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PROFESSIONAL OPINION

Coaching the school district coaches

Best practices for administrators coaching administrators

By: Charles Young and Lisa Gonzales

Truly effective leaders blend elements of coaching with their leadership skills to build trust and maximize the power of social interactions. But when it comes to working with other administrators to [hone their skills](#), the need to coach a coach takes on a greater level of importance.

Leadership situations can be varied and challenging, necessitating the employment of a host of responses, some of which center on the more traditional elements of leadership. Others call for a more nuanced approach that includes the dynamics of coaching. These elements can be used in one-on-one, scheduled coaching sessions and in real-time, in-the-moment situations, as well.

This article, part one of a two-part series, will briefly explore the four domains of coaching: counseling, mentoring, tutoring and confronting, as well as set the stage for the real work. Any of these types of coaching can be used with leaders, depending on the specific needs of the employee or the site. Each has a unique purpose, but it is best to focus on one or two in a given school year, unless specific situations arise that require another to be included.

Counseling: This type of coaching centers on addressing organizational, technical or other issues that may be blocking one's performance. It may include dealing with strong feelings, deepening insights into one's behavior, problem identification, or problem-solving,



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Mentoring: In this approach, the coach may strive to help the coachee better understanding the work environment, leadership styles of supervisors, or one's career development. Sometimes mentoring focuses on organizational culture and ways to succeed within the organization. It can help one assimilate and experience deeper levels of success. Other times, it can take on a specialized emphasis, such as the importance of

political savviness or networking to position oneself for another role or job.

Tutoring: The core of this method of coaching centers on commitment. The coach must commit to ongoing learning and personal growth by helping the coachee gain new skills and knowledge to help maximize performance.

Confronting: We all face difficult situations and this approach centers on addressing deficits in performance, clarification of goals and expectations, and challenging the coachee to make the necessary changes to be successful, or at times, to move on to another position that may be a better fit.

Real time application

Effective coaching involves making time for in-depth conversations on which the foundation of coaching is built. This may involve real-time analysis, planning, application and reflection. In setting the stage for the coaching process, it is important to clarify the difference between evaluative work and coaching work.

While it is difficult to separate the two, the coaching process includes collaborative agreement on areas for growth and development. This is different from the evaluation process where the coachee is measured against organizational expectations, such as effective use of resources, use of data with staff for growth in students' academic performance, or analysis of appropriate intervention programs.

Success in the coaching process necessitates the belief that the coachee can improve and grow in the areas selected. Carol Dweck, in her book *Mindset*, supports the notion that feedback needs to be specific and focus on effort in endeavors over intelligence or innate ability. Dweck's emphasis on a "growth" mindset has many applications for our work in education, especially with coaching employees where our feedback should be ongoing and encouragement frequent and sincere, emphasizing effort, dedication and hard work.

Coaching in real-time does not always bode well for reflective and deeper conversations. Finding ways to use technology to strengthen reflection may work well with coachees, particularly with reflective blogs or journaling with a coach. Using this approach, and encouraging the coachee to use it with his or her staff, can help broaden and deepen reflective conversations and practice throughout a system over time.

Whether coaching with an emphasis on counseling, mentoring, tutoring or confronting, leaders have an obligation to work with other leaders to improve and strengthen their skills for the betterment of the organization.

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