



## Crystal clear purpose builds a foundation for the work

**By Valerie von Frank**

**Q** What is the most important skill you've needed to coach successfully?

As a coach, being transparent is very important and transparency takes preparation. You have to make sure people understand the reasons behind what you're doing and understand that everything has a purpose. Working with teachers is the same as working with kids — if you aren't clear about what you want them to learn, they aren't going to learn it.


In our school, the coaches, the principal, the assistant principal, the intervention coordinator and the community liaison form the coordination team. The team figures out what we want to have happen in the school and how to pace it so we are clear about what we expect, and that is communicated to teachers.

Then it's my job and the other coach's to help teachers carry it out. Clarity among the leaders in the school is crucial, because if we aren't all on the same page, we can't expect anybody else to be.

Coaches have to communicate well ahead of time about what is going to happen, when, and why. Nothing should come up as a surprise, where people say, 'Oh, I didn't know.' It takes being thoughtful about what we are doing and why, and communicating that plan to staff.

For example, today the coaches are sending out a graphic organizer to help grade-level teams plan their meetings and data driven dialogues for the next three months. Another example is a project we are engaged in schoolwide for bilingual students called Literacy Squared. Before school began, I explained and demonstrated one of their strategies and asked teachers to implement it within the

first couple of weeks of school. I offered them my support. Last week, a new teacher asked for help and I went into his classroom to model the strategy on Monday and Tuesday. On Wednesday, he did it and I was there to jump in to help and to give feedback. Thursday and Friday, I passed it over to him. He had the why and what ahead of time. Then I showed him how to do it and made sure he was able to carry it forward. You have to be clear about what you expect teachers to do, how and when, or it's not going to happen the way you want.

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