

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

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Lipscomb University College of Education*

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FULL TRANSCRIPT:

Forrest Doddington: Hello. Welcome to the Ayers All Access podcast brought to you by the Ayers Institute for Learning & Innovation. This podcast is a chance for us to help you access compelling people, current topics, practical tips and innovative solutions— all related to the field of education. To find out more about this podcast and the work of the Ayers Institute, check out our website at AyersInstitute.org. You can also find us on Twitter and Facebook at @AyersInstitute.

Thanks for joining us this week for an 'ask me anything' episode about coaching. We've gathered some questions from current teachers and leaders from all across the state of Tennessee about the subject, and we'll be seeking answers from someone with years of experience in the field. If you submitted one of these questions, I hope you're listening. And for everybody, if you have a burning question about the subject of coaching, then stay tuned and at the end of this episode we'll let you know how to submit your question to us. Who knows? Your question might be featured on a future Ask Me Anything episode about coaching.

I'm Forrest Doddington and I serve as the Technology & Digital Communication Specialist here at the Ayers Institute. Today, we'll be talking with Dr. Karen Marklein, Director of Programs for the Ayers Institute. Karen, thank you for agreeing to answer these questions today.

Karen Marklein: Thank you so much for having me today.

Forrest Doddington: Okay. So, today's episode is focused on coaching. To help set the scene, I'd like to ask you one of my own questions. Is that okay?

Karen Marklein: Absolutely.

Forrest Doddington: Okay. So, I'd like to know— In a nutshell (some people call it, like, an elevator talk or an elevator speech)...

Karen Marklein: Okay.

Forrest Doddington: Okay. Let's define coaching. What is coaching in the context of schools and educational institutions?

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Karen Marklein: Okay. So, I would like to do that by defining what I think a coach is. If that's okay? So, I would define a coach as a "job embedded professional development facilitator focused on student growth."

Forrest Doddington: Okay say that one more time. A "job embedded..."

Karen Marklein: Job embedded professional learning facilitator focused on student growth.

Forrest Doddington: Okay. All right. I'm sure we're going to dig into that as we go. All right.

Karen Marklein: Yes.

Forrest Doddington: All right. So that's our direction.

Karen Marklein: Okay.

Forrest Doddington: I'd like to know, since I know that coaching is a passion for you.

Karen Marklein: Absolutely!

Forrest Doddington: And especially, you know, the impact that it has on teachers, on leaders and on their students, which you just referred to.

Karen Marklein: Yes.

Forrest Doddington: How long have you been involved in coaching and in what roles?

Karen Marklein: Okay. So, I got involved in coaching in Sumter County. Our first round of the Race to the Top funds in 2010 were devoted to starting a coaching initiative in Sumter County. Okay. I was a classroom teacher at the time. High school English teacher. And I got this email about instructional coaching, and I didn't know what it was, but it sounded really cool. So, I applied for that position, and I got one of the two high school coach positions in the county. And I served as a coach for two years in Sumner County, serving four different high schools as a dedicated coach in four different high schools.

And then at the end of those two years, the money, the grant money was gone. And then I stayed on at central office and did some leadership things at central office until the Ayers Institute was born. And I got a call from Candace McQueen about the Ayers Institute. I didn't know what that was, but it sounds really cool. So that had served me well before.

And so, in my current role at the Ayers Institute, I teach 'coaching models and practices' and I'm able to coach individual teachers in our job-embedded program. I'm able to coach leadership teams and individual teachers in schools in which we have partnerships across the state. So, I've really— It's sort of just blown up these opportunities to be a coach.

Forrest Doddington: Right. And you've been able to work with a number of districts on building a coaching culture and a coaching program.

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Karen Marklein: Absolutely!

Forrest Doddington: So, you've gone from not knowing what coaching is to teaching others what coaching is?

Karen Marklein: Yes. And I've also during the on the way, you know, worked on my professional coach credential through the International Coach Federation. So, you know, just grown my skills in many ways.

Forrest Doddington: Okay. Well, let's jump into the questions that we have received from teachers and leaders all over Tennessee. Okay.

Karen Marklein: I think I'm ready.

Forrest Doddington: All right. First question: "How is a coaching program different from a mentor/mentee program?"

Karen Marklein: Ooh, that's a really good question.

So, as a coach as— Well... I see a mentor very much as a trusted guide, a person who helps a person down a path. My vision of being a mentor is very much affected by being an English teacher and teaching the Odyssey for so many years. And Mentor was Telemachus's great friend and really the person he looked to for advice, for direction, for very specific guidance. And when you're mentoring someone, that's what you do. You know, you really sort of show them the path and walk down the path with them.

Forrest Doddington: Okay.

Karen Marklein: A coaching role is similar in that you are a trusted person in this coachee/coach relationship, but it's more about the person's path. The coachee, you know, identifies goals, identifies where he or she wants to be— wants to go, and then a coach is a thinking partner through that process. Not a signpost. You know, not, "Take this step and turn left here and then take this step and turn right here." It's more of let's be thinking partners so you can get where you want to go.

Forrest Doddington: So, it sounds like it's much less directive?

Karen Marklein: Much less directive. Absolutely.

Forrest Doddington: Okay. Another question that we received is, "What are some key strengths that an educator should have in order to become an effective coach?"

Karen Marklein: So, skills.

A good instructional coach should be. A strong teacher. Very skilled in best practices, just instructional strategies in general. Assessment design. The provision of feedback is so important. So, a very strong instructor. And then coaching is so much a relationship business. I think coaches should be skilled at relationship building. However, my relationship with you has to be based in the business of school.

Forrest Doddington: Okay.

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Karen Marklein: Okay. So that relationship is: we've got urgent work to do.

Forrest Doddington: It's a purposeful— It's not just a friendship.

Karen Marklein: Exactly.

Forrest Doddington: It's a purposeful relationship.

Karen Marklein: Absolutely.

And then, you know, just a really good— You can see the whole picture, but you can get into the details, too. So, I think one skill that I have is that I do see a big picture. But whenever I see a big picture, I can also think of incremental ways that we can do this. So, if I set a goal as a coach that I'm going to spend 20% of my time in ELA coaching, let's just say, then I can figure out the steps it takes to do that to reach that goal. So, it's a mixture of the big picture but also the details of the plan.

Forrest Doddington: All right. So, this may be a tricky one. A teacher has asked us, "How do you balance teacher autonomy with district and state curriculum?"

Karen Marklein: Oh, okay. That's an interesting question because we talk so much— We know from brain research that autonomy is extremely important for adult learners. And so adult learning theory might be another skill that coaches need. This knowledge of how do adult learners learn. And autonomy is a big piece of that. However, we're not free to just do whatever it is we want to do because that's what we want to do. So, within boundaries. So, you know, if there's a district or state requirement, that is the standard. That's what we're going to do.

One of my favorite Jim Knight quotes is, "Be firm on the standard but flexible how to get there." So just because we have this, let's just say we have a new curriculum and I'm implementing this new curriculum: that's not negotiable. Like, you're going to do that because the school has spent money on that and there's some research that has led them to believe this is the best curriculum for kids. So that's non-negotiable. How you intend to use it is up to you.

You know, a curriculum doesn't kill creativity. We do.

Forrest Doddington: Hmm.

Karen Marklein: So, you look at this curriculum and you decide, "If this is the requirement, how can I make it work so that it's authentic to me?" And that's where the autonomy comes in.

If I'm working with a teacher and I see his or her wheel spinning because they feel like they don't have a choice, then it is, "What do you need to be successful with this? What is it that's missing in this?" Okay. You know, and then they can start naming things. "Well, I don't know. I used to love this." "Well, let's think about this...", you know, and so you can get some momentum going with the teacher. Just by asking a really simple question like that.

Forrest Doddington: Okay. So, you mentioned that you went from teaching into coaching. And a lot of people transition from a teaching role into a coaching role. We have a question here that says, "I've

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been a classroom teacher for 15 years. What advice can you give me as I change roles and start my first year as a coach?"

Karen Marklein: Okay. Advice I would give. If I could go back in time— and this is also something that Alina Aguilar talks about in her art of coaching book— If I could go back in time, I would do my best to have a clear elevator speech. Like you may give at the beginning of this.

I can't tell you how many people said., "So what are you going to be doing?" I'm like, "As soon as I figure it out, I will let you know." And because we were really just kind of all figuring it out together. So, I would have a clear answer for what a coach does, what coaching is, how coaching can really help a child. That would be the first thing.

Something that I did that I'm happy that I did was I had a message for every faculty where I would be a coach. And I presented it at a faculty meeting at the very beginning of the year. I did my best to communicate what my role would be in that in that school. And so that was very helpful. I also would do whatever I could do (if you're at multiple schools and I was at multiple schools). But, I mapped out all my faculty meetings at all of my schools before I mapped anything out. Because I wanted to be at that faculty meeting, I wanted the teachers to see me at the faculty meeting, and I always asked for the principal to give me a few minutes (even if it's a minute or two) just to remind everybody, "I'm here today. I have my signup sheet today. You know, I've heard the principal say this is that this is a focus in the school and just keep— be as visible as you can be.

Forrest Doddington: So, you were at four schools?

Karen Marklein: Yes.

Forrest Doddington: The same school year, you were responsible for four schools?

Karen Marklein: Yes.

Forrest Doddington: Okay. So, you wanted that sense of presence that "I'm always here."

Forrest Doddington: To be at those visible faculty meetings.

Karen Marklein: "I'm on your team!"

Karen Marklein: "I'm on your team." And, you know, I was not a coach at a school where I taught. So, I had to get the high school t-shirt. I had I had to get the color of the of the rival of my own school, you know. So, I had to really communicate, you know, in various ways that "I am on this team. I'm a member of this faculty?" And I did that. And that was one thing that I was glad about. So, whether you're multiple schools or not, you need to somehow communicate—

Forrest Doddington: You've got to be part of the "we."

Karen Marklein: Absolutely.

Forrest Doddington: Yeah. "Us."

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Karen Marklein: Absolutely. And then, if I had the courage, I would model a coaching conversation in a faculty meeting. Early on in the year. So that people could see, what do we mean by this coaching conversation? What what's going to happen? What are we going to talk about? What are we going to do?

Forrest Doddington: Well, you know, fear of the unknown is such a human trait. So, you're taking away that unknown. This is what you would expect if you, you know, come receive coaching with me.

Karen Marklein: And then, my biggest piece of advice is this: Don't take things personally.

And it's really hard. When you are a coach, you are the only one like you. There's no one else in that school like you. The teachers don't think you're a teacher. The principals know you're not a principal. You know, you're not a librarian. You're not a guidance— You're it. Mm hmm. And so, it's really hard not to feel very isolated and misunderstood. And in that, it's easy to take that personally. But I would do what I could not to take that personally and to just understand that, you know, teachers— who may seem reluctant— maybe just don't know. They just don't know what you're supposed to do. And they don't understand how this is really going to have an impact on their practice.

Forrest Doddington: Right.

Karen Marklein: And so just separating that from the personal feelings. It's hard.

Forrest Doddington: All right. I imagine this next question is probably a pretty common question. "How do you coach a resistant teacher or someone who doesn't want to be helped?"

Karen Marklein: This is a common question. I won't— If you're driving, you need to make sure your seatbelt is on because I'm going to say— You just don't coach them. Coaching is not for people who don't want to be helped. All research will point to coaching needs to be voluntary. It needs to be teacher driven, based in teacher need, and driven by those teacher goals. That's it. If any of those qualities is missing. It will not be successful.

Forrest Doddington: So, this is not a 'you're going to eat your peas and you're going to like it.' It doesn't work.

Karen Marklein: No, it does— It does not work. I can tell you a hundred stories of being assigned to a teacher and it never works. Never works.

So especially if you're a principal listening to this: You can't just put a coach on a person and think that's going to help. So...

Forrest Doddington: Let me let me see clarification, then.

Karen Marklein: Okay.

Forrest Doddington: Is coaching a tool for people who want, I guess, 'to be fixed' is the wrong word— But 'who want to improve?'

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Karen Marklein: Right. So, when you use coaching as a tool for fixing people, that is a that is a weakness-based approach to coaching. And you don't want a weakness-based approach. You want a strengths-based approach. Again, back to the research. All research will tell you that it's easier to get better at your strengths than to compensate for your weaknesses.

Forrest Doddington: Well, you know, when you're at the gym and you see someone with a personal trainer, you think, "Oh that person's serious about improving."

Karen Marklein: Absolutely. That's a great that's a great comparison.

And so, when you see a teacher working with a coach, if you've got the strengths approach, then you know that person is just wanting to get better. And it's not some punitive, "Oh, my gosh. Here's one more thing I have to do, at all." So...

Forrest Doddington: That's really different.

Karen Marklein: So, here it is: You don't coach people who don't want to be coached. That's not coaching.

Forrest Doddington: Okay. All right. So, let's take this to, you know— Maybe they're not 'not wanting to be helped' or not resistant, but then maybe they're reluctant. How do you get buy-in from reluctant teachers? Maybe some practical first steps that have to move from reluctant to open?

Karen Marklein: Right. So, I would say, first of all, whatever it is— When you have this firm vision of coaching, whatever that is, I would think there's some instructional practices involved in whatever this vision of coaching is. So, a practical first step is, "Are these practices powerful?" Like, you know, is this something that really will help a child. How can you communicate to the teachers that this, whatever it is we're trying to change is an improvement? Another of my favorite...

Forrest Doddington: So is that like success stories. "We did this, and this is how our students are thriving."

Karen Marklein: Well, I think first, that's a decision that a coach has to make. "Are these practices powerful?"

Forrest Doddington: Okay.

Karen Marklein: So, I was going to say one of my favorite Jim Knight quotes, "Without support, poorly implemented practices are no better than ineffective practices." And so, you really have to think about the practice itself that you're trying to develop in the teacher. And then, you know, do they want this change? You know, not all change is improvement.

Forrest Doddington: Mm hmm.

Karen Marklein: So, you've probably heard me tell this story Forrest, but I was in the 10th grade at church camp, and I came back church camp and all the Coke (Coca-Cola) was just gone from all the grocery stores. All of a sudden, it was just "New Coke."

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Forrest Doddington: Ha ha ha ha.

Karen Marklein: Well, that was not an improvement.

Forrest Doddington: I do remember that.

Karen Marklein: That was a change that did not result in an improvement. So again, we're back to why are we coaching in the first place? And if that is a compelling reason, teachers want to improve.

Forrest Doddington: Mm hmm.

Karen Marklein: And so, you just have to— If it's a powerful practice and it really is an improvement (and not just a change), it's easy to get teachers on board with that.

Forrest Doddington: So, you've got to believe that it's powerful.

Karen Marklein: Yes.

Forrest Doddington: And they've got to see that you believe. And some of them may sit on the fence and they need to see that other people are starting to believe. Or starting to see.

Karen Marklein: Exactly.

Forrest Doddington: And then they see, "Well, then I want to be a part of that, too."

Karen Marklein: It's a ripple effect. It really is a ripple effect. And if you could start with, you know, a few rock stars in your school. And really get some good mojo going with those few rock stars. It will— It will trickle out. It will.

Forrest Doddington: All right. Okay. So, the next couple of questions are kind of I see them as similar. And they're kind of asking, you know, 'who is coaching for?' Okay, let's start with, you know, "is coaching for school leaders?"

Karen Marklein: Yes.

Forrest Doddington: How does that work? How would a school leader use coaching?

Karen Marklein: So, in one of the schools where I had the most success when I was a dedicated coach in a district is I had a dedicated time to have a coaching conversation with that principal once a week.

Forrest Doddington: Okay.

Karen Marklein: And we sat down and I had a coaching conversation with him or her in this unnamed district. And we focus on goals that the leader had. So, it was really driven by that leader's desire to work on whatever it is that was the focus that week. And so, yes, that's how that works.

Forrest Doddington: So, it is for them and then for that school leader that's involved in being coached: What is the impact of them as a school leader being coached? How does that affect the culture?

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Karen Marklein: Absolutely. So that principal where I had that coaching conversation could stand in a faculty meeting and say, you know, "Karen and I had this coaching conversation this week. It made me realize this. Karen has helped me plan this faculty meeting. I've asked Karen to collect some data in this faculty meeting today." And so, it's a constant reminder.

Forrest Doddington: So, they're modeling that this is strengthening and not a weakness based.

Karen Marklein: This is not a weakness approach. And they're modeling that, if I'm asking you to work with a coach, of course I'm going to work with a coach. It just makes sense, you know?

Forrest Doddington: Okay. And the next question was, do veteran teachers benefit participating in coaching or is it really geared towards new teachers?

Karen Marklein: Coaching is for everyone. Coaching benefits every person who wants to work with a coach.

I can think of one of one teacher I was working with who just thought maybe she wasn't doing a good enough job asking, you know, like circulating around the room and asking all students a question. You know, engaging all students. And so, she just asked me, she gave me a little seating chart and she asked me to put a tally mark whenever she went to a student's desk to have a conversation. Okay. Or she asked that student a question in a, you know, whole group setting.

Forrest Doddington: Okay. Trying to see who is she engaging?

Karen Marklein: Yeah. So, I'm just making tally marks. I mean, that's all I'm doing. So, I take the tally marks, I leave the data with the teacher. The reflection conversation is, what does this data show you? And she said, "You know what? I'm doing a better job. That then I thought" You know, but when you're in the act of teaching, you can't collect data like that. It's impossible to do. And so just that was encouraging for her.

But, you know, then she could still set another goal, like, "Okay, I'm feeling good about this. Maybe I should think about my level of questions. Next time you come in, can we talk about what kinds of questions I'm asking when I stop?" And so, it just builds on itself.

Forrest Doddington: Wow. That's fascinating. And I love how the teacher is driving 'what's the question?' What would they like to know?

Karen Marklein: Right.

Forrest Doddington: And then whether or not— Do I need to do... Do I need to make any change, or do I need to say, "Okay, that just gives me confidence and now I can go look at another area?"

Karen Marklein: Absolutely.

Forrest Doddington: All right. Well, this has been a really interesting and hopefully it's answered the questions that have been sent in to us. Thank you so much for answering these questions about coaching, and thank you for your work in education, Karen.

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Karen Marklein: Thank you. I can't think of anything better to talk about than coaching.

Forrest Doddington: To all our listeners, be sure to check out the show notes for this episode where you'll find links to helpful resources and anything we've mentioned today. I hope you've been encouraged and inspired. You can find more episodes of Ayers Institute podcasts at <https://podcast.AyersInstitute.org>, on Apple Podcasts, and anywhere podcasts are found.

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