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Goals help coaches get a good start

Q How does a coach get started on the job?

Frequently the coach is hired and simply told, “Go out and do some good things with teachers.” There’s no job description, no introduction to the staff. It helps if the school leader is clear about the school’s goal for coaching and establishes some schoolwide areas of focus so it’s a natural fit for the coach to support teachers in these initiatives. The school leader introducing the coach to the staff is critical for having a successful experience.

The coach should have clear goals set jointly with the administration from the beginning. Distance yourself from any evaluative activities. Talk with the administration about objectives and the game plan. For instance, are you trying to foster a culture of collaboration, get people talking about instruction? Or are you working to implement a particular initiative? Then, who’s your audience? Is it just science teachers; is it the whole school? How are you going to operate? Is the goal to do observation cycles or to influence how groups

meet and collaborate?

Then it’s all about building relationships and trust. In one case in my own coaching, teachers did not have a culture of collaboration at all. I began by asking if I could teach a lesson, videotape it, and use my instruction to do a tuning protocol on myself to start the reflective process. When people see that working with the coach is safe, that it’s nonjudgmental, that I’m not perfect, that I just really want to support people, then they start to open up.

It’s easier to move schools forward when you can work with small groups rather than one-on-one. As you’re working with Teacher A on one thing and with Teacher B on another, we’re making progress, but the school as a whole doesn’t see any large scale benefit because we’re all working on different things. I engage different groups; for example, the sophomore English teachers or the algebra teachers. Then when I’m not around they have each other for support. I’m trying to leave a legacy, a culture of collaboration around a common focus where teachers learn how to collaborate to the point that they move me to a true consultative model. ♦

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