



VIRTUAL

INSTRUCTIONAL
LEADERSHIP
CHALLENGE

TRANSCRIPT

MODULE 1

Welcome & Overview

Welcome to the Virtual Instructional Leadership Challenge. I'm Dr. Justin Baeder, director of The Principal Center. And in this program, it's our goal to maximize our impact as instructional leaders even if this school year ends up looking very different from any previous year. I'm going to assume that at some point, perhaps right now, or perhaps in the past, or perhaps in the future, that your school is not 100% face-to-face.

Perhaps you have some students who are remote learners. Perhaps you have some teachers who are working remotely. Perhaps you have teachers going into quarantine and having to be home for a time, or perhaps your entire district is all virtual for a long period of time. Whatever your precise circumstances. I think it's no exaggeration to say that this is going to be an unusual year, and one in which leadership is more critical than ever. This is not a year that we can afford to take off from instructional leadership, but it's also not a year that we can approach as if everything were normal.

So, in the Virtual Instructional Leadership Challenge, we're going to grapple with what exactly instructional leadership is and how we can continue to be high performance, high impact instructional leaders, even under rapidly changing circumstances. So, we're gonna get right into it. And I wanted to start by putting the Virtual Instructional Leadership Challenge into the context of our previous work together in previous iterations of the challenge. And you have probably seen, you may even have a copy of my book, "Now We're Talking, 21 Days to High-Performance Instructional Leadership"

Everything that we're going to talk about in the virtual challenge reflects and builds on what you'll find in "Now We're Talking" and in the original Instructional Leadership Challenge. So, I stand by all of my advice in the book and in the regular challenge, but we're also going to build on those resources in ways that fit our current circumstances. So, just by way of a little bit of history, the Instructional Leadership Challenge started way back in 2013. In the fall of 2013, we did a live challenge.

We did a series of trainings through webinars and got a lot of people excited about getting into classrooms. And that was the beginning for many people of this habit of getting into classrooms and having feedback conversations with teachers 500 times a year. In 2014 we made that a 21-day challenge, and that was our main program for a very long time that introduced many people to The Principal Center. That ultimately resulted in the book, "Now We're Talking, 21 Days to High-Performance Instructional Leadership" published through Solution Tree and to our flagship program, the High-Performance Instructional Leadership Certification program.

Some of the ideas that you'll see in the virtual challenge come directly from that program. I'm excited to share those with you. We then updated the Instructional Leadership Challenge to focus on the most essential elements that would get you the best results as quickly as possible and help you make a consistent habit of getting into classrooms every day. And now we are sharing with you the Virtual Instructional Leadership Challenge to help you continue to do that even if your school year is not happening entirely face-to-face, or if there are various disruptions to it. So with that history in mind, let me first thank you for being here. Let me thank you for your commitment to being an

impactful instructional leader. And let's get right into some core beliefs that I hope you share with me that I think you will, but they really underpin the work that we're going to do together in this program.

The first core belief I wanna share with you is simply that instructional leaders belong in classrooms. Now, I believe that there is no better place to spend your time as an instructional leader, maybe not all of your time, but on a consistent basis, a significant amount of your time as a leader, should be devoted to getting into classrooms and having feedback conversations with teachers. And when your school was operating remotely, the same is true. It has to look differently. And we'll talk about how precisely we do that if classes are meeting virtually, but we belong in classrooms.

That just kind of a fundamental belief for me because when instructional leaders get into classrooms, it allows two things to happen. First, it allows us to build relationships with our staff. It's very difficult to have good relationships with people that you don't see all that often, who supposedly report to you and show up to meetings with you. But if you never see people in their natural environment as professionals, if you never see them actually doing the core work that they're in your building to do, then it's difficult to really have a truly professional relationship. And it's possible to be cordial and run into each other at the coffee maker in the staff lounge, but it's difficult to have a substantive professional relationship if you're not getting into classrooms consistently.

Second, we get something just as valuable from those visits. We get firsthand information about teaching and learning from getting into classrooms and talking with teachers about their practice. And we need that firsthand information in order to be effective as leaders when it comes to our single greatest responsibility. And that is making decisions. All kinds of decisions that you make as a leader, depend on high quality information. And there's no better place to get that information, especially information about teaching and learning, than the classroom itself.

The fourth core belief that I wanna share with you is that teachers change their practice, not as a result of suggestions that they receive or written feedback on an observation or evaluation form, but primarily through conversation. And I believe this is true of just about any change we make as human beings. When it comes to the big changes in our thinking, in our values, in our practice, in our behavior, we mostly make decisions about change in ourselves through conversation. So if we as instructional leaders want to change teacher practice and bring about more effective practices for our students, we're going to have to get into conversations with teachers on a regular basis.

Fifth, I believe that in order for those conversations to actually change instructional practice, we need to have a shared language, a common vocabulary that we can use to talk about practice in ways that mean the same thing to all of us. We need to get on the same page in terms of our terminology, our language, in terms of how we calibrate our expectations. And I believe the best way to do that is with what I call an instructional framework. So later in this program, I will walk you through the process of creating an instructional framework that can give you that common vocabulary, even in areas that are entirely new to most people on your staff.

Even if your evaluation system doesn't have any language or any shared expectations about how to teach virtually, you can very quickly develop those shared expectations and that shared lan-

guage by drafting an instructional framework, and I'll show you exactly how to do that. Finally, I believe that improvement can't wait. The reality of the COVID-19 pandemic is that a lot of things just are not possible, right? Broadway is closed, the movie theaters are closed, at least right now. There are a lot of things that we just cannot safely do until this is all behind us. But I believe that one of the things that we cannot put off is improvement. Right now, our students need us and they need us not to just continue doing what we've always done, but they need us to find ways to meet their needs in circumstances that we've never faced before.

They need us to be creative and solve problems and reach them and serve them and help them get through this time. And that's going to require learning that we've never done before as a profession and learning that is not going to happen without the dedication of instructional leaders. So I wanna thank you for committing to this work. I wanna thank you for deciding not to take the year off and say, you know what, we'll figure this out next year. Let's just kind of phone it in this year. I want to thank you for not doing that and showing up for your students and figuring this out. Because that is exactly what your students need. So thank you for your dedication. Thank you for being here.

So let's jump right in and talk about what is different this year. First of all, obviously we can't always get into classrooms face-to-face. We may not be able to do or be required to do the traditional supervision and evaluation process. Perhaps your district or state has suspended teacher evaluations this year and if so, I think that's perfectly fine. But again, what we can't do is suspend our efforts at improvement and suspend our role as instructional leaders. We are needed. Our work is necessary more than ever, and that's true, even if no face-to-face teaching is going on, right?

Even if your district is fully virtual, and even if instruction is mostly asynchronous, we can still have an impact as instructional leaders. It's just going to look different, right? Some of the fundamentals of teaching and learning are going to be different. There are differences in the ways that students are grouped, in the ways that teachers are dividing the work, perhaps teachers are planning more in teams and kind of dividing the workload. Perhaps a lesson will be filmed by one teacher and shared with all the teachers at that grade level and shared with their classes. So there are many different setups that are happening right now that may vary from a typical school year that are creating differences in the ways that students interact with each other, that they interact with their teacher, that they interact with the content. But if we're creative, we can still find ways to look at practice and to gather evidence of practice and be able to talk about that practice with teachers. And it's essential that we do because this school year is challenging even our most experienced and skilled veteran teachers in entirely new ways. So again, your impact is more important than ever. And the priorities that you focus on this year will be different, but they are huge priorities. And I wanna draw your attention to just three.

Number one, I believe we've got to strengthen relationships. If you've been working together with someone for years, this is a year where we're not going to see each other as much. We're not going to have the informal conversations around the copy machine or the coffee maker, in the staff lounge or the mail room or in the hallways. There is simply going to be less casual, social workplace interaction. And we'd lose a lot from those changes if we're not careful. We've gotta find ways to make that up and maintain those working relationships. And if you have new hires,

I'm guessing you probably have some new hires in your building who are starting their tenure in your building under very strange circumstances, right? It's going to be very difficult for people to feel like they're a part of a learning community when that learning community is locked down and meeting virtually. And so many things are happening that are strange. So we've really gotta find ways to strengthen relationships in our schools.

Second, we need to find ways to gather information. Again, when you can't get into classrooms, when teams are not meeting in person and you can't just pop in. When a lesson plans look very different, we've gotta find ways to get a sense of what is going on with teacher practice and what teachers are thinking even when classes are happening virtually.

And because so much is different, the third priority I believe is that we've got to solve big problems. You may have students who are not logging in. You may have students who don't have internet access at home. You may have students who don't have access to food or to the other supports that we provide normally in person through the school. And some of the little things about teaching techniques, some of the little things about the tips that we might give in a face-to-face observation, some of those things are not going to matter as much this year because we've got much bigger fish to fry. So I wanna encourage you to think about solving the most foundational and fundamental problems first. And if you have something small, a little instructional tweak, maybe there is a time for that but I want you to be open to the possibility that technique is not where most of our opportunity lies.

We may have some more fundamental, kind of Maslow's level issues that we need to address first in order to ensure that our teachers and our students have the greatest opportunities this year. So those are our priorities. Here is a bit about our table of contents. Here's where we're going to go in the Virtual Instructional Leadership Challenge. Module one, which you've already started by watching this video is all about how as instructional leaders, we drive improvement. There are several specific mechanisms that we use to have an impact on student learning. And we're going to get into how precisely we impact teacher practice. In module two, we'll talk about the evidence-driven approach to instructional leadership and how the nature of the evidence that we're working with this year is very different, but we still need to have an evidence-driven approach. And we'll talk about different forms of evidence and different feedback questions that we can use to discuss that evidence with teachers. In module three, we'll go deep on feedback conversations and how people change their practice through conversation and how we can use those conversations to not only get information, not only build relationships, but actually change practice and drive improvement.

In module four, we'll talk about shared expectations and how as instructional leaders, we can actually develop new vocabulary, new shared language for talking about practice in areas that, perhaps your existing teacher evaluation system does not address at all. There's some exciting work that's going to be done this year by innovative leaders around the world to develop new expectations quickly that make excellence the norm. In module five, we'll talk about some of the self-management aspects of this work and about creating the bandwidth that you need with all of the other responsibilities that you have, with all of the other demands on your time and attention, with all of the other stressors that you're facing, both at work and in your personal life. How can we create

the bandwidth for instructional leadership?

That is our focus in module five. And I'll share with you my philosophy that I call decisional minimalism. So stay tuned for that. And then in module six, we'll talk about alignment and about making pockets of excellence into the norm using those instructional frameworks, using those feedback conversations and using the evidence-driven approach that I'm going to convey to you throughout this program because it's not enough to have some people who are doing a great job. It's not enough to have excellence in some schools. We really need to make excellence the norm across our organizations. So stay tuned for module six. And then as a bonus module, we're going to talk about protocols for looking at different forms of evidence, such as student work, teacher-created artifacts, other artifacts that perhaps are curated by the teacher, but made by someone else.

All of those are going to be relevant forms of evidence, and we've got to find new ways to talk about them. So stay tuned for those protocols in our bonus module. One other feature of the Virtual instructional Leadership Challenge that I wanna make sure you're aware of and we should have sent a link to this to you via email, or you can find it on our website, is the journal. And I wanna encourage you to pull up your journal now and reflect on these first two questions. In your journal, answer this first, what have been my best sources of information for instructional leadership this year?

Perhaps you have been able to get into classrooms a bit, perhaps there are other classrooms you haven't been able to get into, or perhaps you've been relying entirely on other forms of evidence if your district is operating virtually. So what are those best sources of information for instructional leadership this year? And second, how have I strengthened professional relationships with my staff this year? Take a moment and fill out that section of your journal and I'll see you in the next section as we continue module one.

What Is Instructional Leadership?

What is Instructional Leadership? In this section we're going to share a formal definition of instructional leadership. And I wanna relate that to what's often thought of as mere management, see a lot of instructional leaders don't wanna be known as just building managers. We wanna be known as instructional leaders first and foremost but actually believe there's a tighter integration between those two sides of the role of an administrator than most people really have acknowledged. So let's first start with the definition of instructional leadership and let me know what you think of this.

I define instructional leadership as the practice of making and implementing operational and improvement decisions in the service of student learning. Again, instructional leadership is the practice of making and implementing operational and improvement decisions in the service of student learning. And operational and implementation, there are carefully chosen words, I believe that it is actually a false dichotomy to say that management is one thing and instructional leadership is something else. And maybe those should even be two different jobs given to two different people and if you are the principal you should just be the instructional leader.

I actually don't believe that, I believe that really they are two sides of the same coin and if we try to separate management from instructional leadership, we end up with some problems. We end up with some difficulties in terms of how well we can do both sides of that job. I believe that it is entirely possible of course to be a manager without being an instructional leader and most educators have probably worked with an administrator who chose only to be a manager and not to be an instructional leader. And I don't recommend that if you are a principal, if you're an assistant principal I recommend that you fully do both sides of that job because they really go together. And you can't choose to only be an instructional leader, I think you can choose to be only a manager but will not be very effective in changing teacher practice through only management work.

But you can't choose to only be an instructional leader and not be a manager because teachers can only improve with effective managerial support. And teachers will only respect instructional leaders who also support them in the day to day operations. Now that doesn't mean that you don't have other people that you delegate to, it doesn't mean that you also take on the role of custodian and also take on the role of discipline dean and attendance secretary and all these different ways that we divide up the work. I think makes sense, I think we don't need to take on and take back work that we've effectively delegated to other people. But as leaders, I believe that we are responsible for first and foremost, ensuring the smooth operation of the school and we can't simply say, well management is beneath me management is someone else's job.

These are two sides of the same coin. and if we understand what it is that we're managing we can see why instructional leadership and management are so tightly linked. If we see ourselves as managing not a building but a team of professionals then it makes total sense that we would be effective managers first if we want to be effective instructional leaders. Teachers are professionals, the work of teaching is professional work and it's not the kind of work that we can simply manage through giving orders and holding people accountable. It's the kind of work that requires professional judgment and if we want to improve that work, fundamentally what we're talking about doing as instructional leaders is helping teachers make better decisions with a high degree of auton-

omy under conditions of uncertainty.

And that is difficult, that is the work of an instructional leader, the work of improvement is mainly about improving teacher's professional judgment. So of course that work involves getting into classrooms or looking at other evidence of practice if we can't physically get into classrooms. It involves talking about that evidence with teachers having conversations that allow us to make sense of practice and that allow teachers to identify changes to make to their practice. And in the course of those conversations we actually can improve teacher's professional judgment.

So again let's not maintain that false dichotomy, that management is one person's job and instructional leadership is someone else's job. And if you want to be an effective instructional leader you shouldn't be a manager. Let's set that aside and realize that we have to do both, we have to be effective managers in order to be effective instructional leaders and change teacher practice. So in your journal, I'd like to invite you to take a moment to reflect on this, how is it that you make a difference as a manager in your organization? What are some of the key ways that you provide support for teaching and learning? And then second in your journal reflect on this question, how do I make a difference as an instructional leader? What are some of the key ways that I provide that type of leadership? Take a moment to write about those two questions in your journal and I will see you in our next section.

The High-Performance Instructional Leadership Model

In this section, I'm going to share with you the High-Performance Instructional Leadership Model, which you may have seen in my book, "Now We're Talking 21 Days to High Performance Instructional Leadership". And it's this model that most distinguishes the practice of classroom walk-throughs that I teach at The Principal Center from the other models that you may have seen out there. So again, in a normal year, you might have read the book and followed that model, and seen those elements. And we're going to start by examining each of those elements of the High-Performance Instructional Leadership Model. And we're going to consider the impact of leaving out any of those key elements from the model. And we're going to take that as our baseline, right?

So if you're able to get into classrooms this year for at least a few weeks, for at least a part of the year, if things have a semblance of normalcy for a time, we don't wanna get away from that model. We wanna continue to take advantage of the benefits of getting into classrooms in the way that I describe in the book, and having feedback conversations with teachers. So let's jump right into that. And then throughout the remainder of the virtual instructional leadership challenge, we will talk about what we can do, even if we can't do that, even if we can't get into classrooms. But when we can, here is what I believe are the key elements of an effective approach. And again, you'll find this in the early chapters of "Now We're Talking". I believe that for instructional leaders to have the greatest possible impact on teacher practice, we need to be in the habit of making classroom visits every single day that have these seven characteristics.

Number one, they need to be frequent. Number two, they need to be brief visits. They need to be substantive. They need to be open-ended. They need to be evidence-based, criterion-referenced, and conversation-oriented. So, let's talk about each of those and what happens to our practice if any of those elements are missing.

First, if we're not able to get into classrooms frequently, and I recommend three times a day, which will put you into classrooms about 500 times a year, if we're not able to make it into classrooms frequently, then a lot of this just becomes hypothetical, right? And I think in most of our professional experience, perhaps you've been trying this for years, you've tried to get into classrooms. Maybe you've made the announcement at the beginning of the year that this was the year that you were going to get into classrooms. And you know, the veteran teachers look at each other and say, yeah, sure. You know, my last five principals have all said that. You know, the best of intentions can quickly become hypothetical if we're not able to put them into practice frequently.

So I wanna give you a specific target for these instructional leadership interactions, whether you do them in person or whether they're happening virtually, in a modified form. I believe you need to be in classrooms about three times a day, three different teachers, because for most schools, with the number of teachers that you likely supervise, three a day will get you around to everyone that you supervise roughly every two weeks. And that means you are having a substantive interaction with every teacher that you supervise at least 15 times a year. It's going to have an impact if you get into classrooms frequently.

But if you slow down, if you allow your pace to slip a bit, and you only get into classrooms, say, two or three times a week, well then it's likely that teachers will not even notice that you showed up. And you're not going to be in classrooms much more than the required formal observations would have you in classrooms. So this has got to be frequent. Think on the order of 500 times a year. So that those walkthroughs, those instructional leadership interactions are not just hypothetical. In order for them to be frequent, in order for you to stick with this, those visits need to be brief. It needs to be sustainable, and doable and simple, for you to get into classrooms. And if you give yourself this big, long form to fill out, or if you give yourself a big writeup to do, it's going to take you an hour at home after your kids are in bed, it is going to be unsustainable. You simply cannot do that every single day, three times a day for your entire career. It's gotta be a simple process and it's gotta not have a lot of homework for you. And it's gotta not take a lot of time in the moment or a lot of time for teachers. So we're talking about visits that are five, 10, 15 minutes at most. So it's gotta be brief if it's going to be sustainable. We don't wanna end up with something that we start strong, but then fizzle out because we simply cannot continue to devote the time and energy to it.

Third, we don't want them to be so brief that they're pointless, right? We don't want to just, like, make an appearance and wave and move on and have people wonder, why does he do that every day? Why does she show up and pop her head in and look at what's on the board and then say, nice to see you, and then leave? Like, what would be the point of investing all that time to show up frequently, but not really have an impact? We need our conversations with teachers to be substantive so that they're not just fluff. So, we're gonna share, later in this module, we're gonna talk about how to get started with this in a way that might feel a little bit like fluff, a little bit like just making an appearance and breaking the ice that first time. But after that first cycle of visits, we really need to start to make these substantive, so that they're valuable to you, and they're valuable to the teachers that you supervise.

Fourth, these visits need to be open-ended. If this is all about filling out a form or checking a box, or satisfying some central office stakeholder who wants you to get in the classrooms, it's not going to be sustainable, and it's not gonna be valuable. So we need to get away from the feedback forms, from the check boxes, from the electronic forms, from ticking things off on an electronic app. We really need to make this about an evidence-based conversation with the teacher about what's happening in their classroom, real or virtual, and about the decisions they're making as part of their professional practice. We need to get away from filling out forms, and really truly be open-ended in these conversations.

Fifth, we need to make sure that we're not just chit-chatting about philosophy, right? We're not just having philosophical conversations about teaching and learning, or about students. We need to make sure that we're talking about actual teacher practice, and the concrete things that we see students doing in the classroom. We need to look at student work. We need to talk about student misconceptions, and look at the moves that teachers are using, and the plans that teachers are developing, and the resources that they're curating, in order for these conversations to actually change practice. Because there's a big temptation to just be philosophical, right? To just think big picture and to talk about the kids, and to talk about things other than practice. You know, teachers sometimes want us not to talk about their practice, and we've gotta make sure that we have an evidence-based approach in these conversations.

We also have to make sure, number six here, that we're not just talking about what happened without any kind of shared reference point. So again, later in the challenge, we will talk about developing a shared instructional framework. Without that shared framework, a lot of this gets reduced to just second guessing, to just opinion, right? Oh, you use this technique and I personally would have used this other technique. What do you think about that? Like a lot of those kind of second guessing conversations with teachers end up not being very valuable, and end up not really impacting their practice.

So, we really wanna work from a shared set of expectations: shared language, shared vocabulary, because that's, what's going to move practice forward, not only with the individual teacher, but across the organization, under your guidance as instructional leader. And then finally, this does need to be a conversation, right? This is not simply an activity that we go through the motions on to satisfy some stakeholder. This is not simply a requirement. This is not simply an expectation. This is something that really needs to be authentic for both parties. It needs to be something that you engage in to help teachers improve, and something that you engage in to inform your own practice as a leader and decision-maker.

And of course, we want teachers to participate authentically in those conversations as well, so that we're not just both playing a role where, you know, as the leader, you know, I show up and I have to give a suggestion. So I give a suggestion, and then the teacher has to smile and nod and say, okay, I'll be sure to do that. And then we both go our merry way and nothing really changes. This needs to be an authentic process, not simply a game that we play.

So I wanna ask you now to pull out your journal and reflect on these seven characteristics. How has your practice of classroom walkthroughs compared, up to this point in your career, with those seven characteristics: being frequent, brief, substantive, open-ended, evidence-based, criterion-referenced, and conversation-oriented. Which of those elements are present, and which of those elements are missing in your practice? Go ahead and write about that in your journal. And I will see you in our next section.

“Getting Into Classrooms” When You Can’t Get Into Classrooms

It’s time now to talk about getting into classrooms when you can’t physically get into classrooms. So you have already learned about the High-Performance Instructional Leadership Model for classroom walkthroughs, which we just went through. And we’re going to talk now about how to modify that approach when school is happening virtually, or when classes are happening in some sort of modified format. Because, I think there are still some key things that need to happen in order for us to be impactful as instructional leaders. There are two key things that you need as a leader. Regardless of the circumstances, more than anything else, you need number one, relationships with the people that you work with. And number two, you need information for making decisions.

You need information about student learning. You need information about teacher practice. You need information about teacher well-being, how your teachers are doing as people. You need information about changes that you might need to make as a manager/instructional leader, in order to effectively create the conditions for student learning. So relationships and information are essential for instructional leaders, even if you’re not able to physically get into classrooms. So what I wanna do now is give you an action plan for maximizing your impact, regardless of the circumstances.

First of all, if you can, get into classrooms as you normally would, as often as you can. If some classes are happening normally, perhaps just your kindergarten classes, or perhaps you just have a special education class that’s meeting face to face right now, and everybody else’s virtual, whatever you can do in person, do it. Put in the time, put in the effort to get into classrooms if you possibly can. And as that unfolds, maybe you have more students will be coming back on campus, continue to get into those classrooms and work them into your rotation. And then for any classrooms that you can’t visit in person, maybe for different reasons some classes will be happening virtually longer than others, I don’t know what your setup is, but anytime you can’t physically get into a classroom and see a teacher at work, what I want you to instead do, is prioritize one-on-one conversations with that teacher. Pick up the phone, set up a time, talk with that teacher.

And we’ll talk more about what to discuss in those phone calls later on. But see that for now as your substitute. When you can’t get in the classrooms physically, pick up the phone and talk to that teacher. Those conversations are more critical than ever for maintaining relationships and getting the information that you need to do your job effectively. And I want the total of both of those two approaches, whatever mix you’re able to do right now, to be three a day. Okay, so if you can get into some classrooms and not others, or if you can’t get into any classrooms at all, you might be having all phone calls. It should be three a day total, though.

Perhaps there are two people that you’re calling and one person that you’re visiting, or maybe it’s different on different days of the week. But shoot for that target of three instructional leadership interactions a day. Now, what if they are virtual? What if they are just conversations and not actual classroom walk-throughs? Well, I think we need to think carefully about this. In order to main-

tain those relationships and gather that information, we need to have a thought-through plan for having conversations one-on-one with teachers. And if there's not an agenda, that can be a little bit awkward. If you just pick up the phone and call people, they can wonder, "What is this about? What can I do for you? What do you need from me?" So we've gotta have a little bit of an agenda, but we have to be the ones to reach out.

As leaders, we can't just leave it to teachers to say, "Well, I need to talk to my administrator. Then, I'll make an appointment and pick up the phone." That is not going to happen very much. If people have to feel like talking to us, if they have to seek us out, we may never talk to some people. And we may talk to other people every single day. So we've gotta be the ones who design this process and say, "Okay, every day I'm going to talk to three people. Whether I can get into their classroom or not, I'm going to talk to three people every single day." And I think if we use the same approach, whether it's in-person or virtual, then we can maintain those relationships and gather that information. And we can organize those into cycles, which we'll talk about as we go along.

So a couple of tips for those conversations, again, if you're not able to get into classrooms, I recommend that you not try to set up another video conference. Don't get on your video software, whatever that is, whatever platform you use and try to meet with them on camera. Instead, I wanna challenge you to actually pick up the old fashioned telephone. Make an appointment. Set up some sort of online scheduling system, so people can let you know when they're available, right? You don't want to interrupt them during dinner or when they're trying to work with their students. So set up a time, send out your calendar link. If you use something like Calendly or Schedule Once, have people schedule a time with you on the day that they're there on your list, where they can actually speak with you, but on the phone. People will appreciate the opportunity to talk to you, not on video. Trust me on this, they will love the opportunity to just have a phone call, and not have to have their professional attire on. Maybe you're having to speak with them after school hours because they're busy during the day, or you're busy during the day. Find a time to connect with them that works for them. Pick up the phone, have an agenda, and we'll talk more about that agenda later on, and let people know why you want to speak with them. And keep it up, stick with that plan, follow it through until you've spoken with everyone.

Now that is going to be difficult. It's going to be easier to speak to some people and skip others. So what I wanna challenge you to do is manage this, keep track of it the same way you would with classroom walk-throughs. If you're using our Repertoire app, you can put teachers on the same rotation, whether you're talking to them on the phone or visiting their classrooms. So certainly use the Repertoire app, if you're set up with that. And if you're a member and you're not set up with that, we'd be happy to get you going with Repertoire. Or you can just use note cards. You can print out our note cards template at PrincipalCenter.com/notecards-pdf. You need one note card per teacher. Simply write the teacher's name at the top, and then you can write the schedule. And then in the date columns, anytime you visit a classroom during that subject, you can put the date next to that subject. Or if you just have a phone call, you could write phone call down as one of the periods or subjects, and you could list the dates of your phone calls. And this will help you keep track over time of whom you've spoken with, and when, and whether that was a face-to-face observation in a particular class, or whether it was a phone call.

But, keep track. However you do it, keep track so that you don't miss anyone, and so that you continue to maintain those relationships and gather the information you need about teacher practice and student learning. Now, let's talk about how to organize this into cycles. Now in the book now we're talking, I recommend that you think in terms of three cycles and we have several chapters on those different cycles that are organized throughout the book. In Chapter 20, we talk about choosing an instructional focus and we talk about your first, second, and third cycle. I don't know where you are in your school year. By the time you're watching this, you may have already been getting into classrooms, and then maybe school went virtual for awhile. Or maybe you started virtually and you haven't really been able to do much yet.

In your first cycle, you wanna break the ice, right? Because, whatever you do the first time, it's going to be a little bit awkward. People may be unaccustomed to having you present in their classroom or unaccustomed to speaking with you on a regular basis, and we just wanna get started on the right foot. And we want to be what I call, "present and pleasant," so that people get used to it, and you start to develop a habit, and it's not so uncomfortable that you decide you don't wanna do it anymore. So the first cycle, don't worry about giving any earth shattering feedback that's going to change people's practice forever. Just be present and pleasant. Get moving, take action, get yourself going into the habit. In your second cycle, you wanna start to pay a little bit closer attention. You wanna start to share what you're noticing, but most importantly, you wanna build that momentum and continue following through. So if you're able to get into classrooms, keep getting into classrooms.

This would be your second tour through every classroom. If you're just making phone calls, this would be your second phone call to check in with each teacher, but keep going. And then in your third cycle, that's where you're going to start to get a little bit more serious. And again, if you're visiting classrooms in person, you would follow all seven characteristics of the High-Performance Instructional Leadership Model in your third cycle and beyond, but not worry about them so much in your first two cycles. If you're just doing phone calls, then this is where you wanna start to follow through. Take some notes, ask better questions, ask tougher questions, really get people thinking, and show that you're in this for the long haul, and you're going to continue to show up for people as an instructional leader.

So that's how you can approach your first three cycles, but don't let that kind of long-term vision intimidate you. Don't let that idea of having 500 of these interactions in a single school year intimidate you. Three a day is all it takes, and all you have to do for now is just get started. Pick up the phone, send out an email, send somebody a text, whatever you need to do to connect with your staff and maintain those relationships, and start to gather the information that you need. So that brings us to the end of Module 1, and it brings us to our Module 1 Action Challenge. I would like to challenge you now to complete a cycle of classroom visits or one-on-one conversations or whatever combination you're able to manage, but reach out, get in touch with every single teacher that you supervise.

Now, if you're in a large school and you have maybe a hundred teachers and three or four administrators, just focus on the teachers that you personally supervise and evaluate. But, connect with everyone. And then I wanna hear from you, and you can write to me directly, Justin@Principal-

Center.com. You can reply in our community. You can send a tweet publicly what your experience connecting with teachers in this way has been. You can tag me at eduladership, and I would love to know how it goes for you. But go ahead and connect with teachers, get into classrooms or pick up the phone, and complete that cycle of one-on-one conversations with each teacher and share your results.

And then for now, in your journal to help you get started, I want you to make some notes to yourself about what your very next step is. Do you need to set up a Calendly? Do you need to send out an email and invite people to book a call with you? What is your very next step for getting into classrooms or having those one-on-one conversations with teachers? And then think through your agenda a little bit. What is your purpose for this next cycle? Maybe you've already kind of broken the ice and built some momentum, but maybe things have changed. What purposes do you need to accomplish in these one-on-one conversations with teachers? And then in your next couple of cycles, where do you wanna go with this? How do you wanna build on that momentum and have more serious and more impactful conversations as you go along?

Make some notes in your journal, and when you've done that, congratulations. You have finished Module 1 of the Virtual Instructional Leadership Challenge. I'm Justin Baeder with The Principal Center, and I will see you in Module 2.