“Although change is unpredictable, you can set up conditions that help to guide the process” says Michael Fullan. That’s exactly what instructional coaches do in schools… they guide the process that helps create and sustain change.

Instructional coaches can create just the right amount of disruption and discomfort in schools to get the ball moving in the right direction. However, this is a messy and disorderly process. It doesn’t necessarily follow a lock-step method guaranteeing that each step flows smoothly into the next. If you think that instructional coaching comes with a “how to” manual… think again! The best I can offer is the notion that working together in a team provides opportunities for collective problem solving after identifying some issues that need to be addressed in school.

An effective instructional coaching model provides an opportunity for a “top-down, bottom up, meet in the middle” kind of approach that defines a problem, invites colleagues to work together to discuss possible solutions, tries a variety of strategies to address the challenges, and assesses the action to determine what worked well and what needs to be strengthened. This, of course, can only happen once a vision is shared and expectations made explicit. And, more importantly, this can only happen if Harry Truman’s words are honored: *“It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.”*

Instructional coaches are great listeners and wonderful inquirers. They can ask probing questions in ways that stimulate thinking, encourage discussion, reinforce flexibility, and create shifts in action. Fortunately, they do not have an ego that prevents them from communicating openly and often. They understand that ideas flow and are the results of conversations that have purpose, meaning and shared ownership.

Teachers and administrators look to coaches as leaders in their buildings. Although coaches are not experts in everything, they are highly skilled and highly effective practitioners who recognize the benefits of collaboration. They understand the theory behind the practice, how to demonstrate the practice, and how to transfer the learning to others. They help the school community believe what they did not think possible, understand what was incomprehensible before, have a voice where a voice is needed, and put into action ideas that will move a school forward.

Do not underestimate the power of conversation and collaboration. As a coach, make deliberate

time to meet with teachers. As per Joyce and Showers, 2002, *"…coached teachers practiced new strategies more often and with greater skill than uncoached educators with identical initial training."* Your role is to expose your colleagues to a variety of effective instructional practices, support them in making these practices their own, and sustain the environment so teachers will have a continuous stream of instructional strategies and techniques to add to their repertoire. Being a "coached" teacher means that the coach and teacher meet regularly to discuss teaching and learning. The important thing is not just to add to the teaching toolkit but to support what teachers learn through the BDA cycle of coaching, a.k.a. a differentiated approach to teacher professional development and professional learning.