

## **“Be a coach instead of a judge” pedagogy**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article presents “Be a coach instead of a judge” pedagogy that has resulted in significant improvement in college student learning/performance, highly favorable student comments and better teaching evaluations. This pedagogy inspires students to learn by embracing empathy, enthusiasm, positivity and trust along with other learning strategies into all facets of student learning and assessments. The pedagogy is grouped into four aspects: (1) student-teacher relations which are the most important foundations of student learning, (2) course contents and organization involving customized and comprehensive class notes that include practice exercises/problems, ethics, pandemic impact, and diversity, equity and inclusion issues, (3) course delivery and student engagement that involve the class to work together and encourage students to overcome their fear of making mistakes, and (4) assignments and assessments that are frequent, online, open-book, with multiple attempts and positive feedback from an instructor. This pedagogy is applicable to any disciplines at any levels, in-person or virtual, for coaching and motivating students to march as mightily as they can on an exciting journey of learning.

Keywords: Be a coach, student performance, student-teacher relations, student engagement, frequent assessments, positivity and trust.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

“Be a coach instead of a judge” pedagogy was developed by the author, and first implemented in an undergraduate required business course, Introduction to Managerial Accounting, in Fall 2020 during the height of the pandemic. Many studies including a meta-analysis of Wang et al. (2021) find that the pandemic had negative psychological effects including anxiety, depression, and stress on college students across disciplines and countries. Students desperately needed a teacher who could also serve as their empathetic coach to guide them through the challenging pandemic remote learning. This pedagogy has since been refined and consistently used by the author after the pandemic for both face-to-face and virtual learning/teaching modalities in both undergraduate and graduate courses. The success of this pedagogy measured by better student performance, more favorable teaching evaluations and very positive student comments involves the change in the mindset of teachers who must wholeheartedly embrace empathy, enthusiasm, positivity and trust into their teaching/coaching, course design, assessments and interactions with students.

Many studies in education including a meta-analysis of Kraft et al. (2018) have documented improvements in student achievement and instructional practice of K-12 teachers as a result of incorporating teacher coaching into professional development programs where coaches or peers observe teachers’ instruction, and provide feedback and emotional support to help them improve. There is, however, no study at higher-education level about instructional pedagogy that would enable a college professor/teacher to become a student coach who guides, inspires and empowers students to feel capable of reaching for the stars. A professor/teacher who is a great coach holds students to a high standard and inspires them to invest their best efforts so as to learn as much as they can and achieve their highest potentials. Such a teacher provides students with rigorous practices, reaches out to students who underperform, fosters students to learn from their mistakes and allow them to correct their mistakes in all assessments. On the other hand, a teacher who is a judge assesses students’ performance relative to a standard, and evaluates students as right or wrong based upon mistakes that students made without providing a second chance. A teacher who is a coach will get to know and try to understand their students, is forgiving and provides a second chance when students make mistakes, and not only encourages students to learn and perform as best as they can but also coaches them toward successful learning and performance. Because this “Be a Coach Instead of a Judge” pedagogy is applicable to any disciplines, the author sincerely hopes that readers will choose features that they feel comfortable and incorporate them into their classes.

The second section of this article discusses the most important aspect of “Be a coach instead of a judge” pedagogy: student-teacher relations with specific examples and suggestions on how to improve the relations. The third section provides suggestions about course contents and organization for this pedagogy. The fourth section describes course delivery and student engagement to enhance student learning and participation. The fifth section discusses frequent, online, open-book assignments and assessments that involve multiple attempts crucial to coaching. The sixth section discusses this pedagogy’s outcomes of better teaching evaluations, highly positive student comments, and significant improvement in student performance. The final section presents conclusion and discussion.

## II. STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONS

Student-teacher relations are the most important foundations of student learning. Cuseo (2018) reviews numerous research studies that documented the benefits to undergraduates as a result of positive student–teacher relations. Reason, Terenzini, and Domingo (2006) document that student-faculty interaction positively affects students’ personal and social development. Positive relations between students and teachers also influence students’ positive perceptions of college quality and institutional commitment (Strauss and Volkwein, 2002). Thompson (2001) concludes that student–faculty contact outside the classroom is positively associated with undergraduates’ academic achievement and cognitive development. This conclusion is confirmed by Micari and Pazos (2012) in a highly challenging course. Accounting is likely a highly challenging course for non-accounting business majors, and the student–faculty relations may be all the more important. Benson, Cohen, and Buskist (2005) and Buskist and Groccia (2011) find that student rapport and student access to faculty are associated with positive learning and teaching outcomes, including higher student ratings of course instruction. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) reports that faculty concern about student growth and development has a positive and statistically significant effect on student persistence, critical thinking and intellectual development. These studies clearly indicate that positive student-teacher relationship in which students perceive their teacher as caring, supportive and eager to help can have a significantly positive impact on their motivation to learn. A teacher who is a coach nurtures student-teacher relationship by showing enthusiasm, positivity, empathy and trust as much as possible in all aspects of the course presentation, assessments and communications with students to make students feel empowered to learn and confident to achieve their goals for the course. Below are specific coaching/nurturing techniques.

### 2.1 Use “You” and Rename the Course to Engage Students in Their Learning

The course, Introduction to Managerial Accounting, was renamed in the syllabus and Canvas Module as “An Accounting Journey for a Future Manager – You!” Likewise, an upper-level accounting course was renamed “An Accounting Journey for a Future CPA– You!” Portraying the course as a journey of learning crucial for students’ career success helps develop the ownership of learning among students. Conley and French (2014) highlight the importance of ownership of learning as a key component of college success. To successfully complete the journey, students must invest substantial efforts into their march so as to learn as best as they can. Students are indeed future managers and future certified public accountants (CPAs), and they need to perceive themselves as such right now so as to become successful managers and CPAs. Positive thought reinforces positive outcome! Using “you” instead of “students” in the syllabus, Canvas and all communication with students is also recommended as this younger generation wants to be treated as a uniquely special individual instead of being generalized as “students”.

### 2.2 Show Students That You Trust Them

A good relation is firmly based on trust. A threatening “Academic Honor Code Form” that includes penalty for academic dishonesty, and were required of all students to read and sign at the beginning of a semester has been scrapped since Fall 2020. This former requirement

implied that students could not be trusted, and threatened them with penalty which did not at all eliminate academic dishonesty. Starting a semester with such negativity can damage student-teacher relations. Instead, an instructor may want to inject positivity into Academic Honesty and Student Integrity Section of a syllabus and communicate it to students as follows.

“You are honest and dedicated student! I trust that you will put in your mightiest efforts to march as best as you can on this road of learning, and will successfully complete this accounting journey for a future manager-You!”

An instructor may also want to emphasize the importance of trust and integrity as the most important asset when discussing ethics cases and Warren Buffet’s quote (Hagstrom, 1999): “It takes 20 years to build a reputation, and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you will do things differently.” Additionally, greet your students at the beginning of the first quiz/exam with positivity such as “Trust your own ability to do this quiz”. A later section about assignments and assessments discusses how to further promote student integrity.

### **2.3 Motivate Student to Commit Their Efforts and Set High Expectation**

An earlier quote, “...you will put in your mightiest efforts to march as best as you can on this road of learning...” clearly conveys the high expectation that students are responsible for their own learning, and that they must invest their mightiest efforts to successfully complete the accounting journey. An instructor may also want to communicate the following in the syllabus and/or Course Canvas as well as discussing them in the first-class meeting.

- A. An instructor is students’ coach who will do his/her very best to coach them on how to march as mightily as they can to successfully complete this learning journey. However, students must do the marching – an instructor cannot march for them!
- B. Use an equation,  $\text{Ability} + \text{Motivation} = \text{Performance}$ , to emphasize that their performance depends on how motivated they are as everyone has the same ability to learn. It is the exceptional motivation that will make them excel.
- C. Ask students in the first-week graded discussion assignment to describe their goals for this course and how they plan to accomplish the goals. This makes students commit to their learning goals early in a semester, and enables an instructor to provide them with additional advice on how to learn the subject.

These small changes had positive impact on students’ ownership of their learning that contribute to a substantial increase in the rating of the course-evaluation question: “My own efforts in the course have resulted in greater knowledge of the subject matter.” from 3.76 to 4.58 from 5 after implementing “Be a coach instead of a judge” pedagogy.

### **2.4 Make Early Positive Connection and Motivate Students to Appreciate the Subject**

Email students a welcome message right after publishing a course on Canvas at least one week before a semester starts. In this message, an instructor may want to ask students to read the course homepage for useful information such as how to buy textbook directly from the publisher, how to navigate an online class, and how to be prepared for the first-class meeting in a face-to-face class. Close this welcome message with an enthusiastic statement such as “I look forward to helping you complete this course/journey successfully!”

For an introductory course required for all majors in a school, an instructor may want to have a first-week graded online discussion that asks students to discuss the importance of the

course/subject. For example, an online discussion in an Introduction to Managerial Accounting is: “Why accounting is important to your personal financial planning, to a manager, to an entity and to our economy?” Such a discussion motivates students to appreciate the usefulness of the subject. Students learn better if they value the subject.

## **2.5 Build Classroom Community**

Another first-week graded online discussion is “Introduce Yourself and Your Goals” that includes their major and why they choose the major, their hometown and home state, what they enjoy doing in free time, their part-time job or internship, their career goal and aspiration, their goals for the course and how to accomplish the goals, and what they have learned from the pandemic. Sharing what they have learned from the pandemic reinforces students to look for the positivity in every challenging situation. This discussion topic not only enables a teacher to really know their students but also helps students find common interests important for developing a sense of community and belonging. Students with the same major are able to connect and shared tips on getting a job. In addition to requiring students to reply to one another’s post, an instructor definitely wants to post his/her enthusiastic introduction with family photo(s), and provide each student with encouraging comments, suggestions about a major, and career-development advice to create a trusting relationship with students. Student comments below show appreciation for instructor’s positive feedback to the discussion.

“She also was very motivational for helping people pick the major they desire and made suggestions for career planning. Thank you so much, Dr. Persons!”

## **2.6 “Listen” to Students’ Concerns with Empathy and Be Flexible**

A good coach is an empathetic listener who is responsive to students’ concerns. Some students may have a harder time with school than others. For example, students may not be able to afford textbooks because they lost their jobs. A teacher may help the students by directing them to apply for a university emergency grant (if any), or using “First-Day Inclusive Access” offered by most large publishers that allow students to access digital textbook and learning materials on the first day of class with deferred payment via Bursar Office. For students who miss class meetings and assessments due to any excused absences, e.g., illness and job interview, an instructor may want to reach out to these students to help them catch up with the class, and allow the students to take quizzes/tests later at their convenience. Similar empathy and leniency are also warranted for a student who is a single parent with a young child. Students do appreciate an instructor’s empathy and help, and would likely rate the instructor highly even though they may receive a relatively low grade like a C-. Student comments below confirm this.

“My Teacher was very nice and helped me a lot individually throughout the semester showing she actually cares.”

“Dr. Persons is a wonderful instructor!! She cares so much and it really shows.”

## **2.7 Prompt Reply to Student Email and Let Them Know that You Cherish Their Commendations**

A teacher who is a coach is responsive and replies to all students’ email throughout a day including evening and weekend. Students who notify a teacher about sickness-related absence

appreciate a suggestion on how to strengthen their immunity such as taking daily vitamin D supplement. Those who are absent due to athletic or job-related activities appreciate a good-luck/best-wish message from a teacher. It is cherishing to receive emailed commendations from students, and an instructor may want to let students know how appreciative he/she is, and that their thank-you messages will always be kept in a specially treasured collection.

### **III. COURSE CONTENTS AND ORGANIZATION**

Customized and well-organized class notes that are comprehensive, and include current real-world events enhance student learning and increase the relevance of the course. Instead of using the textbook publisher's PowerPoint slides that can be dozens of pages and are not at all customized to an individual instructor's teaching, an instructor may want to develop a comprehensive class notes that better coach students and involved them in their active learning and critical thinking. Students appreciate such class notes that help them to effectively focus on learning important concepts. This contributed to a significant improvement in student-evaluation rating from 3.79 to 4.77 for the aspect of "My instructor led course sessions in an organized way." Student comments below support this higher rating.

"Everything couldn't have been any better. I learned so much from your course in the most organized and convenient way possible."

"ACC 310 is very difficult, although Prof. Persons makes it possible and is so organized with the way she teaches the class throughout the semester."

The next four subsections provide specific suggestions on how to improve course contents and organization.

#### **3.1 One Comprehensive File of Class Notes for Each Chapter**

This comprehensive Word file (about 15 pages) includes important concepts, examples, and exercises/problems throughout the class notes for students to practice to enhance their learning. The solutions to these exercises/problems are posted to Canvas after the chapter is completed so that students may redo them and check their answers with the solutions to be prepared for that chapter's quiz. It is a good idea to include in this comprehensive class-note file a number of "quiz teasers" similar to quiz questions. The following student comments indicate that students appreciate this more organized and comprehensive class notes.

"I really liked that you had a document laid out of what was going to be taught. It made it very easy to follow along and participate during class. Having that set up was also very helpful to go back and review before an exam. Having what was learned all in one place with examples and equations was beneficial to me learning the materials."

#### **3.2 Discuss Ethics Throughout a Semester**

Ethics are crucial for students' career success, and should be discussed throughout a semester (Cavico and Mujtaba, 2018). An instructor may want to identify an "ethics idol" who has exemplary ethical standards in the field, and discusses the ethics idol's principles with the class. In a business world, such an idol is Warren Buffett who is one of the most successful investors in the world, and is the chairman and chief executive officer of Berkshire Hathaway. Although he is the world's sixth-wealthiest person with a net worth of over \$100 billion, he is a

great philanthropist who has led a humble lifestyle just like a middle-class individual. This is supported by his quote in Hagstrom (1999), “Money aside, there is very little difference between you and me in terms of lifestyle. I eat simple meals. I drive a regular car. I make decisions, and, yes, I, too, make mistakes.” His ethics advice (Hagstrom, 1999) is, “It takes 20 years to build a reputation, and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you will do things differently.” An instructor can engage students in ethics discussions using ethics cases in a textbook or real-world ethics issues. Students appreciate such discussions per the comments below.

“She taught us many life lessons like the dangers of the business world and to stay away from not only unethical business doings but the illegal ones as well.”

### **3.3 Incorporate Pandemic Effects**

The pandemic offers a variety of relevant learning points that should be included in class notes and class discussions. For example, the impact of business closure during the pandemic can be used to highlight differences in the behavior of fixed costs vs. variable costs, as well as the concept of controllable costs. Variable costs such as direct materials and direct labor are automatically gone when businesses are forced to close, but fixed costs such as rent, property tax, depreciation expense continues to burden closed-down businesses. However, controllable fixed costs such as salaries can be reduced via salary cut or employee layoff.

Another pandemic learning point was the negative impact of corporate use of profit maximization to allocate resources. COVID-19 diagnostic test has about \$10 of profit compared with \$0.18 for a rapid malaria test. As a result, pharmaceutical companies allocated most resources to develop and produce coronavirus-related products. This resource allocation based on profit maximization has negatively affected third-world countries per the concern raised by Mandavilli (2020): “...the coronavirus is likely to set back years, perhaps decades, of painstaking progress against TB, H.I.V. and malaria due to delay in diagnosis and treatment interruption”. This devastating impact on the well-being of citizens in underdeveloped economies can serve as an ethics discussion about corporate social responsibility.

### **3.4 Include Issues About Diversity, Equality and Inclusion**

Fall 2020 was marred by serious racial issues and highly disturbing news about the injustice against African Americans such as police killing of George Floyd and Brianna Taylor. These issues are so important to our society that they should be part of class discussions or assignments. An example of such assignments was an online discussion that required students to view and discuss a Ted-Talk video of Daryl Davis, an African American man who has courageously befriended a Ku Klux Klan national leader. Student discussions were quite lively and their comments were highly positive as follows.

“Thank you for sharing this video! More professors need to be facilitating these conversations.”

“Thank you professor! I really enjoyed the video a lot it Ted Talks are extremely interesting, always a fun discussion.”

“Thank you for giving us this assignment it allows us to take a step back and listen to people who think differently from ourselves. I’ve shared this video with some of my friends as well.”

“This was a very eye-opening assignment for me, which I even shared with my peers and my sister. I liked the message that was conveyed in this assignment/video. Especially since our current political climate was so polarized.”

“I think it’s a video that everyone should watch because it shows the importance of communication and respect, even between people with two completely differing beliefs.”

Another incident that can be used to bridge managerial concepts and a racial discrimination issue is a Philadelphia Starbucks’ calling police to make a trespassing arrest of two African American men who were waiting for friends in their store (Gayle, 2018). Asking students to identify which aspects of the balanced scorecard that were breached by Starbucks’ action, why they were breached, and how Starbuck rectified their action are salient examples of how to integrate racial issues into a class.

#### **IV. COURSE DELIVERY AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT**

An instructor may want to allow students to access class notes of all chapters as early as one week before the semester starts to help them prepare for the course. Emailing students and asking them to read specific topics in textbook, class notes and practice specific exercises before attending each class meeting are highly recommended so as to enhance student learning and stimulate active class participation. To encourage students to ask questions and to show that an instructor cares about their learning, an instructor may want to add “Please feel free to ask any questions. I am here to help you succeed!” to all email and in-class communications with students.

For course delivery, an instructor may want to briefly discuss concepts and examples in class notes followed by engaging the class to work together on class-note exercises. An instructor may also cold-call students by their names to participate in reading an exercise, providing an answer to a question or identifying relevant information (e.g., variable costs, fixed costs) in a problem so as to solve a quantitative question, or to make decisions. Cold-calling can serve as an effective way to check their Zoom-meeting attendance, to assure that students are listening and learning, to get students to practice speaking up in class, and to motivate students to review materials between classes and do assignments before attending class. Kollat (2018), Gooblar (2016) and Dallimore et al. (2006) recommended cold-calling as an effective means to increase active classroom participation. Alternatively, small group discussion is appropriate for cases and open-ended questions with no right or wrong answers.

To help students overcome their fear of giving a wrong answer, an instructor may want to use Warren Buffett’s quote in Hagstrom (1999), “...I make decisions, and, yes, I, too make mistakes.” to highlight that all successful people have made mistakes, and making mistakes is normal part of learning and growing. Students appreciate it when an instructor goes over all class-note exercises/problems in class while engaging them in their learning. The following students’ comments support this statement.

“I really liked how we went over class notes and how we went over examples as a class. By doing so, it made it easier to understand the concept and it made it easier to do the homework and quizzes.”

“She always had us participate which really helped us focus more and learn the material in a better and fun way.”

“Great job getting all classmates involved in each lecture!”



“Great instructor who makes sure you understand the material prior to quizzes. Forces you to participate which helps understand the material”

“The instructor called on random class members to answer questions which helped. Whether the answer was right or wrong the instructor explained how to get the correct answer.”

“...Also, doing the in-class activities together helped to understand the materials...”

For an online synchronous course, an instructor may want to record all Zoom meetings as it is helpful to students who missed a class, forgot how to solve a class-note exercise/problem, or do not yet understand a concept. Listening to this recording also helps an instructor assess how well he/she explained important concepts and examples, and how calm and constructive his/her response was to a student’s wrong answer. Any responses with high-pitch tone or louder-than-usual volume may negatively affect student’s willingness to participate and hurt their self-esteem. These self-examination and corrective actions result in positive student comments below.

“Also, with those activities in class Professor Persons did not yell or get mad if you were confused or got something wrong, making it more comfortable to participate and learn.”

“I really couldn't thank you enough you made the class feel like a safe space to get things wrong and it really encouraged trying even if we got questions wrong.”

## V. ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENTS

Assignments and assessments are also driven by “Be a coach instead of a judge” because all of them provide students with a second chance and are designed not only to enhance student learning but also to instill in students a “can-do” attitude that motivates them to invest their best efforts in their march on this road of learning. This is an important role of a coach as opposed to a judge’s role of just assessing and evaluating student performance. Below are discussions of these assignments and how students are assessed.

### 5.1 Have Easy Assignments Upfront and Award More Than Full Credit for Great job

This serves to improve students’ confidence and interest in the subject. An example of an easy assignment is asking students to post to Canvas Discussion the importance of the subject to their personal lives, their careers, and the society/economy. This is especially important for a core introductory course that students are required to take regardless of their interests and majors. Another example discussed in section 2.5 is asking students to introduce themselves and their goals for the course to motivate student to commit to their learning objectives. An instructor may want to award students who provided highly effortful answers with a higher score than the full credit so as to make students feel great about their capability (an important role of a coach), and inspires them to do their best in subsequent assignments/assessments. For those who submit below-average work, an instructor may provide them with specific instructions on how to improve, and allow them to revise and resubmit their answers. Student performance on these simple assignments reflects how motivated they are, and has a strong and positive correlation with performance in subsequent assessments. Therefore, extra attention and encouragement should be given to students who do not do well on these easy assignments.

## 5.2 Provide Plenty of Practices to Reinforce Learning and Prepare Students for Quizzes

Homework assignments on a textbook publisher's digital learning platform were used to reinforce what they learned in class, enhance their understanding of course materials, and prepare them for a chapter-quiz assessment. Students were allowed multiple attempts for each homework question with detailed feedback after each attempt, and solutions after the last allowable attempt. An instructor may want to provide written tips/guidance for challenging homework questions, and monitor students' homework progress so as to reach out to students who need help. Encouraging students to do multiple-choice questions at the end of chapter and in "Adaptive Practices" on publisher's digital learning platform should enable students to fill their learning gaps and to be more prepared for a chapter quiz. Student comments below indicate that they appreciate homework assignments that enhance their learning of class materials and prepare them for a chapter quiz.

"Also the homework helped solidify the understanding of material taught in class."

"The assignments also helped me learn a lot more about the accounting process."

"The homework assignments helped when you were doing the quizzes because it was a way for you to do the problems done in class on your own to practice."

"All of your assignments were very nice and thorough. You did an excellent job professor!"

## 5.3 Have a Quiz for Each Chapter Instead of a Few Exams That Cover Several Chapters

Ten online open-book Canvas quizzes that students take remotely during a designated two-day window replace a few in class closed-book exams that covered 3-4 chapters. Each of these ten quizzes focuses on a chapter, and took place right after the due date of that chapter's homework. A coach/instructor would prepare students for these assessments by discussing important concepts and examples, engaging students in in-class exercises and problems, assigning homework similar to quantitative quiz questions, and promptly addressing any students' questions.

A review of the literature shows that open-book assessments are universally recognized to reduce anxiety and examination tension and stress (Block 2012). The other two positive outcomes of open-book assessments are lasting learning outcomes and reducing unnecessary rote memorization (Broyles et al. 2005). Regarding frequent assessments, a meta-analysis of courses in math, science and the social sciences by Bangert-Drowns et al. (1991) showed that student performance increased with the number of tests given and that students who took a large number of short tests benefited more than students who took a small number of long tests of identical items because frequent assessments can motivate students to study more regularly, resulting in reduced cramming and increased final grades. Similar benefits of online chapter quizzes on final-exam performance and course grade were documented by Johnson and Kiviniemi (2009) in an undergraduate social psychology course, and by Hennig et al. (2019) in mathematical problem-solving contexts among pharmacy students. Frequent assessments can also lower anxiety (Fulkerson and Martin, 1981), increase self-esteem (Cole and Spence, 2012) and promote deep learning (McDowell et al., 2011; Carrillo-de-la-Peña and Pérez, 2012). Vaessen et al. (2017) studied students' perception of frequent assessments in a statistics course, and found that most students valued graded frequent assessments as a study motivator. Student comments below confirm this finding.

"Having frequent quizzes helped me to retain and understand the material."

“The assignments and quizzes were great helped me stay sharp all throughout the semester and knowledgeable about the subject.”

There are also more advantages of frequent open-book online quizzes. First, an instructor can more thoroughly quiz each chapter’s materials, and include more challenging questions that involve more critical thinking. Such quizzes enable an instructor to assess students’ higher-order cognitive processes per the revised Bloom’s Taxonomy (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001). Most open-book quiz questions assess students’ ability to apply and analyze whereas other questions assess understanding and ability to evaluate. They do not at all assess the lowest level of remembering/recalling or rote memorization often used in closed-book assessments. Second, hours of valuable class-time previously used for mid-term exams are now utilized for practices on more challenging exercises that reinforce deeper learning, and improve applying, analysis and evaluation skills. Third, instant grading by Canvas saves instructor’s time which are productively invested in coaching and helping students learn. Fourth, they reinforce important concepts (e.g., fixed vs. variable cost behavior) over and over which increases the understanding and retention of the concepts compared with testing these concepts in only one mid-term exam.

A common concern about any online assessments taken remotely is that students can search internet (e.g., Chegg, Course Hero) for answers to test-bank questions. Therefore, an instructor may want to rephrase qualitative questions so that internet search would find no result or using quantitative questions with built-in algorithm that presents different figures/numbers across students. Instructors may also create their own questions, and revise them regularly. These suggestions support students’ integrity because students will be motivated to study hard if they cannot find quiz answers on the internet.

Another concern is student’s selling online quiz questions to these internet sites. To address this concern, the following statements should be placed at the front of each online quiz: “This quiz has Copyright © 2022 Instructor’s Name. All rights reserved. NO part of this quiz (questions and answers) may be shared with anyone, reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, photographing, recording, scanning or otherwise without a written permission from the instructor (Instructor’s Name)”. This message will appear on top of each Canvas quiz question if an instructor chooses to present one question at a time. Additionally, an instructor may want to: (1) allow less time if students in past semesters finished a quiz early, (2) disallow going back to prior questions, and (3) place a copyright notice, i.e., “Copyright © 2022 Instructor’s Name. All rights reserved.” on all questions that an instructor created on his/her own.

Another concern is student unauthorized collaboration on a remote assessment. This was less concerning during the pandemic social distancing, and texting or emailing answers would not work because the question order and the order of multiple choices in each question vary across students. However, student collaboration is now more concerning. Therefore, an instructor may want to have a large pool of questions, a portion of which are randomly selected to be in a quiz so that no two students would have exactly the same set of questions.

#### **5.4 Allow Two Attempts for Online Open-Book Quizzes**

Because open-book quiz questions assess students’ higher-order cognitive processes, students may not earn a satisfactory grade on the first attempt. To assess how hard such a quiz is, an instructor may allow only one attempt on the first open-book quiz. If a class average is in a C range and no one gets higher than 90%, two attempts would be warranted to show empathy

and encourage students to improve. Vaessen et al. (2017) indicate that when an assessment results in a low grade, the self-efficacy of students diminishes, affecting preparation for the next assessment task. On the other hand, good grades increase motivation and self-efficacy, and positively affect preparation for subsequent assessments.

To motivate students to master the materials by learning to correct their prior mistakes, an instructor may want to: (1) provide a wrong-answer response that directs students to specific concepts, example or exercise in class notes or textbook, and (2) keep the same set of questions in the second attempt as the first one, but present the questions in a different order, and change figures in quantitative questions from the test bank with built-in algorithm. Because there is a quiz in almost every week, students take the second attempt during the same two-day window as the first attempt. Student comments below indicate that they appreciate two attempts for quizzes.

“Having multiple attempts to do the quizzes also greatly assisted in retention of the material.”

Morphew et al. (2020) examined whether shorter, more frequent, second-chance testing improve student learning in an undergraduate engineering course. They found that students in the frequent second-chance testing cohort scored seven percentage points higher, and earned twice the number of As and half the number of failing grades. The advantage of frequent second-chance testing was found for both multiple-choice and free-response questions, and persisted regardless of student ability, gender and ethnicity (underrepresented minority or not). Similarly, this study finds significantly higher grades when the second chance is allowed for open-book quizzes than when only one chance is allowed. In particular, the class average of quizzes with two attempts ranged from 81.5% to 90%, much higher than 64% class average of the first quiz with only one attempt.

### **5.5 Use a Cumulative Final Exam**

A cumulative open-book final exam holds students to a higher standard compared to a noncumulative one because it motivates students to master materials learned throughout a semester. To reduce students' stress, such a final exam should focus on a few truly important concepts in each chapter, especially those that many students missed in earlier quizzes. The use of a cumulative final exam is consistent with being a coach who would try to help students overcome their weaknesses in earlier practices. Similar to frequent open-book chapter quizzes, a cumulative open-book final exam focuses on sharpening students' ability to apply, analyze and evaluate. For an upper-level course, the final exam requires students to create specific reports after applying relevant concepts, and analyzing and evaluating transactions/situations without resorting to rote memorization. This means that students will not be able to just copy answers from a textbook or class notes even though the final exam is open-book, and will be motivated to invest their best efforts in learning the subject. A cumulative final exam also increases longer-term retention of knowledge learned (Glass, et. al, 2013 and Khanna et al., 2013). To prepare students for a cumulative final exam, a coach/instructor may want to provide practice problems and a list of important concepts in each chapter that students should review.

### **5.6 Add Inspirational/Positive Touches to Quizzes**

An instructor may want to include a short inspirational message on the front page of each quiz. This message will appear on top of each Canvas quiz question if an instructor chooses to

present one question at a time. Examples of inspirational messages are “Do your very best!”, “Give all your mighty efforts!”, “Reach for the stars!”, and “You can do it!”. These inspirational messages consistently injected throughout the semester can be a powerful morale boost for students. An instructor may also want to congratulate students who get perfect score on a quiz and ask for their learning strategy/tips to be shared with the entire class. Another positivity that would enhance students’ motivation to do their best is praising students who significantly improve, and congratulating the entire class when the class average of a quiz is significantly higher than that of prior quizzes.

### **5.7 Provide Extra-Credit Assignments**

The purpose of extra-credit assignments is not only to help students improve grade but also to enhance their learning. These assignments may be additional questions or problems about applying or analyzing challenging concepts that most students missed in quizzes or tests. Extra credit may also involve researching a relevant topic in library online databases and summarize learning points. Alternatively, an instructor may provide materials for students to read and answer specific questions. A suggested reading that may be useful not only to college learning but also to life-long learning/growth is Chapter 8 of *What the Best College Students do* by Bain (2012). Another reading material appropriate for a business course is Warren Buffett’s letter to shareholders of Berkshire Hathaway Inc. His letter was written in plain English with candidness and humors, making it both educational and entertaining to read. Extra-credit assignments may also be used to support students’ career development by asking students to summarize/reflect on what they learn at meetings or interviews with recruiters.

## **VI. TEACHING EVALUATIONS, STUDENT COMMENTS AND PERFORMANCE**

Table 1 presents teaching evaluation ratings of ten aspects about the instructor and class activities of “Introduction to Managerial Accounting”. These aspects were developed by a university-wide committee in Spring 2019 for all online courses, and may also be used in any in-person courses. “Be a Coach” semesters were Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 with a total of 107 students. Earlier semesters which utilized these same questions included Spring 2019, Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 with a total of 128 students. The ratings are out of 5, where 5 is the highest and 1 is the lowest rating.

**Table 1: Teaching Evaluation Ratings**

<b>Teaching Evaluation Aspects</b>	<b>Earlier Semesters</b>	<b>Be a Coach Semesters</b>
1. My instructor explained the purpose of this course, as well as the goals of the individual lessons or units.	4.21	4.70
2. My instructor set and communicated high expectations.	4.14	4.63
3. Class activities and assignments were focused on achieving course objectives.	4.18	4.71
4. My instructor led course sessions in an organized way.	3.79	4.77
5. My instructor provided timely feedback on tests and other assignments.	4.17	4.70
6. My instructor explained how work/performance was evaluated.	4.07	4.59
7. My instructor created an environment conducive to learning.	3.93	4.78
8. My instructor demonstrated respect for the students.	4.34	4.81
9. My instructor was available for direct communication.	4.24	4.68
10. My instructor created an environment in which I was comfortable participating.	3.79	4.72
<b>Average rating across ten aspects</b>	4.09	4.71

The table shows that teaching evaluations of “Be a Coach” semesters range from 92% (4.59/5) to 96% (4.81/5) compared with a significantly lower range of 76% (3.79/5) to 87% (4.34/5) for the earlier semesters. The average rating across the ten aspects, computed by dividing the sum of ratings by 10 is 82% (4.09/5) for earlier semesters vs. a significantly higher average of 94% (4.71/5) in the two “Be a Coach” semesters. The top three most significant improvements across the ten aspects are as follows.

1. “My instructor led course sessions in an organized way.” Student evaluation of this aspect jumped from 3.79/5 (76%) in earlier semesters to 4.77/5 (95%) in “Be a Coach” semesters.
2. “My instructor created an environment in which I was comfortable participating.” Student evaluation increased from 3.79/5 (76%) in earlier semesters to 4.72/5 (94%) in “Be a Coach” semesters.
3. “My instructor created an environment conducive to learning.” The evaluation significantly increased from 3.93/5 (79%) in earlier semesters to 4.78/5 (96%) in “Be a Coach” semesters. All elements of “Be a coach instead of a judge” implemented in this course likely contributed to this much more positive learning environment.

All student comments in course evaluations during the two “Be a Coach” semesters were also highly positive as shown below.

“Thank you for being a great professor and helping me understand my questions whenever I asked.”

“Great professor 10/10 would recommend.”

“Professor Persons has been my favorite professor I have ever had at Rider. I was able to learn from her and the class, which reflected back in my grades. She was super nice and accommodating during this time of a pandemic as well. I have nothing but nice things to say about her, and I have had nothing but a positive experience in her class”

“I really enjoyed learning in this class! The instructor was very sweet and was always encouraging us to do our best! She would work with us to get to the answer she needed during the lectures, and she always kept us up to date with what needed to be handed in. She was an amazing professor for this course and I would recommend her to my fellow classmates and students.”

“Great instructor who makes sure you understand the material prior to quizzes. Forces you to participate which helps understand the material.”

“Professor Persons did a great job.”

“Best professor ever!”

“Professor Persons was one of the nicest and forgiving professors I have had at Rider. She knows what she is teaching about and handled this current epidemic wonderfully with online classes.”

“Professor Persons did an amazing job handling remote courses! She always made sure students understood the assignments and if students needed help outside of class she was more than willing to help!”

“Professor Persons has been by far my favorite professor. She taught the material well and was very good at elaborating on questions from students. She took class time to ensure students understood the material rather than having the students learn on their own.”

“Dr. Persons is the most amazing and influential professor in my opinion. She does her best to help everyone out and make suggestions on career planning to help benefit us. She cares about her students and goes the extra mile. I have learned so much in this course and Dr. Persons is the reason why I want to learn Accounting now. Thank you so much Dr. Persons for being so influential and helping me succeed in this course.”

Receiving favorable and warm email comments from a student who had received a C- in Fall 2020 further supports “Be a coach instead of a judge” pedagogy. Her email with the following message was sent on January 10, 2021, a few days after the capitol riot which was the shockingly unprecedented time.

“Thank you for everything!!! I enjoyed having you as an instructor and I hope you have a nice and relaxing break amidst all the craziness going on in the world and society right now!”

The implementation of these pedagogical practices also significantly improved student performance measured by average total grade. The average total grade during “Be a Coach” semesters (Fall 2020 and Spring 2021) was 87.14% which includes 10 quizzes, a cumulative final exam, homework, and class attendance/participation. This was 12 percentage points higher than 75.29% average total grade (three mid-term exams, a cumulative final exam and homework) in earlier semesters. The use of average final-exam grade also shows similarly significant improvement of 14 percentage points from 71.26% average final-exam grade in earlier semesters to 85.12% average final-exam grade in the two “Be a Coach” semesters of “Introduction to Managerial Accounting”.

## VII. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This article discusses “Be a coach instead of a judge” pedagogy that was developed by the author and first implemented in an undergraduate introductory managerial accounting during the challenging remote environment of the pandemic in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. These

pedagogical practices resulted in highly favorable student evaluations and performance as it inspired students to do their best. These practices are classified into four major aspects. The first and most important one is student-teacher relations. To nurture these relations, a teacher will need to incorporate enthusiasm, empathy, positivity and trust as much as possible into all aspects of the course to make students feel empowered to learn and achieve their goals for the course. Getting to know students beyond their names and helping students with any questions including career planning are crucial for the positive relations.

The second aspect is course contents and organization. Customized, organized and comprehensive class notes that include current real-world events such as pandemic effects and ethics issues enhance student learning and increase the relevance of the course. Students prefer these comprehensive class notes that include important concepts, examples as well as exercises and problems for them to practice throughout the class notes because such class notes involve them, and better coach/prepare them for assessments. Students also appreciate class discussion about diversity, equality and inclusion.

The third aspect is course delivery and student engagement. After brief discussion of concepts and examples, an instructor may want to engage the class to work together on exercises/problems via a technique such as cold-calling or small groupwork. Using Warren Buffett's quote about making mistakes can help students overcome their fears of providing wrong answers and being judged unfavorably by the instructor or their peers. Recording all class meetings and post this Zoom recording to Canvas can also benefit students.

The fourth aspect involves frequent, online, open-book, out-of-class assignments and assessments with multiple attempts to let student improve their learning and perfect their performance. In addition to homework, a total of 10 second-chance quizzes assess students' higher-order cognitive processes: understand, apply, analyze and evaluate. Injecting positivity via inspirational words on each quiz, and commending the class and individual students for improving performance are highly recommended to boost students' can-do attitude. Awarding grade above the full credit for online discussions and any writing assignments also enhances positivity and enthusiasm in the class, and further inspires students to do their best.

Applying these pedagogical practices to in-person sections of the same course in Spring 2022 resulted in a similar improvement in student performance and favorable teaching evaluations. This pedagogy has also been used in an upper-level accounting course (both in-person and online), and in an online asynchronous graduate accounting course since Fall 2021 with similarly desirable outcomes. In sum, this instructional pedagogy or any of its elements that a reader feels comfortable may be used to "coach" and motivate students to do their best in any courses at any levels, in-person or virtual.



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