

Tools *for* LEARNING SCHOOLS

EVERY EDUCATOR ENGAGES IN EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EVERY DAY SO EVERY STUDENT ACHIEVES

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Teacher-coach relationships

An excerpt from *Coaching Matters*

By Joellen Killion, Cindy Harrison, Chris Bryan, and Heather Clifton

In any professional learning program, teachers and coaches must have a good relationship in order to get the work done.

To have a productive relationship, teachers and coaches need to trust one another, respect each other professionally, commit to keeping their partnership agreements, and clearly define the work they will do together. Teachers must believe that the coach supports them and that the coach's top priority is student academic achievement. The coach must believe that teachers are committed to continuous improvement and that teachers' top priority is student academic achievement. The mutual respect and professional focus of the coach-teacher relationship minimizes personal factors that may detract from a productive relationship.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH TEACHERS

Building strong, productive relationships with teachers requires six key elements:

- Creating effective partnership agreements;
- Building teacher leadership capacity;
- Communicating about coaching services;
- Allowing teachers to identify their needs and to choose how a coach provides support (allowing teachers "a voice and a choice");
- Encouraging feedback; and
- Managing resistance and conflict.



CREATING EFFECTIVE AGREEMENTS

To have a constructive and productive relationship, teachers and coaches agree in advance on how they will work together and the kind of work they will do. An agreement reduces teachers' anxiety about what the coaching experience is and creates a foundation for a trusting relationship.

A coach may want a partnership agreement with individual teachers and with teams of teachers. Partnership agreements often describe each party's roles and responsibilities, outline desired outcomes for the work, define how the work will be measured, specify what data the coach and teacher will examine and how they will follow up, describe what the coach and the teacher need from one another to be successful, tell how they will interact with one another, and spell out what is confidential.

One of the most important aspects of partnership-agreement conversations teachers and coaches have is about

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what confidentiality means in their relationship. The coach is more likely to be able to establish trust and gain teachers' confidence if everyone explicitly understands that the coach's work does not influence the principal's evaluation of teachers in any way or affect the principal's regard for the teachers. If teachers think the coach tells the principal about their practices, they are less inclined to want to work with the coach or to see the coach as a support. Coaches and teachers can negotiate what is permissible to share with other teachers or the administrator.

Learning Forward BELIEF

More students achieve when educators assume collective responsibility for student learning.

An astute coach discusses the bounds of confidentiality with administrators as well as with teachers when establishing partnership agreements. Conversations about partnership agreements allow teachers to share how they might work most effectively with the coach and what specific needs they have. The coach may want to use an agenda or conversation map to focus the conversation. A summary

restatement ending the conversation ensures that the teacher and coach agree on the specifics of the working relationship.

Usually both the parties write and sign the partnership agreement, but the agreement also can be less formal, such as having one person, usually the coach, take notes during the conversation and copy the notes for the other person.

Partnership agreements are not stagnant — they evolve as the relationship between the coach and teacher evolves. Early on, when the coach and teacher are more tentative about the relationship, the agreements are clear and explicit. As the relationship matures and becomes more focused, businesslike, and intentional, the agreements, while never ignored, may require less focus.

BUILDING TEACHER LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

One indicator that coaching is effective is when teacher leadership grows. Coaches are not the only teacher leaders at a school site. Coaches who see it as their responsibility to develop teacher leadership send the message that all teachers have leadership potential and responsibilities. These coaches see themselves as models of leadership practices and make their practices transparent so that other teachers can learn to coach. Teachers are more engaged when coaches demonstrate respect for teachers' knowledge and practices.

Coaches can foster teacher leadership in many ways. Coaches can:

- Invite other teachers to facilitate a team meeting, and guide and support novice facilitators.
- Seek other teachers' support with complex challenges related to student learning and teaching.
- Invite teachers to add resources, examples, models, or

ideas to conversations.

- Invite teachers to discuss their instructional decisions so that others understand the theoretical, research, or contextual rationale for the decision.
- Use reflection protocols to foster reflection.
- Encourage teachers to present in critical friends' groups.
- Encourage teachers to facilitate professional development for their peers.
- Provide professional development in teacher leadership skills for interested teachers.
- Coach team, grade-level, or department chairs on their leadership skills.
- Share practices or resources with designated teacher leaders or those who want to develop their leadership capacity.
- Pair teachers as peer observers to provide each other feedback.
- Engage teachers in walk-throughs or instructional rounds to gather data about teaching and learning, and participate in debriefing sessions.
- Invite teachers to serve as hosts for walk-throughs or instructional rounds.
- Encourage teachers to open their classrooms to other teachers to visit.

Some teachers hesitate to take leadership roles, seeing the challenge as adding responsibilities to their regular work. Others consider leadership responsibilities only as a track to school administration. However, schools today have enough leadership opportunities and forms of leadership to allow just about any interested teacher to lead in some way. Coaches also can help create leadership opportunities for teachers who prefer to remain in the classroom.

To build teachers' confidence as they step into leadership roles, coaches apply the same gradual-release principle they use in coaching instruction to build leadership expertise — I do, we do, you do. As teachers gain confidence, they can gradually assume some of the coach's responsibilities so that eventually the coach can shift responsibilities or assume new ones. Other teacher leaders can take over roles including data coach, learning facilitator, instructional specialist, and more. When teacher leaders are active within a school and assume leadership responsibilities, their sense of collegiality is stronger, they feel more engaged and professional, and they have a greater effect on student achievement.

Coaching is most successful when instruction improves, student learning increases — and more teachers see themselves as leaders and contributors to the professionalism within their schools.

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COMMUNICATING ABOUT COACHING SERVICES

Coaches can encourage teachers to participate in coaching by communicating which coaching services are offered. What the coach can provide and the coach's availability depend on the coaching program's goals and parameters. For example, if a district has determined that its coaches will serve as data coaches, instructional and curriculum specialists, and learning facilitators, the coach will need to provide services associated with those roles. So a data coach would meet with teachers individually or in teams to analyze student data and also might help the principal facilitate whole-school faculty meetings to review data about student achievement, engagement, demographics, perceptions, and so on. Some coaches have surveyed staff and then outlined services that respond to teacher needs.

Coaches have different ways of letting teachers know what support is available. Some coaches have created electronic or print menus listing the coach's support options. Others have created one-page descriptions or brochures. Some approaches are creative; others are more straightforward. The form of the communication sends a message about how the coach intends teachers to view coaching.

In almost all of these communication tools, coaches include details such as how to connect with the coach and the best way, whether by email, a note in the coach's mailbox, or with a phone message. Written or electronic formats generally include a place for the teacher's name and a spot to check off the requested service. These communication tools help a coach prepare and be ready to focus when working with teachers. Teachers then can consider in advance how to benefit from the coach's support, which increases their engagement, intentionality, and, potentially, the results.

In addition to communicating the services they offer, coaches periodically report to the staff, principals, and the coach champion which services they have provided. Most coaching programs require coaches to complete some form of log that the coaching program director and school principal use to manage the program.

Teachers often wonder how coaches spend their time when the coach is not with a particular team or individual teacher. To keep teachers informed, coaches can create a summary to share with all staff — a circle graph of how the coach's time is allocated or a description of the amount of time the coach spent in various services. The data can be pulled easily from the coach's log. The summary could be included in the staff newsletter, shared in a faculty meeting or school leadership team meeting, or posted on the faculty Web page. By seeing this information, teachers may get ideas about how to benefit from coaching services in the future.

Coaching Matters

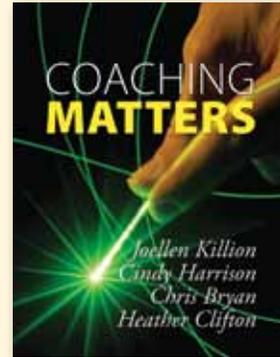
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This article is excerpted from *Coaching Matters* (Learning Forward, 2012). Each chapter describes an element of research and the authors' firsthand experiences in making coaching effective.

Every chapter is accompanied by tools, including extended readings, resources to use with teachers, strategies for accomplishing the work, and real-life examples to build on.

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ALLOWING TEACHERS A VOICE AND CHOICE

Teachers can't be forced to engage in coaching. A more positive approach is to set clear expectations and allow teachers to identify their needs and choose the services the coach provides and the focus of the coach-teacher interaction. Giving teachers a voice and choice empowers and respects the voice of teachers (Knight, 2007). Choice means believing "that teachers should have choice regarding what and how they learn" (Knight, 2007, p. 41).

When teachers are respected and given choice in their professional learning and the professional learning the coach provides aligns more closely with teachers' unique needs, teachers are more likely to perceive value in the coaching and apply what they learn from the coach.

As principals convey expectations about coaching, it is important that they expect that teachers take an active role in the coaching process by clarifying the specific type of support they want and their goal for the coaching interaction.

The coach's role is to create a trusting, collaborative relationship with teachers to make the process inviting, to listen deeply, to seek to understand teachers' needs, and to support them in meeting their individual, team, school, and district goals.

REFERENCE

Knight, J. (2007). *Instructional coaching: A partnership approach to improving instruction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. ●