



Instructional Leadership  
**DIRECTORS'**  
**ROUNDTABLE**

**Kim Marshall**

*Rethinking Teacher Supervision and Evaluation*



Kim Marshall

**RETHINKING  
TEACHER  
SUPERVISION  
AND  
EVALUATION**

How to Work Smart, Build Collaboration,  
and Close the Achievement Gap

SECOND EDITION

**Justin:** Welcome everyone to the December Roundtable. I'm your host Justin Baeder and I'm honored to be joined today by Kim Marshall. Kim is the author of the Marshall Memo and the new book, *The Best of the Marshall Memo: Book One: Ideas and Action Steps to Energize Leadership, Teaching and Learning*. We'll have a podcast out about that soon that we recorded recently. And of course, Kim is the author of several editions of *Rethinking Teacher Supervision and Evaluation*. And Kim I don't think I'll ever get rid of this original version because this was the one I read as a new principal and I have to say it was far and away the a single most impactful book that I read as a principal. The one that really helped me understand the importance of getting into classrooms as a principal, of being in classrooms not just when I was required to but being in there frequently and having a relationship with teachers, and a way of working with teachers that went beyond the formal observation requirements. So Kim welcome to the roundtable.

**Kim:** Thank you.

**Justin:** I wonder if we could just do a kind of a brief bio? Tell us about your professional background and what you've been up to for the past 16 years.

**Kim:** So last 16 years—that's my post principal life—so I was in the Boston Public Schools for 32 years as a 6th-grade teacher and as a central office curriculum director and then as a principal for 15 years of a large Elementary School in the center of Boston. Then I got exhausted and part of my message to people is don't burn yourself out—pace yourself, have a life and so forth. In the last 16 years, I've had a less intense life but still pretty intense the three halves of my life right now are the Marshall Memo which is Sunday and Monday. I just finished this week's issue late last night. It's sending out right now around the world the second half of my life is coaching principals. And I'm on my way down to New Jersey today to work with three different districts in the middle of New Jersey. And then the third half of my life—you can do that math—is a lot of presenting and talking and consulting on the issues of teacher supervision, differentiation understanding by design, backwards unit design, and several other topics.

**Justin:** Fabulous. Thank you. Yes so I think it's helpful to go into kind of the origin story of the work that you did in this book, *Rethinking Teacher Supervision and Evaluation*, which was part of the origin story of my work and again I owe you a huge debt of gratitude intellectually and as a thinking partner before you knew you were my thinking partner. And it's been just a real privilege to correspond with you over the years, as I was writing my book and to get your

feedback and your pushback in some cases that were was really helpful in that.

You had some realizations as a principal around the typical state of teacher evaluation and I think you have some very strong grounding. And certainly we have some colleagues who did some pioneering work in teacher evaluation like Jon Saphier. What did you start to realize required a different approach or a different perspective as you did teacher evaluation the best way it can be done and then and then kind of pushed up against the boundaries of that?

**Kim:** So I stormed into the principalship of a large elementary school sort of 600 students, 42 teachers and other staff in 1987 with a lot of energy about this very issue—because I had been trained by Jon Saphier. He was a close friend of mine we worked together on the early editions of his book, *The Skillful Teacher*. And I really believed in the traditional model of in-depth classroom visit—staying for the whole period, writing up in-depth, every detail as thoroughly as possible and then writing that up. So two or three pages of detailed write-up and then sitting with the teacher and going over it. So I really was wedded to that and I was very good at it. In fact teachers actually speculated that I was wearing a hidden microphone, because I got so much down and what was happening in their classrooms.

But at some point after what five years of doing this and kind of exhausting myself trying to do as many of these as. I realized because told by teachers that they really weren't reading these very carefully that they knew what was going on because they were there. There wasn't any big revelation in my detailed write-up but they cared about was the rating they got at the end, and so they skip to the end. And so really I began to realize that it was a slow learner it took me a while this process really wasn't helping to move instruction. It was merely documenting what was already happening and in case I give suggestions there were occasionally tearful conversations about criticisms I made but it really wasn't moving the ball. In fact in my retirement dinner when I left in 2002, one woman who had come to tears in one of my critiques I asked her if she remembered that moment. And this is at my retirement—we're talking like 14 years later—and she said, "Oh yes, I remember that." And I said, "Well what was your big take-away from that?" And she said, "Never to take a risk." So that was a kind of not really what I wanted to hear and I kind of began to suspect that.

So anyway everybody six years in I got a suggestion from our phys ed teacher a guy named Julio Avila. He said, "Why don't you lighten up a little bit, Kim? You know, you're kind of bring yourself out here I mean he was very personal first pick a shoes and why don't you can't come

on our class was more informally and why don't you talk to us about what you see instead of staying up all night writing these along things?" And that's what I did and right away it was embraced by our union folks who were very skeptical. But very quickly and the first couple of cycles people began to enjoy these conversations. And I get better at seeing what was important in short visits and classrooms and got my frequency up but I was seeing people 10 or 11 times each year and kept that up for nine years. And then I began to write about it percent about it and the rest is history.

I should quickly add and I'm not the only person who thought of this idea I mean Carolyn Downey had written a book called *The Three Minute Walkthrough* a few years earlier which I had not seen. And I think a lot of principals sort of stumbled upon this approach. However as you sort of sort of alluded to a minute ago they were can continue to they continued to be required to do the traditional system. And what I was able to do, and then I think I'm fairly rare in this is I was able to actually toss the old system completely overboard. We got a waiver there was a provision in the Boston contract at that point. There was a faculty vote you could get a waiver so we simply stopped doing traditional evaluations and it became entirely short frequent unannounced visits, face to face feedback, and then sort of a kind of a write-up at the end of the year.

**Justin:** Yeah. So you realized that when teachers would get the big long write up that you put hours and hours and hours into, they pull it out of their mailbox and then they do this—they the last page and they look at what you marked they make sure that they were satisfactory. And that was kind of it like you were seeing that the growth was not there the reflection was not there and you used the phrase in the book kind of a dog-and-pony show that the process had become just a formality a game of going through the motions how did that change when you adopted this much more frequent practice of unannounced visits?

**Kim:** Well the first thing was I began to see what was not the dog-and-pony show I began to see everyday practice and that, of course, is what really matters in terms of student learning is what teachers consistently do on a day-by-day basis. And I saw some wonderful stuff and really hugged people about that but I also saw a mediocre practice, for example, a teacher only calling on the kids to raise their hands, or a teacher using sort of crappy worksheets, or a teacher slow getting off the mark in the morning—a half hour into the day and things really haven't gotten going yet those sort of mediocre practices that are not scandalous and certainly not fireable but which people need to work on and I'm beginning to get people's feedback

on these. And I think it really sort of moved the ball our school did much better I'd also really contributed I think to a good professional climate of trust and the research out of Chicago and elsewhere is that trust is one of the most important things so I think building trust was a really important part of this.

**Justin:** Yeah well let's talk about trust for a minute because I think there's a there's a sense of safety that teachers get from the fact that formal observations are pre-announced and scheduled and they know when you're coming they can prepare extra the night before they can prepare the kids the day before and kind of create the optimal conditions for you to see them at their best and that sense of safety can contribute to that sense of trust but what did you see as some of the differences trust wise with your approach when you started coming more often and unannounced

**Kim:** Well for one thing it may seem safe if things go well but what if things don't go well or what the principal doesn't like the special lesson or what if the technology fails or what if you get tongue-tied out of nervousness and so forth so really it may seem safe in one sense but it's very dangerous and kind of scary in another sense so when I shifted to this to the many observation approach as I call it. I think people are nervous at first and if we had a blood pressure cuff on people when I walk in and probably the blood pressure went up a little bit but people get used to it and then they the trust was really built by the fact that there was this face-to-face conversation afterward I see this I see variations on this in my travels for example people who send an email before they leave the classroom they bring their laptop yeah then they sort of write some notes and they send an email or they leave a note on the teacher's desk and I'm a big proponent of the face-to-face conversation but I believe you agree with this as well that there's that really builds the trust because then whatever notes you were jotting down the teacher can see you're referring to those and they kind of realized there isn't any magic box that things are going into and the biggest insight and I really got this language from Paul Bambrick-Santoyo it was another writer and practitioner who was in this in his camp is the idea of focusing on one leverage point not try to give this teacher a detailed sort of synopsis of what happened but focusing in with curiosity and wondering why you did bit sort of this seemed to be working. Tell me more about that tell me what happened after I left or let's look at those writing things that the kids were working on just a really a curious sort of low-key non-judgmental approach of course there are times when what you do say, you know, that needs to stop, you know, that sarcastic tone or something where you really can have a you know a sharper conversation and a directed conversation with the teacher but

that happened very rarely I mean mostly I saw good stuff great stuff things I was curious about things that weren't work particularly well and teachers were mostly open to my suggestions although I tried as much as possible to have a solution come from them not to paternalistically tell them what they should be doing

**Justin:** Oh yeah absolutely and that sense to go back at a minute or two that sense of trust related to the stakes I think is a big part of what we're talking about here that when something is the only opportunity that teachers have all year. You know they're very nervous as I said people you know some people get tongue-tied there they're fine in front of kids but you know when they know they're being watched by another adult they get very nervous and if that's it for the year that's their only opportunity to demonstrate that they're even competent it becomes this very high pressure very high stakes thing so in your approach you're giving people a minimum of like nine or ten opportunities to demonstrate that proficiency and that confidence and then the nervousness just kind of starts, maybe not the first time but over time the nervousness starts to go down and you start to see people you know and you know maybe not their absolute best but they're at their more authentic and more kind of typical sense of practice Eileen do you want to jump in here and ask your question about how teachers responded to some of those changes?

**Eileen:** Hey Kim, hi Justin I'm curious in the transition how did you how did the teachers respond and how did you talk to them and communicate that there was going to be this change and sell it to them so that they were on board with that change and how did you see them responding to the frequent observations at least initially

**Kim:** So I told people what I was gonna do I think they were skeptical that I would do it. You know, they could see how busy I was as a very busy school and I think they were nervous about like coming in and some of them were still in this habit of all the kids stand up in chorus good morning Mr. Marshall which I used to get a big kick out of it then I realized how disrupted that was I so well by the way is me of that let me just do a quick sidebar here I was in a Jewish day school in New York City last a couple of weeks ago and they said that in their schools it's really an issue of respect that the children will stand up when an administrator comes in and that it would be disrespectful to consider and this teacher actually this principal excuse me I developed a signal the signal was this if she did this when she walked in it meant respect me with your eyes but not by standing up and disrupting the class and so that became there'd be the procedure and that's what when she walked in and did this now if she did this



it meant okay go ahead and stand up so any case I mean the goal is to be a minimally disruptive to have instruction continue as is and I think it only took a couple of cycles thinking of going through the 42 teachers once with these short visits a couple of times and of course I was positive to start with I was another key thing for people to realize okay so this is probably better so let's see how he does let's see how these conversations go and they were mostly pretty brief mostly stand up not in my office, in a classroom or in or in the corridor on the stairway or in the playground or after school and I think the conversation is really the key part though that's what we really got into appreciating what was working well appreciating funny things the kids said moments of insight but also getting into some of these difficult issues like is that work she really the best way to teach this concept well I've been doing this way for a while okay so what about this have you thought of this or I tried this once it's been work but then I try a dislike that kind of conversation so then that's really what made it I think what built the trust and what got people and then they saw that I actually kept it up now this is partly because I have an assistant principal who is very good at a lot of the other stuff we always split the two of the three lunches. I did one and a half she did one and a half and so she but she took care of a lot of other things that made it possible for me to do an average three of these visits today that's great thank you in deal

**Justin:** Yeah Kim I think a big part of the trust they're thinking about some of the research on the elements of trust is that follow through on your part that you know anybody can announce at the beginning of the year I'm going to be in classrooms a lot more and let me know anytime you want me to come by and we've probably all experienced that as teachers or seeing that among our colleagues where there's this grand announcement and then we're pretty much back to normal and it's January before anybody sees the principal in their classroom so that follow-through really I think is key there Heather I wouldn't want you pop in here and ask your question Heather Bell Williams is one of our superstar members from New Brunswick in Canada.

**Heather:** Good morning Kim you answered I think you answered most of this in the previous question but I was the question I had was around some of those moments I have one teacher and doing walkthroughs pretty consistently three a day for about three years now three school years one teacher still super nervous right we talked it through she still just I can see it when I walked in the room she knows exactly how many times in a school year I've been there so far and so I'm wondering if there's specific words that you use when you might see some of that mediocre and there's a mediocre moment I'll call it and you need to have that conver-

sation I've stopped giving her written feedback in the form of emails or notes simply because I know her nervousness is taking over want to build some more trust what kinds of words do you use specifically when it's a mediocre moment, not something that's horrible it has to stop immediately

**Kim:** Well it sounds like there are two things going on here, first of all, she's nervous secondly she's using mediocre practices is that correct

**Heather:** Yes.

**Kim:** Aha okay no wonder she's nervous because she knows you're critical of her and so when you come in there are two reasons you're the boss and she knows that you're looking with the critical eye and certain things that she's doing. So I think one misstep you've taken it sounds like is you've gotten away from giving written feedback right away to having a conversation is that correct?

**Heather:** Yes

**Kim:** So I here's a question where are the conversations taking place is that there in your office then that would add to the nervousness right so maybe if you can have the conversation in the classroom when the kids aren't there is that possible

**Heather:** Absolutely I was reading and I don't know if it was what I read last night in your book or another journal article but that notion of trying to be really strategic about timing those conversations I get lost and chaos of all that's going on during the school day and then I end up at the end of the day and I need to make sure that I may be following through more on prep times and things like that so that I can be strategic about the win of the conversation and not just always at the end of the day which could tend to be in the office area

**Kim:** Yeah so I used to carry around in my pocket a shrunk down version of the schedule so I knew when teachers planning periods were and I was strategic about wandering up there and catching them sometimes at the Xerox machine or some other place some neutral place I think definitely the principals' office is definitely a scary place and I think a lot of us still have associations from when we were students and even teachers will say oh I saw you in the office is everything okay that kind of thing right so I think those things a minute and then in the ac-



tual conversation a lot of people have had different styles of starting the conversation with the teacher after and any observation but one might be how's that how are things going or how did you feel the less than when I think those are a little too open-ended, you know? I think the other approach would be that was terrible you need to stop doing that now that would be a little harsh so I think I developed a set of sort of opening lines I mean it's just some church some minimal chitchat great to see you again and then here's what struck me or tell me a little bit about always happening before I came in or tell me how that worked out did you achieve your learning target that sort of thing and I think one of the best ways to lower the stakes is to get away from judgmental language and criticism and talk about results talk about actual student learning so if you're in there and you're actually looking over student's shoulders that the work chatting with a couple of kids then you can actually say when I talked to Melissa and she seemed so interested in this topic or I talked to George and he really wasn't clear about what was going on and that I think is it makes teachers nervous when they see you walking around talking to kids but at the same time that's great sort of data to use a horrible word for the conversation but I think you know that to me the most important thing is get the frequency out you know make it at least once a month have a conversation as soon afterward as possible have the conversation before anything is written up and focus really on only one thing at a time I mean this teacher is probably nervous I'd be actually curious about what the mediocre practices are but maybe you don't want to go into that you want to talk about that at all

**Heather:** Sure things that you mentioned a lot of worksheet kinds of thing was follow-up activities that are very structured she does struggle historically with classroom management so her or her solution to that has been to do very structured follow-up activities where everyone is sitting quietly allegedly saying quietly I'm doing the follow-up work on she's avoiding the active learning and the manipulation of materials say math in order to in order to keep a lid on things and management mice

**Kim:** Yeah that is so interesting I'm also having a little post-traumatic stress here thinking about my own teaching where I used worksheets very heavily to keep kids settled and by the way that can be a very many that can be a very winning strategy from a principal is admitting you know that you yourself had issues with that as a teacher maybe you didn't maybe you were rock stars on day one but that can really set a teacher's mind and rest a little bit but actually seeing a worksheet so there's an interesting issue I there's also the possibility in these conversations bringing in an outside resource I don't know it so you get the Marshall memo through Justin right?

**Heather:** Yes

**Kim:** Okay I don't know if you've ever looked in the archive but there was a wonderful article by Jennifer Gonzalez who's like I summarized frequently because she's so terrific she's a former middle school teacher and she just writes very thoughtfully and frankly and wonderful things was about worksheets and she says there's a there's a continuum with worksheets from what she calls busy sheets which are just kind of low-level that kind of low cognitive level to which equals power sheets and a power sheet is a worksheet that really does get kids thinking for example an original source document or a real conundrum or something where it really gets them thinking so if you can find that article so you probably know how to log into the archive and just search for Jennifer Gonzalez and look for her look you'll find that one right away and maybe you suggest the teacher read that and get into a conversation about well so this worksheet was this a power sheet or was this a busy sheet or was it somewhere in between and because I think a written word can be very powerful but it sounds like you also want more all class discussion more interactive stuff so that's a great conversation to have with this teacher that's great thank you very much yeah and idle something for her I mean there's all kinds of ways but we're really talking about here as being a coach to the teacher not and I think what makes our nervous is you're coming in as the boss and the judge did you can turn it more into I know you're probably not thinking and firing this person she said she's a keeper so so that any one I want to hear that to nobody might want to one of my favorite two opening lines that I picked up from an administrator in New Jersey you remember this one he was a teacher the administrator said you're a great teacher that lesson didn't go well let's talk so notice the reassurance the frank statement had been the conversation the coaching conversation around are we going to approve this

**Justin:** Thank you very much. Yeah can I love that sense of safety to create and I remember having very similar conversations with people saying there is zero chance that you're going to be fired as a result of how this is going but at the same time it does need to change, you know, and I think it's hard for us to say both of those things at the same time because when we mean that something is kind of non-negotiable that like we cannot persist in this mediocre practice forever we do need to see a change but we know that if people are feeling under the gun if they feel threatened then hey the situation is probably not dire enough that I could get rid of this person if I wanted to and I don't want to but B they're going to be more successful at changing and improving if I do create that sense of safety right off the bat so I appreciate

your frankness on that yeah Ron save you

**Kim:** Another dimension of this and it's very helpful especially for young administrators who are working with veteran teachers is to simply look at the students work if there's an exit ticket there's a piece of writing they did if there's a worksheet that they did spread it out and think about okay so how did this go okay so here's a third of the class that actually didn't get this you know who didn't do too well what's up with that are you satisfied with that teacher they're probably gonna say no they may have excuses about that but that's a good conversation and it's more sort of putting it in neutral territory or like there you go what did you get your learning outcomes okay so why not and then if it becomes systemic that certain students—maybe the girls are not doing so well or the African-American kids are not doing so well then it's a conversation of an instructional technique how can we up the game here so the more kids are successful which is the goal that any teacher would embrace

**Justin:** Yeah and just the opportunity to have that as a conversation I think it is a big shift for a lot of teachers and I don't know what your experience like was like as a teacher being evaluated but often I feel like teachers are conditioned to just kind of sit there and accept everything like smile and nod smile and nod agree with the weaknesses that are identified promise to work on them and then like soon it'll be over if you smile and nod at the right pace

**Kim:** Right and the person is not going to come back for a long time whereas with this method they're coming back fairly soon and also probably just dropping in the time like the many observations so I advocated about 10 a year which is once a month but most of the principles I work with are around their buildings every day so just and that really would be accurately labeled a walkthrough in terms of just really walking around saying hi but not giving feedback but just sort of seeing what's going on monitoring it and maybe getting a pat on the back for things that are that are being picked up on that are going better so I think I think a combination of being around the building a lot and then focusing on a couple of day and most schools it's to get to 10 per teacher per year that means a couple a day, you know, and I think having a numerical goal is very helpful because it was very helpful to me to know if I did three a day I could get to all these 42 people 10 times during the year and I did it yeah and that's a that's a number that is shocking to a lot of people and especially if there's if you have some homework if there's some writing that you have to do to document that and make that count how did you how did you actually make that happen in terms of the writing because I think a lot of people will say oh I can probably get to the classroom but the homework that I have is the

principal you know like are we back to the staying up all night to write it up how do you how do you get the writing done efficiently well this is where many observations have gone off the rails in a lot of districts working with some people in New York City and the high school in Queens and I by crushing the assistant principals I found that they were spending an hour and a half on each visit and that just shocked me and it's because they felt this obligation to do a detailed write-up after even a short visit so my approach to this is to say keep the visit to about 10 minutes most people know the ten minutes is enough time to be gather important insights and have a conversation have the conversation last about 10 minutes ideally in the teachers classroom where the kids aren't there as soon as possible afterward and then do a very shortened write-up and the software that I love on this comes out of Tennessee it's called T Eval on limits the administrator to 1,000 characters and 1000 characters is a basically on paragraph I can show you what it looks like but you can picture it it's sort of it's a paragraph like this it takes about ten minutes to write so ideally one mini observation cycle is a 10 minute visit a 10 minute conversation with the teacher and a 10 minute write-up done perhaps in the late afternoon or maybe in the evening so that's half an hour and I would go out on a limb and say that any administrator who can't get into a couple of classrooms a day have a couple of conversations and do a couple of write-ups something is really wrong there you know either they're being called out of their building a lot or they have a lot of parents who are driving them crazy or they have a lot of discipline issues or they're trying to keep up with hundreds of emails during the school day all these are reasons they would pull you away so I just say have a numerical goal to a day you know get up out of your office didn't do those did be systematic about spreading them around you know catch teachers for the conversations the teachers are very curious they want to know what do you think you know how did it go and then do these very brief write-ups afterwards that to me is that is the formula

**Justin:** Okay so writing less you know putting a character limit on it is a big part of it the analytical aspect of the writing I feel like often we overdo and we say okay in my feedback I need to come up with some insight like this needs to be you know like you know sophomore composition that you took in college I need to write like a critical review essay of this ten minutes of a lesson that I just saw and I feel like often we're trying to squeeze blood from a turnip in some of that writing like I know that every aspect of a good instruction is here and opportunities for improvement are here if I can just kind of squeeze the turnip a little bit harder I will find all of these rich insights in these ten minutes and sometimes I would get into a classroom and I'd say all right there you know here are some things to talk about but honestly I don't have ten thousand words for you on what I saw like we can kind of talk about it in just a few minutes

and let's not let's not try to squeeze more out of it than then we need to and I think that gets back to the formal observation once a year mindset where that's it like that is the turnip for the year and we have to squeeze everything out of that or you know worst case scenario we have to repeat the process and then it's twice as much work and you know they were we're back to square one what did were your thoughts on that?

**Kim:** So I think the key insight is to not try to write it up before the conversation you know Jon notes absolutely get those funny quotes get that insight get that thing you noticed on the wall jot that down and I advocated doing that by hand not with a computer on our the tablet or a laptop then having the conversation and the conversation may actually change your mind I mean you may come in you know wanting to deal with one issue and then the teacher quickly fills you in on something about that and then you move on to another one of the teacher brings something up did you notice such and such or that freaking I was smart for it he's breaking down you know we've got to get this fixed or so and but then you know ideally in the conversation the leverage point emerges you know the one particular thing I mean for example with the person who just came from your brother just spoke for New Brunswick you know the crappy worksheets the anxiety about classroom management you know tamping kids energy down by giving them a lot of paperwork or you know that that's the issue talking that through with the teacher and then they've the write-up is simply summarizing that so I think it takes a lot of the stress off the write-up if you're simply you know it begins with as we discussed you know we're going to try this approach and I referred you to this article by Jennifer Gonzalez and we're going to talk about that after you have a chance to read it and you know that sort of thing so the write up is not this big sophomore SAT you referred to and by the way I love the metaphor squeezing juice from eternity the write up should be a simple summary rather than and you certainly wouldn't want to break new ground you wouldn't want to so and by the way I also am critical of such-and-such no the conversation is where the heavy lifting is done that makes sense?

**Justin:** Absolutely and I think what we're letting go of in that writing process in order to let the conversation do its job is we're letting go of the obligation to solve the problem in the written feedback and I think that's where a lot of principals get hung up is they see a problem they want to fix it so they want to document it exhaustively they want to provide a prescription exhaustively in writing and you know and take them through kind of the whole process when that may not be realistic for the principal to do that like it may be a little bit of a process for the teacher and the principal working together to figure out how to get to a better place

you know I think especially when there are skill gaps like you're not gonna fix the skill gap by scolding someone in writing like that takes. It takes work. Let's see Eileen do you want to jump back on and ask your question here about voice feedback?

**Eileen:** Sure so can I have some colleagues in a mastermind that I'm in I've talked about getting into classrooms and effectively doing that juror four times a day and the way that they successfully do that is they leave Voxer messages for the teachers and I'm just curious because I love the face-to-face when I can sit down with the teachers and I believe it really builds trust with the faculty I don't know how I know they have massive massively large schools so maybe they feel it's prohibitive to try and have the face-to-face what is your perspective about a Vox message or another voice message to a teacher about their observation

**Kim:** So I really have a problem with that because basically, that's the principal going off half-cocked that's you know because you have an impression you may have a critique you may have a thought and so forth and you're gonna give it but that's but before you've talked to the teacher you may have gotten it rolling you may have misunderstood a situation you may have you know been overly critical you may miss something that was on the classroom wall you may have of course you weren't there to see what happened after you left which is so I really think a fundamental issue of respect for teachers is the face-to-face conversation first before anything is sort of put into any kind of electronic form I now that the kicker here is that teachers are curious and nervous and teachers may actually request getting something in writing or in a box message before the conversation so I mean if you put it up to a vote with teachers they might actually vote for that but I'm for not being democratic here we're going for best practice which I think is having the conversation now of course another reason for avoiding the conversation might be what you mentioned having too many teachers but the thing is in most schools the ratio is about 20 to one and 25 to 1 you know I had 42 to 1 you know but most of my schools it's and it's doable to do a couple of day but there is one other issue which could be which is simple cowardice you know like simply not wanting to have a face-to-face conversation and have a difficult conversation with somebody who is for example using crappy worksheets or screening of kids or you know only calling on the kids to raise their hands or whatever the mediocre or ineffective practice is and this is where they're actually several good books are not difficult conversations and having the courage and having this strategy if like how do you broach a topic it's difficult especially if you were 28 years old and the teacher is 55 years old and I heard a wonderful quote from one of my friends who's coaching teachers this teacher said to her I've been at this for 30 years and I know what I'm



doing I don't need you so I mean breaking through that takes courage it takes strategy it takes maybe practicing the conversation and it may involve some tears and some difficulty so but that's what the job is that's what we get paid for is to step up to the plate and deal with those issues that make sense?

**Eileen:** Absolutely and I love that both you and Justin come from the viewpoint of asking questions you don't have to go into a conversation knowing everything about a subject matter that's outside of your content area perhaps but as long as you're curious and ask questions that encourage the other teacher to think and to have to answer them and process the iceberg the part that you don't see in that planning part I think then you really can get to the heart of the matter so just in case someone doesn't know it Vox is it's like a walkie talkie system where you can leave messages for people so Justin I know you maybe someone else on the call doesn't know no

**Kim:** Thanks well you know there's other clever electronic ways of giving feedback to teachers I don't know if you've seen the bug in the ear approach where the teacher has a Bluetooth earpiece and the principal is at the back of the room and actually talks into their ear while they're teaching real-time coaching bug in New York so I mean you're laughing you know but there are people who swear by this I mean Teach for America the program uses this and there's some teachers who because they have a trusting relationship with the principal and because you know they're eager to learn maybe these are brand new teachers they appreciate hearing in their ear you're only calling on the boys or you know you haven't narrated the positive there were some tip like that would drive me crazy you know I could I would not tolerate that there's also the practice of actually intervening during the class you know like you know my philosophy is the administrator should be like a fly on the wall there should be in a unobtrusive as possible but some people cannot resist the temptation to jump in and correct a mistake or you know ask a question or contribute an insight to a discussion I know my feeling is you know like shut up and unless it's an emergency and then there's you can do the bug in the ear remotely like professors at Ed schools will do this you know with a camera at the back of the room and then of course there is electronic feedback you know sending a message doing a box thing so I but I'm for low tech you know I'm for human low tech which takes courage and skill I mean it's definitely you know kind of an art form to doing this there are lots of questions I mean you said questions are good but they're questions it don't work so well for example how did you feel in less than what Oh what great it was terrific we knocked it out of the park and it was a great success you know you and then you have to say well actually

you're wrong so I think I have a set I've I can send these to you if you want a set of good lead-in questions that help one of the most clever I've seen this is not my own invention is after the conversations the conversation gets going saying I what can you hope I would notice there's not a lovely question now this is obviously for something that's going well and were you're really probing what is it what does the teacher want you to see because you're only in there you know once out of every 100 lessons so yeah what do you want what do you what's in you bulletin board or this very quiet as participating or I've taken one of your suggestions and I'm doing this you didn't even notice it so those are the kind of things that get good conversations going and also build trust

**Eileen:** That's beautiful, thank you. I've never heard of the bug in the ear.

**Kim:** And I tell you it's but some people think it's good no they're smart people who are doing clever things and but I'm for low-tech curious humble frequent face-to-face you know that's that sort of way and then the electronic could be that they've written feedback afterward that can be done electronically now that's and then the teacher opening it means that they've seen it so you don't have to sign stuff forget formal about it you know so that's a good use of technology. Thank you.

**Justin:** Thank You, Eileen. It's interesting, Kim—That's a great line of questioning there it's interesting how the technologies that are available to us can be used well if the trust is there, if the relationship is there, if the context is right. But just about any technology can be used in kind of an abusive Big Brother kind of way, as well. I've heard somebody was telling me earlier this school year about the camera system that allows the principal to watch remotely and even buzz into the classroom on a loudspeaker in the classroom. And the story I heard was the principal was not even in the school—the principal was at home taking a personal day or a sick day and would just hop on the camera and buzz in and make a comment. And certainly the technology or technologies are always going to allow us to do both wise, well-intentioned things and probably harmful things. But, Kim, I really appreciate your point that this doesn't need to be complicated. It should be grounded in human interaction, because that's what this is, right? That's the business that we're in.

**Kim:** And people who are using mediocre practices may not be aware that their mediocre may not have fought them through they were that way you know the work worked for me kids weren't listening and that's their fault I mean they have all kinds of rationales or simply

be putting one foot in front of the other and living their life and not knowing not getting the results that they could so I think you know improving I mean to me the moral issue is improving mediocre practices you know occasionally we have to fire a teacher who's really abusive or creepy or something else or sort of failing in health and so forth that's but those are very rare mostly this is an issue of moving average up you know improving on average and pretty improving and it constant I love the book teach like a champion by Doug Lemov which talks about specific teaching techniques that are effective and just moving people to use more of those and the kids who benefit most from that are the kids who are needing the kids who walk into school with any kind of disadvantage and there are lots and lots of those kids and they especially need effective and highly effective teaching Justin: Yeah absolutely well and I think I love your perspective on this because I think you know Doug Lemov and Paul Bambrick-Santoyo probably better than anyone I'm connected with but I've also seen those strategies used just as we can use technology inappropriately and kind of break the human interactions that should be driving this I've seen technique used in that kind of inappropriate way so it so I'm curious what your thoughts are on that like if we have a let's say I have a list of techniques that I got from a great book they're effective techniques but you know I hear from a lot of teachers who say my principal is kind of out of control with these teach like a champion techniques and like I come in and they're always like why aren't you doing this one why don't you do number 42 what about number 34 like linear Leslie works what's the way to balance that and manage that we have lots of

**Kim:** Yeah that sounds like a kind of out of control principal so what about having a study group where they take one chapter at a time and it's discussed and you know and teachers sort of fun because most teachers really like that book I mean do we're talking about teach like a champion I mean it's a real teachers book it's about teaching and anyone who has you know is any you know sort of a blood pressure around the profession around their work is gonna take to that I remember seeing a veteran teacher union rep and Connecticut years ago we kind of like that someone you know in the middle-age section of her career you would think that she would bridle at this book that's largely for charter schools or comes out of charter schools and many sort of inner-city schools there that's the where a lot of the mobs videos come from and she loved the book she said it was it was a fantastic book you just sort of made her appreciate something she was doing that she didn't even know she was doing and we think some things so I think it's how his handle I would I would suggest you know a study group take one chapter at a time discuss it talk it through push back and there's some gaps in Lemov's work I mean his work is more sort of focused on classroom management than on 2d

parts of curriculum it's not a critique I mean it because that was his interest so what's missing here what could we use there would be more thoughtful on a particular issue you know there's lots of other books about it about teaching you know wonderful books about teaching and so I think that's it's all about the craft of teaching but I think back to your you know the description of teachers being driven crazy that kind of sounded just sort of thoughtless management I mean that comes down to you know being in people's faces and using a poor strategy and I wonder if as those principals are getting into classrooms you know if they're actually getting in and talking one issued I mean all my recent oils big thing is take one thing at a time you know one leverage plenty of time like a good basketball coach you know like let's work on the dribbling let me show you this okay try that okay so can I come back and look at rather than flooding people with a whole bunch of brilliant suggestions

**Justin:** Yeah well and again to get back to the idea of curiosity that you brought up just a few minutes ago and I saw some of our panelists here nodding because I my emails the last couple of days have been about curiosity and you know if you see something that's that you think is not okay that really needs to change you know rather than just getting aggressive about that and really hitting that feedback hard getting curious about it and saying you know what's behind this what are what are people that not what are you thinking but you know what's the thinking behind the front you know there's a big difference between what are you thinking and what do you think depending on the tone but you know that you know that human side and not the feedback that is the as you said kind of the lacking encourage let me drop you a voice memo and run away or you know let me throw a grenade in the door and run away that you can't push back what do you put your thoughts on the teaching is so as teaching us so hard I mean let's face it it's a really hard and it's even more challenging now with teachers looking over their shoulders about crazy people running into their schools with guns and opioid addiction and the families and this week's Marshall Memo and I just finished late last night it has a couple of articles about stress racial stress other kinds of stress that kids are under especially adolescence but even young kids family issues divorce shouting at home you know all these kinds of issues are going on and teachers are dealing with that with the pressure step accountability with all the correcting both of my children our humanities teachers one teachers high school history and like no other teachers seventh grade English and the amount of correcting they have the amount of papers by donor has 137 papers to correct and did so over the Thanksgiving vacation so it's just really hard and I think there has to be a certain humanity and intact and wisdom of somebody coming into a classroom and critiquing that I mean you got over you know the three big things in there's a book called thanks for the feedback and I

know you've seen the three big things so teachers want to be appreciated and whether it's a hug or a compliment or something but it's you know face to face individual appreciation the second thing is coaching and it's a most teachers I'm to ninety five percent of teachers want to get better and appreciate coaching and then the third thing is knowing where they stand and that's back to the thing you mentioned earlier there's a zero percent chance you're going to get fired Oh relax you know what we're about here is improving practice and you know those three things you know appreciation coaching and reassurance really you know we got to convey those in a human way and I think the best way to do that is short frequent classroom visits unannounced face-to-face conversations as soon as possible afterward brief and getting the rhythm up and keeping it up all year long and really being kind of being a mensch about this business that's what it comes down to

**Justin:** I love it I want to pass it over to Rachel I think we've got time for one more question.

**Rachel:** Thank you one of my struggles that I'm facing right now is finding that time for the face-to-face conversation not that I don't have the time but more so my teachers not having the time a lot of my teachers will go all day with maybe only a 20 30 minute break so having to come touch base with me real quick ends up being one more thing on their to-do list which does take them away from planning and prep and you know just dealing with the the day-to-day so I have been providing feedback on a tool that we use and it's just really scripted I'm just documenting what I see in a class participation totally unbiased it's just what I see for them to see what I saw in those 10 to 15 minutes and then I've been putting on the forum if I saw something I really like great use of whatever the strategy is that I know the teams working on or if the teacher had told me that they were struggling with a student I'd say you know you're doing everything that you can keep it up be consistent here's an article I read recently on responding to trauma you know students experience trauma maybe some of these strategies will help is that more detrimental to staff or should I continue it like I will try to talk to the teachers in the classroom but lightens up if they're helping students or it's a direct instruction I can't really pull them off to the side and you know have that quick conversation what are your thoughts on that and I have about 60 teachers I'm a coach I don't evaluate but um I do document it and I documented to show growth for them especially if something were to come up and administration that supervises them you know they don't want to rehire but then I can see look at this growth like look at this track record of what you know all these informals have gathered. What are your thoughts?

**Kim:** So how long is it taking you to do these write-ups after the visits?

**Rachel:** It does take some time um it's not too much anything I'm getting it down to about 20 minutes per her teacher I pair every action that I've documented to a Danielson domain but not a level just a domain like this is I'm for you know assessment or this is an artifact for engaging students, you know, that type of connection

**Kim:** Yeah I mean it could be and I'm not seeing your write-ups it could be that these are very sensitive and thoughtful and helpful the teachers what kind of reactions to get anything from teachers so.

**Rachel:** For veteran teachers that I have built a relationship within the past who have come to me I received positive feedback because when I brought it up to them like should I just walk through you know leave a sticky note you know every time I'm in there you know a kudos stick you know that's on these walkthroughs or these informals but then they always say that they like the feedback

**Kim:** Yeah so is the change in practice do you see improvements

**Rachel:** I don't know that I'm necessarily seeing improvements just yet but I see them utilizing the tools you know like I'm seeing them take those risks but I don't know that I've necessarily seen like instructional improvement

**Kim:** So I think the picture here is it seems to be of you doing a lot of work and probably very good work it's there's a lot of description and then there are some suggestions and some kudos and so forth so you have a lot of good elements there I definitely don't think you should be giving feedback during the class I think your instinct on that is absolutely correct you know you don't interrupt construction you don't pull them away from the kids because they should be working with the kids it sounds like there may be a macro scheduling issue going on here a teachers don't have any breaks today yeah it happens that my son-in-law is a middle school teacher in Boston Public Schools and he has a schedule like that and it's really killing him I mean he just simply does the are less time to go to the bathroom during the day yeah and that really is I don't know what kind of school you have you know it really is a union issue which you know this is what unions are really good for it is making sure that teachers have working conditions which includes you know out of seven thirty a day a couple of peri-



ods of non teaching periods that are spread and no more than three in a row and that kind of thing so I don't know what your situation is in

**Rachel:** That we aren't charter we don't have a union but they do have a break a forty forty-five minute break except they get called to sub-issue there that break goes away

**Kim:** Well okay so charter schools there is some of the more wonderful and some of the best schools I've seen are charter schools but this is one of the downsides it is if people are being burned out and you know I know charter schools that have a 50% turn teacher turnover rate every year and that's not good getting to a humane and manageable schedule is one thing but back to the face to face even I do think is you've gathered from you know the previous administrators I do think the base faces should happen before anything is written up and I think that has numerous advantages your dilemma is can you do that because teachers don't have time to talk to you I'll bet that most of your teachers are really curious to hear your feedback going to talk to you and I'll bet that they can find the time whether it's at lunchtime or after school or before school or even a zoom conversation late in the afternoon I mean charter teachers you know my experience are mostly eager-beaver interested thoughtful you know want to improve and I'll bet that they could find the time you know and if you're only doing a couple a day it should be possible and those conversations don't have to be long psychodramas you know they can be no 10-minute conversations I mean it do you think you could fit a couple of those in I mean during the day and with charter I mean they can't give you a union push back you know that let's talk to them they will know

**Rachel:** Yeah you know I think it's more on the personal level of kind of hindering myself from going into more classes in the day because I know that okay if I do five classrooms today that I should be touching base with five teachers the likelihood of them catching me after school between meetings and all that you know now we're probably talking just a couple days yeah so you're it sounds like you're trying to do short visits I'm wondering with as a coach whether it might be less is more you know like more longer visits more you know co-teaching or you know sort of working together more like and I know we're running out of time here and Justin may be about to get out the hook here but uh you have access to the Marshall Memo yes okay so if you go to the website, you log in and I think it's a The Principal Center I believe to login look under teacher coaching and there been a lot of really great articles about coaching it's sort of a dilemma you know like a lot of coaches are if you push back and you just I want to hear it or you know the teachers are most needed don't get it you know there's

all these issues but there really is a way of a coach making a big difference and one of the biggest ones it's looking at student work you know with the teacher team I don't know if you have like great little teams and they have PLC meetings where they look at the work is that a dynamic you can be part of those

**Rachel:** Yeah it's definitely its one that's a work in progress right now but we will definitely have the structure and professional development day is next year in our new charter annual to really like move those conversations like do it this year but really have productive conversations next year yes

**Kim:** So rather than kind of micromanaging teaching actions looking together as a teacher team and how did this work and what was effective in your class and what was what do I need to change became what ideas can I get from it cause I think Paul Bambrick-Santoyo says all the time and he's a big charter guys you know is that the teacher teamwork looking at student work together that is the most powerful driver of improvement you know supervision and so forth can be but it's the actual teacher teamwork at carving out time for that in the schedule I think is absolutely crucial it sounds like your school is moving in that direction are you familiar with the Bambrick-Santoyo work at all?

**Rachel:** Yeah a little bit yeah

**Kim:** His book leverage leadership 2.0 or it's one of the most powerful books out there in his schools in Newark New Jersey this is where I'm going this afternoon his schools are unbelievably successful and they don't have as much teacher turnover and they've really figured out use of the North Star Academy charter schools they really figured out how to get the teacher teamwork working and also they're in classes frequently and coaching

**Rachel:** Great that that's helpful thank you

**Justin:** I love it and Heather is mentioning *The PLC+ Playbook* from Fisher and Frey I believe and there were some of our earlier guests and by the way thinking about some of our past guests on the roundtable here we've also had Jen Abrams on hard conversations so definitely some good work to check out there and as Kim said Paul Bambrick-Santoyo's work and Doug Lemov's work absolutely. Rachel one the other thing I wanted to mention that I think I never really got the hang of as a principal but that some of our members suggested to me people

who are going through the instructional leadership challenge and really trying to get serious about getting into classrooms every single day they said you know what I actually made myself note cards and wrote out each teachers schedule on the note card so I would know okay if I go visit this teacher now are they going to have a free period later in the day or if I already missed that and just that little bit of planning and being able to kind of anticipate you know what's going to come up and you know when kind of the optimal time to visit is really makes a big difference so we actually took that feedback from our members and designed the note-cards you can get those at [PrincipalCenter.com/notecards](http://PrincipalCenter.com/notecards) or if you'd like we have them print it up in batches of 5,000 if you wouldn't like some just let me know we'll send you some in the mail and then just have your office staff write those out get yourself organized and then you know we and can I say this a little bit she officially because we actually have an app that will help you organize this but I'm still a big advocate of the paper note cards because they're in your face you know

**Kim:** This is what I carried around in my pocket so this is the whole schedule and the big light the big number is when that grade-level team has a planning group so I could see at a glance at any point during the week you know you notice in my pocket you know when I could zero in on people now, of course, they might have been busy they might be running to the bathroom they might be running stuff off and everything so you back off but still you can be strategic and you can catch those people and again it's only a couple of day so one thing of Rachel is she's trying to do five a day so that's I think a little bit overload in terms of frequency and especially in terms of being able to catch those people for a meaningful conversation

**Justin:** Yeah absolutely and you know and if you are in classrooms you know I think it is also okay to say hey you know what I stepped in I don't really need to say anything to this teacher so I'm just gonna tell them nice to see you today and move along and then prioritize those ones that you know there really is something to talk about because just honestly sometimes there's not and that really bugs people when there's not really much to talk about they think oh I gotta find something I've got squeeze blood from a turnip, but there is nothing.

**Kim:** That might be the time to ask that question what did you hope I would notice yeah that's a good one maybe you didn't see it but maybe they're aware of it or they're worried about something so forth

**Justin:** Love it so again I can't recommend highly enough reading the Marshall Memo and

the archives are there and if anyone is wondering how to get into those archives I think one of the best ways Kim is the book that you just put out with Jenn David-Lang the best of the Marshall memo that highlights some of those and I know we've done a podcast that'll be coming out soon to take people into that book but final thoughts on anything we've talked about today

**Kim:** For me or from so I think frequency is the best thing authenticity humility curiosity those are the key things here looking at student work almost focusing in the classroom focusing more on what the kids are doing perhaps than what the teacher is doing checking in with a couple of kids what are you working on today all kinds of insights from that but I think it really is a certain amount of self-discipline and just one thing I do think having a numerical target of classroom business for the day is very helpful you know mine was three. I pushed myself to do three a day and there were bad days when I did zero just keeping up a steady pace and keeping it up all year long and being systematic about different parts of the day different parts of the different groups that teachers are teaching I think that and those conversations those face-to-face that's the heart of the matter that's the real work and I think when you go home after doing two or three of those and having conversations you just feel like you're in the middle of the work you know you're really doing your job you're making a difference that's really what it's all about

**Justin:** Well said yeah well said okay it has been an honor and a privilege to speak with you today and to engage in this conversation thank you so much and stay in touch we'll talk soon that we'll send you the video but thanks so much for the work you do and thanks for your consistency and your frequency and your you know steadiness in putting out the memo every week

**Kim:** You're welcome. Thanks so much!

**Justin:** All right everybody, take care and have a great day!



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