

In the June 2014 JSD issue (Vol. 35, No. 3), authors Sheri S. Williams and John W. Williams share what they've learned about business and education. What they found is that there are similarities in identifying the skills and knowledge base needed to support both school and business communities in order to sustain "learning" in both domains.

Executive coaching, business coaching, athletic coaching, and performing arts coaching have been around quite a long time. In fact, Ellen Guiney from the Boston Plan for Excellence wrote a great article entitled, "Coaching is Not Just for Athletes" in 2001. In the article, Ms. Guiney states what is obvious to us...effective professional development is continual, job-embedded, high quality, and tied to instructional practice. Interestingly, that's what Williams and Williams discovered in their research about both communities as well: it takes work to sustain growth!

There are four lessons shared that serve both the business and education community:

1. *Mentoring matters in schools and the workplace.* In our coaching world, mentors are the "coach's coach" and provide ongoing support to help coaches establish trusting relationships with their teaching colleagues. They are non-evaluative (like the coach) and help coaches become reflective practitioners in a no-risk environment. They model the teaching behaviors that coaches mirror with the teachers they coach. Both mentors and coaches help teachers identify areas of strength and need and discuss ways to foster critical thinking so that learning is front and center. They are the side-by-side, real time support that gives teachers confidence to try to new things and opportunities to discuss what works well in classrooms.

2. *Collaboration gets results in the workplace and in school.* Collaboration is not the same thing as cooperation although they are often used interchangeably. In business, potential candidates can be asked the question about collaboration during the hiring process. That's not always the case with education. In some cases, content knowledge supersedes the ability to work effectively on a team and that becomes the focus of the hiring. In any case, working together as a team fosters the capacity to problem-solve and take collective ownership, both necessary for school wide improvement. Instructional coaches provide opportunities for teaching colleagues to meet, discuss, plan, review, and revise instructional practice that yields positive student outcomes.

3. *Leadership cultivates respectful cultures in business and education.* Instructional coaches have a place on the school's leadership team. After all, coaches are teacher leaders are on the side of helping teachers implement effective instructional practices in non-evaluative ways. They are not the "experts" but they are highly skilled, highly qualified practitioners who understand adult learning theory and practice. They honor the teachers' voices, respect each other's points of view, and acknowledge a person's right to choose. As a business or school leader, supporting others in achieving their goals is critical for success.

4. *Mentoring, collaboration, and leadership are all about change.* Sure, everyone wants change; you go first! Instructional coaches are in the perfect position to build awareness for change by first helping the stakeholders to identify goals and then to collect, analyze and use the data about how successful they were in achieving those goals in an environment that disrupts the status quo without fear of failure. Some people believe in the adage that *"If it's not broken, don't fix it"* and others believe that going from good to great involves soul searching, self-assessment, collective problem-solving, open communication, and the desire to make mistakes so that learning in a no-risk setting is ongoing, persistent, consistent, and relevant. Coaches are the leaders in that kind of learning environment where teachers are rewarded for their creativity and innovation because continuous learning for all stakeholders is the ultimate goal.

Instructional coaches serve as a daily reminder that learning does not only take place from bell to bell; learning takes place every day for every individual both inside and outside of the classroom environs. They help create and maintain the atmosphere that supports ongoing learning; they reinforce skills that include speaking, listening, writing, and talking; and they promote open and honest communication between and among school stakeholders. They consistently ask themselves the question, *"What am I doing to help teachers understand change, improve their practice, and increase student engagement?"*

Look at the lessons above and remember that you are a mentor, collaborator, leader, and change agent – all at the same time! Recognize that the cycle of teaching is like the weather: some days are sunny; some days are cloudy; and some days, it just rains all day! Whatever the climate, rest assured that coaches are change agents and are incredibly valuable to the transformation process.

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