



# Virtual Instructional Coaching: The Ingredients for Success



## What Makes a Great In-Person Instructional Coach?

Coaching is a powerful way to spark and sustain change in practice. Instructional coaches partner with educators to meet their individual needs and grow their skills in teaching and leading. The following are some key characteristics of an effective instructional coach.

### RELATIONSHIP BUILDER

Builds trusting relationships, shows empathy, and establishes productive relationships with educators to improve practice and student outcomes.

### DATA ANALYST

Utilizes data to help educators identify their strengths and areas of growth, share their vision for the future, and set goals to improve achievement for all students.

### ACTIVE AND EXPERT LEARNER

Learns continuously and brings new strategies and content to coaching sessions. Stays informed on high-quality and effective instructional strategies and content resources to help educators grow as quickly as possible.

### FLEXIBLE AND RESPONSIVE THINKER

Actively observes and assesses the needs of each educator and adjusts support based on what is most essential for growing that teacher's skills in student-centered instruction.

### CURIOS LEARNER

Asks a lot of questions, builds and maintains relationships, thinks creatively and critically, and serves as an active listener and thought partner.

### EFFICIENCY EXPERT

Prioritizes actions steps, so the most important things are accomplished in a limited amount of time. Actively utilizes consistent structures, processes and systems to make the most of coaching moments.

“

Coaching is the art of creating an environment, through conversation and a way of being, that facilitates the process by which a person can move toward desired goals in a fulfilling manner.”

-W. TIMOTHY GALLWEY

*The Inner Game of Work: Focus, Learning, Pleasure, and Mobility in the Workplace*

# What Makes a Great Virtual Coach?

A virtual instructional coach must possess all of the key characteristics of an in-person instructional coach—and more—to be successful in a virtual setting. For example, relationship-building can be more challenging in a virtual space because the coach may not be able to interpret body language or get a clear sense of how an educator is feeling.

Let's look at how the characteristics of an effective coach must be enhanced in a virtual setting.

## RELATIONSHIP BUILDER

Pays close attention to body language, facial expressions and tone. Uses emotional intelligence skills to constantly read the “temperature” of the coaching space and adjust coaching to meet the needs of the educator. Virtual coaches must establish a strong presence by showing warmth and utilizing voice tone and body language to make connections in an online setting.

## DATA ANALYST

Actively collects data from the educator and clearly explains what kinds of data and data analysis is needed to improve student achievement. The most powerful pieces of data to drive virtual coaching conversations are classroom video, student work, and educator reflection. This data should be at the center of all virtual coaching sessions.

## ACTIVE AND EXPERT LEARNER

Considers ways to share knowledge, resources, and tools that are interactive, engaging, and purposeful. Virtual coaches need to plan what content will be shared in coaching sessions and why, versus what content might be shared via email or in another format at another time.



## FLEXIBLE AND RESPONSIVE THINKER

Responds flexibly to the many unexpected challenges that virtual coaching may present. For example, the technology might not be working and a virtual coach will need to know how to problem solve and/or adapt the coaching medium.

## CURIOS LEARNER

Asks more questions than with in-person coaching. Questioning is the way a virtual coach will take in data, assess need, build relationships, and ensure that coaching is personalized.

## EFFICIENCY EXPERT

Uses time effectively. This is even more important in a virtual setting because the coaching session might be shorter or less frequent. A virtual coach must backwards plan the coaching session to ensure that the focus is on student-centered teaching and learning and that the educator always leaves the session with concrete action steps.

## Sample Virtual Coaching Cycle

A virtual coaching cycle looks very similar to an in-person coaching cycle. However, virtual coaching sessions are typically shorter and less frequent than in-person coaching sessions. This means that a virtual coaching session must follow a very clear process that is replicated each session. This keeps the time focused and productive and most importantly, leads to change in teacher practice in the classroom to improve student outcomes.

CHECK-IN

UNDERSTAND  
CURRENT NEED

DEFINE  
SUCCESS

SELECT  
A FOCUS

SHARE STRATEGIES TO  
ADDRESS THAT FOCUS

PREPARE TO  
IMPLEMENT



“I have seen tremendous change in my teachers who have worked with BetterLesson. They really appreciate the 1:1 support for their pedagogy. We’ve experienced student growth in every grade level.”

-NANCY MARTINEZ, Principal

## How Does BetterLesson Develop Effective Virtual Coaches?

### RECRUITING

**Classroom and Leadership Experience:** On average, our coaches have over 9 years of experience in the classroom, including at least some as teacher leaders or in-school instructional coaches. Many of our current coaches have pioneered new programs or curricula at their schools, led technology initiatives, or provided instructional coaching to teams of teachers.

**Content Area and Professional Practice Expertise:** We look for coaches who have a deep knowledge of learning standards and practices as well as experience coaching across several content areas or grade levels.

**Ease with Technology:** Our coaching is done virtually. We look for coaches that have experience utilizing technology to enhance and improve teaching and learning.

**Mindsets:** We only select coaches that readily embody the values on which our coaching process is based: failing forward, self reflection, and taking a “learner stance”.

### HIRING

**We assess and evaluate virtual presence.** In virtual coaching, relationships need to be built quickly without time for in-person connections. We look for coaches that have a strong virtual presence, bringing a welcoming vibe and creating a safe space. A coaching participant should easily connect with the coach.

**We assess content knowledge and communication skills through a written task.** In addition to providing world-class coaching to individuals and teams, BetterLesson coaches are also content creators and curators. Our coaches must be knowledgeable about what constitutes high-quality content and must effectively communicate knowledge and methods of support.

**We assess coaching using video clips.** Prior to working with any teachers, coaches receive extensive training in BetterLesson’s strategies and coaching method. However, it is important that they possess sound coaching instincts, like an ability to listen empathetically, question intelligently, and propose next steps that are manageable and attainable for the teacher.

## Our Impact

**3,000+**  
TEACHERS  
SUPPORTED

**70,000+**  
STUDENTS  
SUPPORTED

**1.4 Million**  
REGISTERED MEMBERS  
USING OUR LESSON PLANS

### INITIAL ONBOARDING/TRAINING

New BetterLesson coaches have access to an online curriculum as well as a multi-day training in the summer before fall kickoff.

**Mindsets:** The entire training process is designed to allow a new coach to experience the power of fast-cycle learning, developing their mindsets of “failing forward” and “reflecting honestly” which are key to helping educators make sustainable shifts in practice.

**Content Architecture:** Throughout training, new coaches participate in activities and tasks designed to develop their knowledge of our Essential Elements of Student-Centered Teaching and Learning, Professional Learning Domains and Instructional Strategies that are the backbone of our coaching process.

**Virtual Coaching:** Coaches view recordings of coaching calls to learn how to use the tone of their voice to encourage relationship-building and engagement, how to interpret body language to adjust to the needs of the coaching participant, how to engage in active listening and facilitate skillful questioning to collect data and analyze the participant’s needs, and how to use digital tools to share strategies and make learning visual.

**Mentor:** Each new coach is paired with a mentor coach who provides personalized support.

### ONGOING SUPPORT & TRAINING

We create opportunities for goal-directed ongoing development and peer support.

**Peer Support:** Coaches engage in PLCs throughout the course of the year. The PLCs focus on topics such as mindsets, content, and virtual coaching.

**Content Knowledge Support:** Coaches have the opportunity to deepen their content knowledge by taking self-paced mastery-based certification courses.

**Individual Growth:** We provide continuous PD for our coaches focused on both content expertise and coaching skills. All of our coaching calls are recorded. Coaches have the ongoing opportunity to review and reflect on their calls individually and with mentors and peers. The focus of the review at the start is typically on virtual presence. We support coaches with their ability to use vocal inflections for particular purposes, read body language and adjust based on it, use verbal cues to let the participant know they are listening and engaged in the conversation, and ask questions that help to collaboratively determine next steps.

## Learn more

BetterLesson has more than a decade of expertise in virtual professional development. We provide one-to-one and one-to-many virtual professional learning experiences across a wide range of domains including distance and flexible learning.

Explore our supports for educators at [BetterLesson.com](https://www.betterlesson.com)

