

By [IU PIIC Mentors Rae Ann Crispell and Gail Porrazzo](#)

Picture yourself in a conversation with a teacher you are working with or a coach you are mentoring. You ask a question and the person responds. You pause. A few seconds go by and then a few more. Silence. "It is a phenomenon of our times that, for many people, silence is almost unendurable. Silence makes us nervous...Many people feel silence is a form of nonparticipation, signaling a lack of interest," writes Susan Scott in her book, *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life, One Conversation at a Time* (2004). Do you often feel the need to say something when there's silence in a conversation? Does silence make you feel awkward? There are times when silence can not only be comfortable but is essential in the conversations coaches have with teachers and mentors have with coaches.

Linda Gross Cheliotas and Marceta Fleming Reilly in their book, *Coaching Conversations: Transforming Your School One Conversation at a Time* (2010) assert that, "Committed listening is foundational to all coaching conversations. When you are focused on listening to another person, you open the door to gaining clarity about issues and understanding the perceptions and needs of the other person," (p. 24). To be a committed listener, you have to be silent. The silence demonstrates that you want to get to know the coach and that you care about what they have to say. It also shows a level of high regard as you use the silence to consider a thoughtful response. How often are you thinking ahead to the next thing you want to say in a conversation with the person you are coaching? Are you missing what they are really saying because you are not silent? Your mind is doing a lot of talking in that conversation even though you may not be vocalizing the words. "Sometimes you may just need to listen (silently) without any obligation to act," (p. 42) Cheliotas and Reilly point out. This can be difficult for mentors and coaches. Biologically, we naturally try to sort information as it is provided to us. Our minds immediately want to analyze what others are saying so that we can provide the right question or suggestion for next steps. Stop that habit! Let the silence be the time to do your analysis and prep for what you need to say next. Susan Scott writes, "When we are completely engaged in talking, all of the possibilities for the conversation grow smaller. How do we let silence do the heavy lifting? Provide it. Allow silence to fill in the greater meaning that needs to be there," (p. 229-230).

As we continue our work as coaches and mentors, it is our job to embrace the silence, to provide opportunities for moments of silence. We challenge you to consider adding moments of silence into your next coaching conversation. But as blogging goes...now is not the time to be silent! Share your thoughts on ways you have or could apply the concept of listening with silence in your coaching conversations. How might this silence change relationships between coaches and teachers? Feel free to share situations where being silent has worked for you?

