



A new role and a new vision for the road ahead

I recently met a woman who is leaving a school system after 14 years to work for a technical assistance agency. She had limited professional learning leadership experience beyond the district and wondered what to expect.

We talked about how she might prepare herself. A new learning leader's first priority must be to have a vision for the quality and impact of professional learning. While my colleague had seen Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) listed on posters, she had never thought about what they meant for planning and implementing professional learning in her school system. Now she needed to think about them on a larger scale.

As we talked about the importance of professional learning quality, she explained that her interest in the position lay in the opportunity to impact teachers and their students. We reviewed what she knew about how to make a difference and how she would use that information to guide her work every day. We acknowledged that if she finds herself in too many situations where she is asked to deliver stand-alone workshops, the position might

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not be right for her.

Next we turned to the challenge of working with strangers. Working with a variety of clients is different from working within a school system with the same group of educators day after day. My new colleague will meet educators from across the country, each with a different story and each hoping but skeptical that she can meet his or her unique needs.

I suggested she start by sharing her story. She will never have expertise in every challenge she faces. She can only offer what has worked for her and thoughts on why it worked. She can present herself as a fellow practitioner, not as an expert. She can offer her lessons, hoping that others can find a way to use them. If she tries to establish herself as the only expert in the room, she will fail. I reminded her that great expertise lies within the individuals in the room. The biggest gift she has to

offer is to help them find it for themselves.

We talked about her responsibilities as a model learner. Her credibility will increase as she demonstrates that she has the knowledge to lead. One of the greatest services she will offer her new partners will be to keep them informed of new findings and resources that help them with their work. In addition, I recommended to her that she investigate people who have shaped our understanding of

adult learning and review important lessons on evaluation and impact of professional learning.

Finally, we talked about the potential isolation of her new position and how a community of learners can be vital to her success. One option I encouraged her to explore is whether her new employer might enroll her in the Learning Forward Academy, where a community of learners investigates problems of practice with intensive support.

I look forward to watching her grow in her new role and for many teachers and educators to be touched by her passion, expertise, and dedication for years to come.

REFERENCE

Learning Forward. (2011). *Standards for Professional Learning.* Oxford, OH: Author. ■