

## Listen to understand teachers' unique needs

Teacher leaders in schools are innovators who are comfortable with change. "I don't understand why some teachers are so reluctant to implement new instructional strategies or curriculum while others are eager to learn," says Barak Azad, the math coach at Norton High School.\* He faces what many staff developers do, the realization that teachers learn differently.

Azad is more comfortable working with less-experienced teachers and feels less comfortable with teachers who are his senior in years of experience. He finds that novice teachers want more direction and advice from him, while others are more reluctant to seek help or want to complain about the new curriculum. To be successful in his work, Azad navigates the needs of the individual learners, their personality, and how they respond to change. His training as a coach, especially on the Concerns-Based Adoption Model, provided him with a framework for identifying the concerns his colleagues express and guiding him to determine appropriate interventions.

Azad finds listening is the most important skill he can practice. He listens for his colleagues' concerns related to information, management, effect on students, or collaboration. If he hears a concern related to management, a common concern, he considers how to help a teacher organize her time, access materials needed to implement new instructional strategies, or how to eliminate less essential concepts from her classroom curriculum.

Another observation Azad makes is that teachers learn differently. One teacher benefits from his demonstration lessons. Another wants Azad to help him identify ways to reach the lowest achieving students in the class. Still another

### LEARNING

Staff development that improves the learning of all students applies knowledge about human learning and change.

wants him to provide web sites to extend learning for more capable students. While Azad is comfortable with each of these tasks, he finds himself thinking about which produces the changes in instruction and curriculum that are essential to implement the new math program. He agrees to find web sites for the most senior member of the department because he hopes to establish trust and credibility with this teacher

and to use that as an entrée to more significant support.

Azad's work as a math coach requires him to acknowledge the unique attributes of each teacher he coaches. They differ in years of experience, how they respond to change, and how they learn. As he works with each one, Azad listens to understand the needs or concerns expressed and then decides how he will intervene. He has formulated a few patterns among his school's faculty. The inexperienced teachers are more open to his suggestions and support. More experienced teachers are less open to his suggestions. Mid-career teachers can be either reluctant or eager for his support. While this pattern exists among his staff, he hears other math coaches describe their staff with different patterns. He vigilantly guards against pigeonholing any of his colleagues into stereotypes and strives to ensure that each one receives the support he or she wants to improve student learning. ♦

*\* Fictitious person and school*



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