

Establishing positive relationships is what makes a difference with instructional coaching. Actually, it's what makes a difference in any relationship or partnership. In the world of instructional coaching, however, not every partnership is based on a shared vision or shared interests. These relationships are not "matched" or determined with an intentional design. In fact, these relationships occur simply because a coach and the teachers who are coached want (or are told) to work together and to make a positive impact on teaching and learning. And, they succeed because coaches are skilled professionals who understand adult learning, build trust, honor their colleagues, and give meaningful feedback to improve practice.

The fact is that the coach cannot pick and choose with which teachers to work nor can the teachers pick and choose the coach. In spite of this, coaches and teachers join together to establish and grow a productive working relationship so that continuous learning takes place.

William Glasser, a noted psychiatrist, claims there are "Seven Caring Habits" that are critical for creating and sustaining healthy relationships. Those habits are: supporting, encouraging, listening, accepting, trusting, respecting, and negotiating differences. Putting these habits into practice is critical for the coaching role to be effective and successful in stimulating change on the classroom, school, and district levels. These habits must be routine, familiar, and part of a coach's daily rituals as s/he work with colleagues.

As you think about your role as coaches and teacher leaders, think about the importance of your work and how you influence others. Think about how you approach your colleagues and support them. As you bring folks together to collaborate and collectively problem-solve, think about what you do that changes customs. Think about each of the abovementioned "habits" and how your coaching behaviors contribute to making change and helping teachers implement effective instructional practices.

All relationships should start with active listening, transparency, and mutual goals. That should be followed by consistency, reinforcement, and open communication. Coaches strive to create an atmosphere that is conducive to change and at the same time, reverent to past practice. They must balance the desire to help their colleagues move from point "A" to point "B" with the acknowledgment that no one way is the right way for everyone but that the actual movement is necessary for change.

Coaches are in an enviable position; they have a chance to make a difference in schools and learning communities. They help their teaching colleagues create meaningful professional development that is well implemented. They help turn that professional development into professional learning through follow up, teamwork, and ongoing support so that adjustments to teaching are the results of reflection and feedback from collegial conversations. They continuously build confidence by providing opportunities for teachers to talk, plan, learn, and share ideas that help revolutionize individual, team and school-wide practice.

Yes, coaches help revolutionize practices so that teaching and learning are dynamic and creative, innovative and transformative. They are at the forefront of adaptation and modification, adjustment and revision.

As you continue the process of self-assessment and reflection, think about all the ways in which you helped teachers recognize their full potential. Think about your growth and how your coaching practices have changed as you engaged your colleagues in thoughtful deliberation and discussion. Think about how your own contemplation and introspection have led to careful examination and valuation of the individual and collective work you do with your colleagues.

Enjoy your summer vacation. Rest, renew, and re-energize your coaching toolkit. See you in September.

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