships you have."**
> — Joshua Thom

Instructional coaching is inherently relational, and Josh makes this clear to the instructional coaches on his team.

To help coaches track relationship-building tangibly, he encourages leaders to ask themselves:

- Can I identify each teacher's face?
- Can I find their classroom?
- Can I name one professional and one personal fact about them?

These questions are great proxies for how many relationships a coach has built in a school building. If a coach can locate a teacher and recall details about their work and life, they're far more likely to enter into a meaningful coaching cycle rooted in trust.

IN ACTION:
BERWYN SOUTH SD 100

Director Samantha Shuman focuses on coaching visibility: "Our coaches are thought partners first. Their trust with teachers is why this work sticks." These relationships have helped Berwyn maintain over 90% coaching engagement across the district.

And don't forget: relationship-building starts with you. The way you invest in your instructional coaches sets the tone. Ask questions. Show genuine care. Be present. Often, your team will learn as much from your modeling as from your mentoring. You may even try creating a spreadsheet of your own.

QUICK WIN

Support your coaches in tracking the relationships they're building. Encourage them to create a simple spreadsheet listing the teachers they work with, along with one professional and one personal detail for each. Revisit it together regularly in your check-ins. Over time, you should see the list and the depth of those relationships grow.
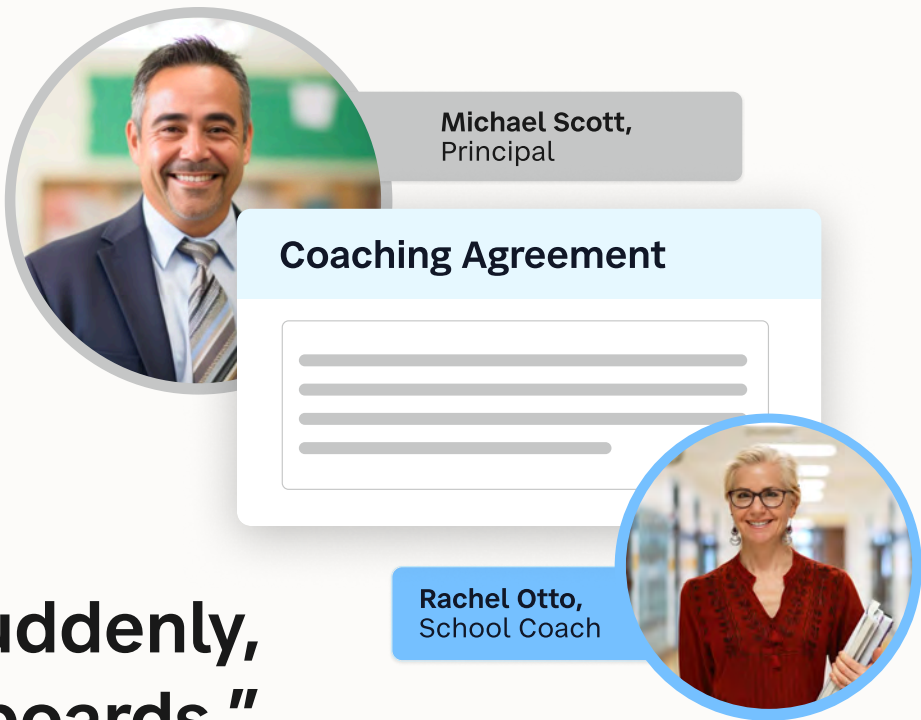
3. Align on Purpose: Building Coach-Principal Partnerships

> **"Without a clear vision, coaching gets squishy. Suddenly, coaches are covering classes and doing bulletin boards."**
> — Joshua Thom

In many schools, coaches operate in ambiguous territory. They're not administrators, but they're expected to lead. Without clear agreements, misunderstandings between coaches and principals are inevitable.

To prevent this, Josh works with each coach to create an action plan tied to school and district goals. These plans are co-crafted with school leaders, not to evaluate, but to co-own.

IN ACTION: BERWYN SOUTH SD 100

Coaching is positioned as Tier 2 support, distinct from administrator walkthroughs. "Principals set the bar. Coaches help teachers reach it," Jennifer Bowles, Director of Early Education at Farmington Municipal Schools, explains. This clarity helps avoid overlap and builds mutual respect.

IN ACTION: HESPERIA USD

Each coach-principal pair signs a coaching agreement that outlines focus areas. SchoolStatus Boost: Coach is then used to verify that logs align with those goals, reinforcing fidelity and trust.

Often, the difference between effective instructional coaching and administrative catch-all lies in a single conversation. When principals understand and co-own the vision, they champion coaches and help them focus on work that drives impact.

TIP FOR LEADERS

Ask every coach to create a coaching plan that's explicitly aligned with school goals and review it with their principal. Then, revisit those plans in quarterly check-ins to track progress and course-correct as needed.
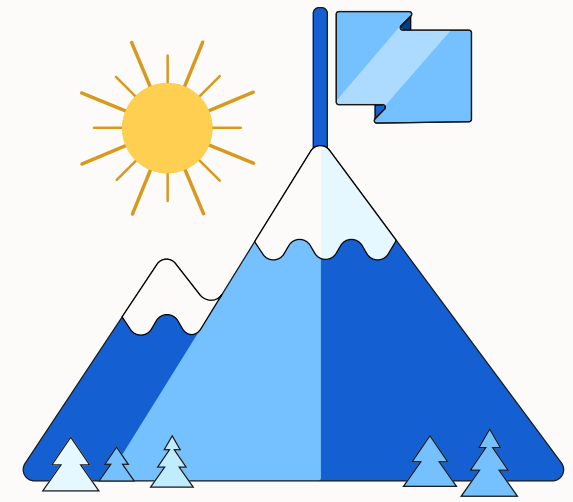
4. Focus on Outcomes:
Define and Celebrate Impact

> **"It's easy to be busy. It's harder to be strategic."**
> — Joshua Thom

Too often, coaches spend their days helping everywhere and influencing nowhere. Thom uses the concept of "coaching heavy" (Joellen Killion) to shift focus from activity to impact.

In Loudoun, facilitators are asked to observe changes in teacher behavior, not just how much coaching time was spent. They might track behaviors aligned with instructional models like the 5E framework and assess the depth of planning, reflection, and student outcomes.

IN ACTION: **LADERA DEL NORTE ELEMENTARY (CA)**

Coach Mindy Small supported a fifth-grade teacher in implementing Socratic seminars with a clear, student-centered goal: students would be able to generate and defend claims during discussions. The measure of success wasn't the number of coaching sessions completed, it was whether students achieved the goal. This cycle is a model of coaching heavy: deep, focused, and impact-driven.

Reflection Prompts for Coaches

Support your team in shifting from activity to outcomes by using reflection questions like:

- Is there evidence of student work that supports the goal?
- Can the teacher describe how the strategy we practiced impacted student thinking?
- Has the teacher applied what you worked on in a new context?

TRY THIS

At your next team meeting, ask coaches to bring a "coaching story," a short narrative about a recent cycle, including what they focused on and how it impacted student learning. This practice, used by Berwyn South's coaching team, sparks deeper reflection, encourages peer learning, and creates space to celebrate real wins in real classrooms.

5. Protect What Matters: Prioritize People Over Tasks

> **"If I don't know where to spend time, my default should always be with a teacher. Better yet, in a classroom."**
> — Joshua Thom

Leaders must help coaches understand the concept of opportunity cost. Every "yes" to a tech issue, hallway chat, or data report might be a "no" to deep work with a teacher.

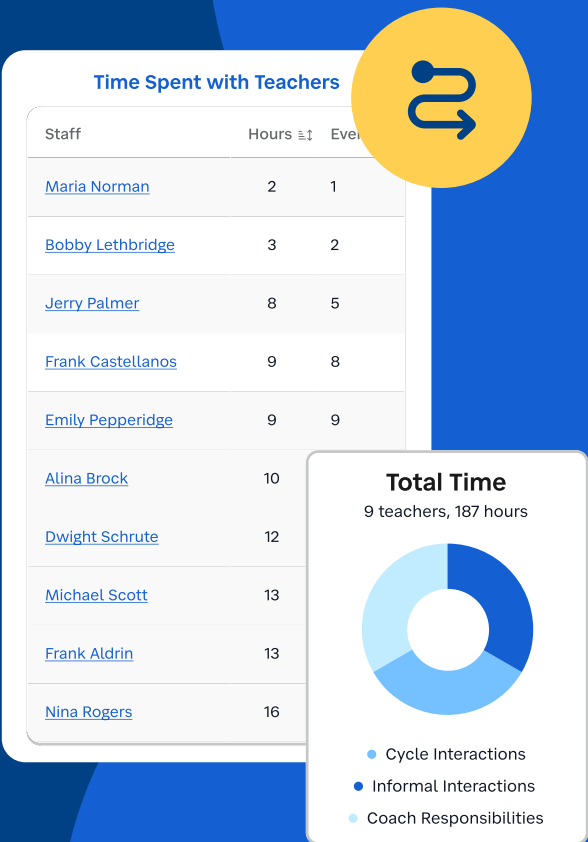Josh gives new hires a mantra: "Don't just be helpful. Be impactful."

IN ACTION: FARMINGTON SD

Coaching time spent on actual instruction increased from 10–20% to **40% in a year**, simply by tracking where time went, and aligning it with goals.

LEADERSHIP STRATEGY

Ask instructional coaches to track their time. On a given day, how much time are they spending with teachers in coaching cycles vs. other school-based activities? By tracking time, you can easily flag instances where coaches may be misused. A solution like **SchoolStatus Boost: Coach** makes this practice easy.

Time Spent with Teachers

Staff	Hours	Eve
Maria Norman	2	1
Bobby Lethbridge	3	2
Jerry Palmer	8	5
Frank Castellanos	9	8
Emily Pepperidge	9	9
Alina Brock	10	
Dwight Schrute	12	
Michael Scott	13	
Frank Aldrin	13	
Nina Rogers	16	

Total Time
9 teachers, 187 hours

- Cycle Interactions
- Informal Interactions
- Coach Responsibilities

# 6. Build Belonging: Anchor in Community, Not Just Content

Instructional coaching can be lonely, especially when you're the only one in a building doing the job. Josh's answer? Monthly full-team professional learning and ongoing trend tracking, co-designed with his CLT leadership team.

> "We look for trends. Then we build our learning days around those. Sometimes I have to push. Sometimes they tell me to pull back," Joshua Thom says. "We stay in that tension together."

In other districts, community looks like this:

- **Hesperia:** Coaching labs, peer observations, and themed regional teams foster connection
- **Berwyn South:** Coaches meet twice monthly to align vision and share cycles
- **Farmington:** End-of-year coaching celebrations feature stories of growth and transformation

Whatever structure you use, what matters most is meaningful differentiation. Build gatherings that focus on what your coaches truly care about. Make time for meaningful conversations and genuine relationships. When coaches feel seen, supported, and connected, their impact grows exponentially.
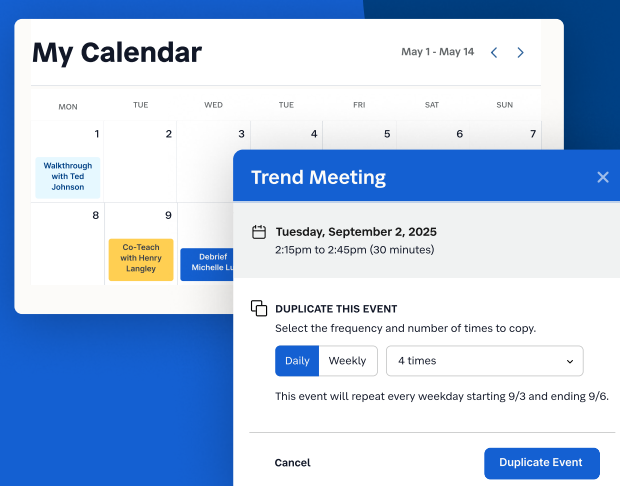
MONTHLY RHYTHM FOR LEADERS

1. Data Check (Where are we?)
2. Trend Meeting (What needs our focus?)
3. PL Design (What learning moves us forward?)

7. Sustain the Vision:
Create a Culture That Lasts

Joshua Thom has been leading his team for eight years, and in some ways, they're still in the liminal moment. The key to continuous progress, however, is focusing on things that are certain to last, such as building relationships and creating effective systems.

As you build or refine your coaching strategy, return to these truths:

- The conversation is the relationship, a powerful tidbit from Susan Scott's *Fierce Conversations*
- Not every problem is yours to solve, but every voice is yours to hear
- Vision should be co-authored, not handed down
- Systems matter
- Culture makes deep change possible

Whether you're navigating a liminal moment or leading through it, you are not alone. Instructional coaching leaders across the country are doing the same, and there's so much to learn.

Your instructional coaches are the heart of teacher growth, but even the best coaches need the right systems to thrive. SchoolStatus Boost Coach helps you:

- Tie coaching cycles to school- and district-level goals
- Track how coaches are spending their time to ensure maximum impact
- Take detailed notes during classroom visits

Equip your team with the tools and insights to move from activity to outcomes, and create a coaching culture that lasts.

Book time with our team to learn more