

By [Amy Walker, IU 4 PIIC Mentor](#)

Elbert Hubbard, American philosopher and writer, once said, "If you want work well done, select a busy man- the other kind has no time." Instructional coaches are probably some of the busiest people around. They co-plan lessons, co-teach lessons, research and provide resources, lead study groups, participate in professional learning communities, gather and interpret achievement data, and attend trainings and meetings outside their buildings. Many coaches in my Intermediate Unit have additional responsibilities for teaching students. With all of these competing roles, it is no wonder that time to spend one-to-one with teachers is a concern.

One challenge coaches face in making time to work one-to-one with teachers is the idea that some administrators seem to have that coaches should be all things to all people. This notion can result in "drive-by coaching sessions" where little is accomplished and that can leave both teachers and coaches feeling frustrated and overwhelmed.

Principals can be guilty of pulling coaches away from their actual coaching work to engage in any number of non-coaching tasks perceived as urgent.

If a coach misses too many one-to-one meetings for the sake of some "emergency," the coach's credibility will suffer and the coaching relationship will fail.

Shari Frost, a literacy coach, suggests that coaches respond to these urgent requests with a simple sentence such as:

"Mrs. Smith and her 25 tenth graders are waiting for me right now to do a literature circle in their chemistry class."

This type of response helps to remind the principal that the most important thing that happens in any school is instruction.

Even if the coach still has to pinch hit in an emergency, the principal is reminded of something that most principals agree with but can lose sight of in the day-to-day responsibility of running a school.

The coaches I mentor have used a variety of creative ways to coach teachers in the time available to them throughout the day. Since many of them teach at least one or two classes a day, they open their doors to model best practice and issue standing invitations for anyone interested in a strategy or technique to visit and

observe their classes.

Those coaches usually post a list of what they will be modeling so that other teachers can plan to come in and see something they can use in their own teaching.

The coaches also provide sign- up sheets for teachers to use if they want more instruction or a chance to co-plan with the coach regarding what they observed.

They take a few minutes at the end of each of these classes while the kids are completing their tickets out the door to debrief with the teachers and answer questions.

Most of the coaches engage in a sort of “rounds” approach where they frequent the halls during class changes and in the morning before the first bell. They check in with a different group of teachers each day and use these times to schedule sessions to work on a deeper level with interested teachers.

These are not the sort of “drive-by” sessions mentioned earlier.

They are more a “status of the staff” type check that allows teachers to ask questions and seek coaching without having to search out the coach.

Coaches in my area have also made good use of available technology and started blogs where they post questions and ideas.

Teachers are then able to respond in their own time, beginning the conversation about instruction and educational practices that can continue face-to-face whenever the two can schedule a time to work together.

One coach posts a schedule with open slots for teachers to sign up for time to work with the coach.

In addition, most of the coaches in my area meet with teachers during lunch and before and after school for individual coaching sessions. These meeting times provide uninterrupted stretches when coaches and teachers can deeply discuss changes and plans for implementing change.

These times require sacrifice on the part of both teachers and coaches.

Teachers have to give up some planning time or time when they could catch up on the requirements of the job and the coaches sacrifice time for planning and reflection.

However, both parties generally agree that these sacrifices are necessary to make the changes that will help students achieve at a greater level.

Several coaches keep detailed and rigid schedules. Their time is planned out for a month in advance.

When they are making their schedules, they block out the times they will work with teachers before they fill in with any other

roles that need attention that month.

The schedules help the coaches keep one-to-one coaching a priority.

In addition to their myriad other roles and responsibilities, instructional coaches are change agents. In order to effectively introduce, encourage and support the changes necessary in their schools to improve instruction and student achievement, coaches have to make one-one coaching a priority and creatively find ways to meet the challenge of finding time in busy days for nurturing partnerships with the teachers they coach.