

Coaches are on the side of helping teachers implement effective instructional practices every day. They are not “drop-in” professional developers who are unaware of school climate and culture nor are they once and done “experts” who talk at teachers rather than work with their teaching colleagues. They are skilled practitioners who understand how adults learn and recognize the importance of collaboration and new learning. But, the coaching relationship is not automatic, robotic, or involuntary. It is actually built on a specific skill.

Charles Green, executive educator and author, has conducted research on a variety of topics and has made a simple declaration: *“The level of trust in business relationships is a greater determinant of success than anything else, including content excellence”* (The Trusted Advisor, Trust in Business: The Core Concepts, 2009). What an interesting connection to education and the effectiveness of schools. Is trust important in schools?

Many of us think about creating a caring environment for our students. You’ve heard the adage, *“People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care”* (Theodore Roosevelt).

We’ve all tried very hard to make our school environments nurturing, safe, and conducive for learning. Part of constructing a safe environment means establishing an atmosphere that supports reflection, advocates continuous learning, and builds trust among its staff and students.

Teachers have 2-3 times the impact on student learning than any other school factor (www.rand.org).

Nothing is more important for students than to know their teachers care about them, believe they can learn, and want to establish trusting relationships with them.

Teacher-staff-administrator relationships are just as important, and they, too, are based on trust, respect and support – the same things we think about when trying to understand why some schools are effective and some are not.

Conditions in schools can either reinforce or deter effective teaching. Curriculum matters, environment matters, safety matters, relevant professional development matters, appropriate resources matter, and a host of other factors impact how students learn. One thing, however, that isn’t tested or doesn’t come with a checklist is how teachers and students respond and react to each other and how teachers and their administrators cultivate their relationships as well. We don’t talk a great deal about the emotions behind our actions or how our emotions create our reactions. If we don’t talk about our emotional well-being and talk about building the

trust so that it is safe to let our emotions do the talking, our schools cannot be successful places where learning takes place and collaboration is the norm.

Instructional coaches need to understand how adults think, learn, and how they transfer that learning to others. They need to position themselves in ways that get to the underlying principles of their beliefs and how those beliefs manifest themselves in the teaching. They need to recognize that how teachers respond to their students provokes how students will respond to them. The greater the trust, the greater the relationship. The greater the relationship, the more likely students will look at their learning environment in a positive way and see school as a place where they can talk about their emotions without fear, repercussions, or embarrassment. But teachers need to know how to navigate the emotional rollercoaster that many students ride.

Sure, instructional coaches help teachers unpack the Common Core Standards. They collaborate with teachers to address the multiple pieces of the curriculum for which they are responsible to teach and communicate ways to deliver these curricular requirements effectively. They also do more... they help teachers understand what trust is and how to create a trusting, confidential, non-threatening environment where teaching and learning thrive. They help the school create community and adopt what Andrew Carnegie clearly understood: *"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results."*

Coaches create teams so that teachers can collaborate, collectively problem-solve, make mistakes, and practice together in ways that inspire accomplishment and foster trust. That's how schools become successful.

Be trustworthy and create trusting relationships. This comes through respectful and confidential conversations where internal reflection is encouraged and questions are the currency of the coaching interactions.

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