

January is the time when most of us reflect on the past and share the myriad hopes for self-improvement. Some estimates claim that 40% of us make New Year's resolutions but how many of us really keep them? How many of us make a laundry list of goals that we want to accomplish but don't really think about the reality or likelihood of accomplishing those tasks? Sometimes, the desire to make changes overrides the practicality of achieving some of those goals.

As an instructional coach, each day brings new challenges, not unlike teaching. In the past, conventional wisdom claimed that teachers were responsible for just their students' learning, not for the school community at large. By extension, coaches would be responsible for just the teachers for whom they are coaches. This belief has certainly changed.

Teachers, coaches, and other school leaders are collectively responsible for all the students' and adults' learning. While teachers are primarily responsible for what happens in their own classrooms, coaches have a broader view of the school community and have taken on the responsibility to take the learning to another level; that is, to take the learning to the individual, the team, and the entire school community. Many times, they are the conduit to ongoing conversations where professional talk about learning has become the norm. In several ways, they are the liaisons between research and practice, planning and feedback, innovation and change.

So, start small and build on each success. If the school is organized into professional learning communities and participants have only met once during the first semester of school, make a goal to organize the group and schedule intentional time to meet twice during the second semester of school. If the group chose a short article to read, discuss, and reflect about what they learned, choose a longer article or offer two articles where participants can compare and contrast concepts and ideas as expressed by both authors.

If mini professional development sessions have been offered every three months, try two new things: offer these mini sessions once a month and then offer an open discussion afterwards to discuss what was learned, the depth of the learning, and how this learning transferred into classroom practice. That means that you've moved participants from receiving the information and offered them an opportunity to discuss how that information influenced student learning and their own learning as well.

If you are working with teachers in a cohort group, you probably cycle the groups and bring them together for specific learning times. Here's something to try... if you work with four groups of 6-8 teachers for 6 weeks at a time, try working with each separately and then bringing two groups together at a time for a larger group of possibly 16 teachers to reflect on their learning. Buddy the teachers within the group so that veterans and novices are paired together. That way, all members in the group have an opportunity to learn from each other as partners. (That's like a "*turn and talk*" to your partner and then share out to the larger group.) Try interdisciplinary groups or mixed team groups if you have not tried that yet.

Remember, identifying both short term goals and long term goals are wonderful ways to create change. Start with a realistic mindset about making those changes and celebrate each step towards accomplishment.

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