



**How do we proceed with intentionality and follow the conventional wisdom of “going slow to go fast” when the need is urgent and the requirements are pressing?**

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## WHAT I'VE LEARNED

Shannon Bogle

# STAY TRUE TO COACHING PRINCIPLES, EVEN IN HIGH-PRESSURE SITUATIONS

If you have ever worked in a school that is being overseen by an organization not linked to the district (e.g. a state receiver or external operator), you understand the unique challenges that teachers and leaders in such schools face every day.

One of the challenges is that state mandates and externally imposed structures can compromise a teacher's sense of autonomy, as they leave teachers with little to no say in the instructional process. Because teacher efficacy has a meaningful effect on school and student outcomes (Donohoo et al., 2018), that's a problem for everyone involved.

Instructional coaches have an important role to play in this situation because it is our job to build teacher efficacy and capacity or, as a school leader once told me, to help teachers improve enough to “coach yourself out of a job.” But how do we as coaches help teachers build their sense of efficacy while maintaining the vision of the leaders we work with? And how do we proceed with intentionality and follow the conventional wisdom of “going slow to go fast” when the need is urgent and the requirements are pressing?

In my experience, there are a few key coaching moves that make the most impact in low-performing and other high-stress situations.



**Focus on one small but highly effective change idea at a time.** When deciding what to change, place all the teacher needs on an effort-to-impact matrix (see p. 72). Start with low-effort, high-impact changes to get quick wins and build teacher confidence, then move into high-effort, high-impact changes. When considering impact, be sure to ask yourself: How or to what degree will this change impact students?

**Home in on implementation of the change idea.** There is very little time to collaboratively plan with teachers, so focus your limited time on discussing how the identified change fits into the lessons teachers are planning. It can be tempting to address other urgent student and staff needs, but staying focused now can free up time and energy later.

**Provide quick, actionable feedback several times a week.** When trying to make instructional changes on a tight timetable, it is essential for teachers to see whether what they're doing is working and, if not, to change it. Consider using a coaching-in-the-moment model, in which the coach intervenes during instruction in the least invasive way possible.

This model includes whisper coaching, stepping in to model a portion of the lesson, asking a strategic question to students, or using predetermined signals to alert the teacher of an action they may want to add or abandon.

And remember, when you visit classrooms, never skip the debrief. Even if you only have a few minutes, you can use the following questions to help teachers identify actionable next steps:

- What did you do differently?
- What difference did it make for students?
- What did you learn from this?
- What will you do with this learning beginning tomorrow?

### Share feedback from state or external walk-throughs with teachers.

Often, those who oversee the school's improvement initiatives conduct walk-throughs without teacher engagement. This can leave teachers wondering if the work they have put in is being noticed, and it deprives them of valuable information.

Even when teachers do see or hear the feedback, it can feel overwhelming or disconnected from their direct work. Connect the dots by reviewing the upper-level feedback with teachers and discussing action steps that fit into the coaching work you are already doing.

My experience also suggests something to avoid doing. When we are under pressure to get immediate results, coaches can be tempted to take over the instruction or decision-making by telling teachers what to do or doing

### LEARNING FORWARD'S COACHES ACADEMY

Learning Forward's researched-based Coaches Academy fosters the development of skills that allow coaches to address organizational needs while meeting teachers where they are by fostering relationships based in mutual respect and resulting in collaborative learning that improves outcomes for all students. For more information, visit [services.learningforward.org/services/coaches-academy/](https://services.learningforward.org/services/coaches-academy/)

the all-important reflection work for them. But this ultimately has a negative impact on a teacher's sense of efficacy. It also masks the problem so when the coach is deployed elsewhere, that problem could potentially re-emerge and get worse.

As you are working with educators in high-pressure situations, remember to stay true to the key principles of effective coaching. And remember that

Learning Forward is here to support you through our Coaches Academy and other resources and programs.

### REFERENCE

**Donohoo, J., Hattie, J., & Eells, R. (2018).** The power of collective efficacy. *Educational Leadership*, 75(6), 40-44. [www.ascd.org/el/articles/the-power-of-collective-efficacy](http://www.ascd.org/el/articles/the-power-of-collective-efficacy) ■

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### COACHES HELP US PROJECT THE SELVES WE WANT TO BE.

Educators do far more than deliver content; we model for students what it means to be fully human and to live out our values. Students are watching us and learning from how we respond and react to the situations and people around us. As one teacher with a popular Instagram account recently reminded all of us who have the privilege to be in classrooms, "Somebody is learning how to be a person by watching you. Let that sink in" (mrscowmansclassroom, 2020). To be the models we want to be, and to live our values out loud, we have to understand what those values are and how other people are — or are not — perceiving them based on our actions. Coaches can help us with both of those things.

Coaches can serve as sounding boards, so we can discuss our possible

choices for our actions and their implications. Then when we have settled on an authentic and solid next step, we often feel more assured of our values and decisions.

Equally important, they can help us determine if we are communicating those values and decisions. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1983) said that, instead of learning from textbooks, we should learn from "text people" — in other words, we learn most about the world and our place in it from reading each other.

Our words, gestures, and actions are constantly being read and interpreted by others. But are they being interpreted the way we intend them to be? Coaches can help us do the hard work of examining those questions and making necessary shifts to ensure that we are expressing outwardly the person we want to be so that we can help students become the people they want to be.

We all need to be the humane, growth-oriented person we want others to see. Working with a coach helps us look at our challenges with a broader perspective, find new strategies for handling them in growth-producing ways, and help us become the person we want to be.

### REFERENCES

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**Heschel, A.J. (1983).** *I asked for wonder: A spiritual anthology.* Crossroad. ■