



Coach's rules of the road keep the journey smooth and successful

By Valerie von Frank

Q What should new coaches think about?

Catina Mason (mathtmason@hotmail.com) has been an instructional coach at several schools, including turnaround schools, and is now an instructional specialist with Detroit Public Schools.

One of the first things I always do is to talk with the principal to get the principal's philosophy and take on the school culture before I go to the classrooms. That builds the principal's comfort level so the principal can step to the side and know where I am coming from. I clarify what my role is and is not. Sometimes the principal may expect

the coach to help get a teacher out of the school if the teacher is not


performing effectively, or to tell the principal what's going on. The coach is not there to spy, but to help and support the teachers.

I usually observe in the classroom to find out what the teacher's style is so I can adapt. We have conversations about things they may need to reflect on rather than me telling them. I try to get them to say, "Maybe I could have ..." or "Maybe I should try ..." I believe in the gradual-release model of coaching: I do, we do you do. When I'm working with teachers, I use the analogy of a relay race in which the runners pass the baton. The transition has to be smooth when you let go, so it is essential to know when to make a move.

Finally, have humility. Remember it's your colleagues that you are

helping. It doesn't matter how smart you are or how much you know. You want to transfer your ideas in a safe way for those teachers. Be organized. Keep your word. Continue to be a lifelong learner, just as you're asking teachers to be. Have a support system among other coaches to keep yourself energized. When you don't know, find out, because you're the resource person. Find out the need before you try to provide the service.

Be the buffer and the inspiration; the teachers will definitely appreciate it!

Valerie von Frank (valerievonfrank@aol.com) is an education writer and editor of **Learning Forward's** books. 

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