

The Unexpected Episode: How to Coach Resistance

[00:00:00] Hi, everyone. It's Elena. And I know the podcast is over. We said goodbye, and I meant it. And yet, here I am back in your feed because something has happened that I just cannot keep to myself, which is that I wrote another book. I told myself there wasn't gonna be another book. I told myself there wasn't gonna be another podcast episode.

But this book, well, it just had to be born and I love it so much, and I believe so completely in what it can do for people, for schools, for relationships that I just could not resist popping back in to tell you about it. [00:01:00] So the new book is called How to Coach Resistance and it's gonna be on the shelves in the middle of September 2026.

And I wanna tell you very briefly why I wrote it and the one idea that changed everything for me and why I think this topic is so important right now. And then I'm gonna read you a short passage from the introduction. And if the introduction sparks your interest, you can download the whole thing for free and read the whole thing.

Okay, so let me tell you why I wrote this book. So I have been asked one [00:02:00] question more than any other in the last probably 20 years of my career. And so for the-- from the very first training that I ever led after The Art of Coaching came out, which was 2013, and regardless of where I did those trainings, rural schools, urban schools, US, abroad, someone always at some point raised a hand or just came up to me and asked, "How do you coach resistant teachers?"

And I would see this expression on their faces when they asked it, which I recognized because I had had it myself, and it was like a blend of frustration and sadness and desperation and exhaustion, [00:03:00] and maybe a little tiny bit of hope. And I know all about that because I lived that expression. My very first full-time coaching job, I walked into a school that had such a toxic culture that I didn't even know what it was at that point, really, and a teacher, who I call Sandra, who from the back of the room made it really clear that she did not want me there.

And I'm gonna tell you something that I am not proud of, but it is the truth I created a goal for myself almost right away, which was not to understand

Sandra, not to try to build relationship with her and figure out how I could coach her. [00:04:00] My goal was to break her And it took me quite some time, and it took me a lot of looking in the mirror to understand that the impulse to break someone is the very thing that makes resistance intensify.

So here's the insight that changed everything for me. For two years, I obsessed over the question, how do I coach resistant teachers? And I eventually realized that I was asking the wrong question, just the completely wrong question. Because resistance isn't a quality that some teachers have. It's not like being tall.

Resistance [00:05:00] is a response. It's behavior, and behavior is always a response to something underneath. That could be an emotion, an unmet need, a belief, a history, a power dynamic And then there was the learning that really hit me, which is that resistance requires two forces. Because if you press your hand flat against a wall and you feel resistance, that's because the wall is pressing back.

So if you remove either force, the resistance disappears. And a coaching relationship works the same way. There's the teacher's protection, which is usually reasonable, and which predates my work with them, [00:06:00] and then there's my push. And my push is the half that I can change So that reframe turned the question I dreaded into the question that I now love receiving more than any other

I want to say something about why this feels so necessary right now for us to examine this topic. So resistance lives at the intersection of three of the most consequential things in our lives. Our relationship with our own emotions, our relationships with other people, and our relationship to power.

And I genuinely cannot think of anything else that we need to understand more urgently in this [00:07:00] moment than how we relate to each other, how power moves through us, and what we do with our feelings So there's also a piece of this that often goes unsaid, which is that the resistance of adults has consequences for children.

It shapes whether trust can grow in a building, whether adults can learn in public, and whether there's any shared sense of purpose. Children live inside what the adults around them are able or unable to build and repair. So this is not only about helping coaches feel more effective, it's about the conditions that children can actually learn [00:08:00] in Okay, I'm gonna read you a short passage from the introduction, and this is really one of the core ideas in the entire book.

Okay, here it goes One idea organizes everything in this book. Problems of change are problems of learning. When a teacher pushes back against something new, that pushback is almost always a problem of learning, a gap between where they are and where they need to go, and fear about crossing it. If you make one change in your practice as a result of reading this book, let it be this.

Change the questions you ask when you encounter what you perceive as [00:09:00] resistance. Stop asking, "What do I do about them?" And ask these questions instead: What are they trying to learn and what is standing in their way? What might they be afraid of? Which of their core human needs might feel threatened right now?

What happened to them in this school, in this district, in the coaching relationships that came before mine that I am inheriting? And underneath all of that is another essential question. What is my own resistance telling me?

All right, so that's a short portion from the introduction. Now, the [00:10:00] reason that that passage matters so much to me is that it moves the work off of the other person and back to where I actually have power, to my own questions, my own fear, my own raised hand. When I shifted from, "How do I get this teacher to change?"

to, "What is this resistance trying to show me?" I stopped feeling stuck and started seeing next steps everywhere And that's what I hope you take from it, not a protocol for handling difficult people. You won't find one in this book because there isn't one. What I hope you take is a different way of seeing, the ability to look at resistance and recognize it as [00:11:00] information about an emotion, a threatened need, a history, and a dynamic the two of you are building together once you can read that dynamic, you stop bracing against it.

You get curious, and curiosity changes who you are being in the room, and that changes everything So if this is resonating with you, then that's where to start, with who you're being in the room. And read the introduction to this book. We are making the entire introduction available for free. You can download it and keep exploring these ideas.

You can hear the full story of that teacher, who I call Sandra, and the moment when everything shifted, and you will find the link to the introduction in the show notes. [00:12:00] Now, the book itself, How to Coach Resistance, is available for pre-order. So if you want to get your own copy the day it comes out, reserve one.

And if you want to move beyond reading about this and into actually doing it, because these are skills that cannot really just be learned from reading a page, they have to be practiced out loud with other people, with someone offering you feedback, then I would love for you to join us at the Coaching Resistance Workshop, which will be in November.

That's where you get to practice. All right, friends, before I go, thank you. Thank you for being a part of this community, for listening, for doing this hard work, and for being the kind of person who looks in the [00:13:00] mirror. This book is dedicated to those who are willing to look in the mirror. I have been holding onto this work for a long time, and I am so happy to finally be sharing it with you.

I want to leave you with the one thing I most believe, which is that resistance is not the immovable wall it feels like in the moment. Most of the time it's fear, fear of crossing the gap between where someone is and where the work is asking them to go. And in the gap between what we feel and what we do, we always get to choose who we will be, and we can choose to drop our hand.

We can always choose to get curious instead of to push back. All right, friends, [00:14:00] take good care and thank you for letting me back into your feed one more time.