

Coaching is a messy and humbling experience. We think at the onset that everyone wants to be coached and everyone welcomes advice. Not so! Although teachers want to get better at their craft, figuring out ways to do that can be challenging.

Most coaches initially experience the “Wow” factor... that is, they think their teaching colleagues teach like they do and when they find out their colleagues teach differently, WOW, what an eye opener that is! As a result, the coach needs to focus on keeping the goal front and center; that is, being mindful that the ultimate goal is to help teachers identify practices that need to be strengthened; engaging the teachers in ongoing conversations about those practices is what leads to change.

Coaching is all about change but how does change happen? It's not automatic and not a quick procedure or quick makeover like getting a haircut. Think about it... if you want to change your hairstyle, how many pictures and magazines do you review before settling on a few desired ones? And then, depending on your stylist, is there a discussion about your desires vs. the reality of having that cut/style? It may be difficult to hear but I bet your stylist gives his/her “expert” opinion on whether the style fits your hair, facial features, and lifestyle. And, you sit there taking it all in because you are getting some feedback about a hairstyle/cut you want.

Fast forward to instructional coaching... while the coach is not the expert and the details and process are different, the idea of change is similar. Change is slow and deliberate, one conversation at a time with a plan for sustainability – just like the new haircut that you want.

Instructional coaches work with teachers to enhance practice. That takes practice! Coaches think about how to approach teachers and enrich their practice, keeping motivation high, ego restrained, and inquiry encouraged. Although coaches are not the experts, they are trusted colleagues who want to help teachers get better at their craft. While teachers do not peruse pictures to select an ideal “look,” they reflect on their practice and think about their classroom decisions. They count on coaches to help them plan, rehearse, and revise their instructional design. Just like hair stylists have their own language of design, so do instructional coaches. There is a definite language and course of action to help teachers recognize where change is needed and how to get the “groove” of change moving in the right direction.

Ten Coaching Tips to Transform Teaching:

1. Recognize your own teaching and learning philosophy, personal learning style, instructional strengths, and areas of need prior to helping your teaching colleagues; these

shape your coaching approach;

2. Model the *"I don't know the answer"* process which goes a long way towards collective problem-solving and shared responsibility;

3. Resist giving an answer...while knowledge might be power, don't focus on your knowledge, skills, and experience;

4. Share the learning and help your teaching colleagues rejoice in learning and discovery; coaching is not a contest of wills, ego, wisdom, or expertise;

5. Collaborate regularly, model the constructive feedback process, and offer "side-by-side" support;

6. Become the change agent who continues to ask the kinds of questions that get to the heart of effective instructional practice;

7. Ask, don't tell; you are a "passenger" not the "driver";

8. Create a culture of continuous improvement; grow the skill set of all;

9. Make mistakes; that's how learning takes place;

10. Be a learner, always... promising practices come in all different shapes and sizes; model how to "try something on" and practice reviewing, revising, and rethinking ways to deliver effective instruction

Wishing you a wonderful holiday season!