

# Unlocking the Power of Coaching in Education

By Dr. Brian Zator

In the ever-evolving world of music education, one of the greatest challenges we face isn't tied to technique, repertoire, or rehearsal management — it's communication and connection. As educators, we often find ourselves defaulting to giving advice, solving problems, and being the expert in the room. But what if a more effective, sustainable, and empowering approach exists?

At this year's Virtual PASIC, I'll present a session titled "Unlocking the Power of Coaching in Education," inspired by Michael Bungay Stanier's transformative and best-selling book *The Coaching Habit*. This clinic introduces a set of simple yet powerful coaching strategies that can help educators make meaningful shifts in their interactions with students and colleagues. The goal? To build trust, strengthen communication, and unlock the potential of those around us, while also reclaiming some of the time, energy, and joy we may have lost along the way.

## THE POWER OF QUESTIONS

During the clinic, I'll introduce seven core coaching questions that can guide any conversation — from a brief hallway chat to a more serious discussion about career plans, motivation, or conflict. Each one is designed to replace the reflex to "fix" with a habit of inquiry. These are not

just rhetorical tools, they are conversation game-changers. They provide clarity, provoke reflection, and help others discover solutions on their own. At the heart of these questions are what Stanier calls the Irresistible 1-2-3 Question Combo:

1. Kickstart Question: *What's on your mind?*
2. AWE Question: *And what else?*
3. Focus Question: *What's the real challenge here for you?*

This trio of questions is designed to get to the heart of an issue quickly and effectively,

without veering into the trap of simply giving advice. Together, they lay the foundation for a coaching approach that shifts the focus from directing others to empowering them.

## WHY COACHING?

In rehearsal, we must often be the authority, the guide, the voice of certainty. But outside of rehearsal, especially in one-on-one or small group conversations, the coaching model offers a radically different and impactful approach. It's rooted in curiosity, patience, and a sincere desire to see others grow on their own terms. It doesn't mean abandoning leadership; it means shifting *how* we lead.

In *The Coaching Habit*, Stanier argues that habitual advice-giving can lead to three common leadership pitfalls:

- **Overdependence:** When students or colleagues become reliant on you for answers, they miss out on learning how to think independently.
- **Overwhelm:** If you are constantly solving everyone's problems, your own work (and well-being) can suffer.
- **Disconnection:** When you're stretched too thin, it becomes easy to lose sight of what you truly love about your job.

In contrast, coaching helps develop others' potential by encouraging them



Brian Zator

# The simple act of asking better questions can reshape your professional life.

to take ownership of their challenges. It's not about withholding your expertise; it's about timing it more thoughtfully and leading with curiosity first.

## FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

To make these concepts practical and relatable, the session will include live examples of "Before Coaching" and "After Coaching" conversations. These will highlight a typical student-faculty conversation, followed by a coaching-style version of the same topic exchange. Through these vignettes, attendees will witness the subtle but powerful ways in which coaching can shift the dynamic, deepen the connection, and ultimately lead to more lasting growth.

## TOOLS YOU CAN USE RIGHT AWAY

This clinic is not about learning new scripts or memorizing formulas. It's about adopting a mindset and acquiring tools that you can bring into your world immediately. Some additional strategies include:

- How to **tame your "Advice Monster"** — that inner urge to jump in with solutions.
- How to **embrace silence**, allowing others the space to think and respond.
- How to ask **"lazy questions"** that drive engagement and responsibility.
- How to respond with **"I'm curious..."** as a lead-in to deeper conversation.

By the end of the session, attendees will leave with a set of coaching tools that are immediately applicable in student conversations, faculty meetings, rehearsals, and even personal relationships.

## A SESSION FOR EVERYONE

While this session is rooted in the world of percussion and music education, its principles are universal. Whether you

are a seasoned university professor, a high school band director, a studio teacher, or even a student leader, the coaching approach has something to offer. It's especially timely as educators continue to navigate increasing demands, shifting student needs, and their own desire for balance and fulfillment. This isn't about becoming a certified coach; it's about becoming a better communicator, listener, and mentor. It's about doing more by talking less.

Join me and discover how the simple act of asking better questions can reshape your professional life. Although this is part of the Virtual PASIC series, I will be present and actively engaged during the initial presentation to answer questions, offer clarification, and connect with attendees in real time. Whether you attend live or watch the replay, you'll gain insights that will help you connect more deeply, lead more effectively, and continue making a meaningful impact through the work you love. I welcome conversations following the session and would love the opportunity to work with individuals or groups interested in applying these coaching principles more deeply.

(If you're looking to bring this content into your studio, school, or program, I'd be happy to discuss options for one-on-one or group consulting tailored to your needs.)

**Dr. Brian Zator** is a Regents Professor and the Director of Percussion at East Texas A&M University, currently in his 25th year. He is a past-president of PAS and the founder of the PAS Leadership Academy. In addition to performances, he has presented clinics around the world on percussion education, leadership, and communication strategies for educators and students. **PN**

## COMPOSITION

Glenn Kotche

Composition Clinic

**The Monkey Chant for Solo Drumset at 20**

Glenn Kotche's drumkit solo, the "Monkey Chant," is an arrangement of the Balinese Ketjak — a rhythmically fascinating performance artwork based on the Hindu epic Ramayana story. He researched multiple versions as well as the text of the Ramayana tale for his unique interpretation of a retelling of the story through percussion with specific sound sources on the kit playing the parts of the main characters.

Glenn Kotche has been the drummer of Wilco since 2001. As a composer, he's released seven solo albums and has been commissioned by many artists including Kronos Quartet, The Silk Road Ensemble, Bang on a Can All-Stars, Eighth Blackbird, So Percussion, Third Coast Percussion, Carnegie Hall, the Chicago Youth Symphony, and Roomful of Teeth. Kotche has played on over 180 recordings by such artists as Taylor Swift, Ed Sheeran, KD Lang, Neko Case, First Aid Kit, Phil Selway, Ed O'Brien, Andrew Bird, Iron and Wine, On Fillmore, Neil Finn, and Low and Beck. In 2013 he released his book, *A Beat A Week*.

## INTERNATIONAL PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE

### COMPETITION WINNERS

**BAK Middle School of the Arts**  
Chris Murray, director

**Braswell High School**  
Alan Miller, director

**Hebron High School**  
Ben Koch, director

**Heritage High School**  
Alan Brawdy, director

**Michigan State University**  
Gwendolyn Dease, director

**Texas Christian University**  
Brian West, director

**University of North Texas**  
Dave Hall, director