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Prevailing Winds

Navigating the Perfect Storm



If you are reading this book, you are probably a leader who is already interested in the potential of coaching. Perhaps you are an administrator for a school or district that is considering implementation of an instructional coaching program, or maybe you are an educator who is preparing to be an administrator. You might even be a teacher leader

who recognizes a need in your own school and wants to learn what might be involved in starting a coaching program. Perhaps you were intrigued when you saw the benefits firsthand in another school or district—or perhaps, like us, you have been asked to start a coaching program and you do not really know how to begin. This book is a navigational guide for you as you embark on your coaching voyage.

Over the course of our careers, we have weathered a lot of storms, from the *Nation at Risk* (1983) to No Child Left Behind (2001). Despite these programs' impact, most people would agree that what was actually happening in most American classrooms was little changed from what it was in 1975. But in recent years, many educational, social, and economic realities have come together in the “perfect storm” that is now transforming public and political attitudes toward schooling in America. In many states, standards are higher, tests are harder, and teacher and principal evaluations are including individual and school value-added statistics. Teachers are called upon to exhibit expertise in their content, the standards, pedagogy, assessment, statistics, and diverse cultures and learning styles. The very concept of *public school* is being reimagined. All of this is in the context of intense economic pressure in a “flattening” world where globalization is forcing greater and greater economic competition with the world's largest countries of India and China (Friedman, 2005). In this maelstrom of change, it is finally becoming apparent to American schools what other countries such as Finland, South Korea, and Singapore have embraced for some time: Sustained and embedded support for collaboration, action research, and peer observation must occur in order for teachers and learning organizations to reach their potential (Darling-Hammond, 2010–2011). We think of this as maximum capacity.

Fullan (2008) states that “individuals and groups are high in capacity if they possess and continue to develop knowledge and skills, if they attract and use resources . . . wisely, and if they are committed to putting in the energy to get important things done *collectively* and *continuously*” (p. 57). It seems that the sociocultural learning theory formulated by Vygotsky (1978) and others is as applicable to the professional learning of teachers as to the educational learning of children. The way to maximize the capacity of teachers to meet student needs is to embed professional learning in the cultural and social life of the school. No one person can navigate the complexities of modern educational reality alone behind closed classroom doors or sitting in a lecture hall listening to experts. This new climate requires continuously improved teacher knowledge, skills, effectiveness, and collaboration embedded within the daily work lives of teachers. There are

different methods to accomplish this goal, but this book is about the way that we found worked best for our learning organization—instructional coaching—and ways to implement it in any school.

According to the U.S. Department of Education website (2009), “Doing What Works,” one of the keys to education reform is improving teacher effectiveness . . . and strategies to do that include redesigning staff learning to ensure it is “sustained, job-embedded, collaborative, data-driven, and focused on student instructional needs.”

Over the years, as teachers and then as administrators, the authors came to believe that effective professional learning must take place in the context of the particular work situation of the teacher. Some schools in our district had great success with the professional learning community (PLC) model of professional growth, and this experience heightened our desire for deeper and richer professional dialog for all of our teachers. Like most districts, the majority of our meager professional learning dollars were spent bringing in professional presenters to provide instruction in workshop-type settings. We always knew that when the opportunity arose, we would take a different path. And indeed, the resources came, and we and our colleagues were asked to create a coaching program in our district in a very short time frame.

We began by researching the literature on coaching models and implementation recommendations. We found many sources that helped us narrow our focus to the one approach to coaching we felt matched our needs and vision. However, the book we kept looking for was a step-by-step guide to take us from the dream to the reality, and we could not find it. Most of the books we read were very helpful for our coaches, but they were not practical guides for large-scale implementation. There were many excellent resources for one to acquire deep knowledge about the various forms of coaching and the strategies coaches employ, but no plan of attack for two newly appointed and inexperienced coaching facilitators who had about 2 months to develop a program and then hire, train, and deploy a cadre of instructional coaches to make a difference in student achievement. This book can be that guide for you.

When we were faced with the challenge of starting a coaching program, not only were we untrained as coaches ourselves, but we had never even been formally coached in any setting other than

athletics. Although coaching had become ubiquitous in the realms of counseling and business, in the pre-K–12 world in which we operated, it had only been the rare and well-funded district that believed it could afford instructional or academic coaches on any large scale. This meant we were asked to implement a change initiative with very little personal knowledge or experience and to help teachers and administrators understand what coaching is and why implementing a coaching program is a better solution to school-improvement issues than are other options, such as lower class size, increased technology purchases, or adding more support personnel.

Our first step was to assess our own strengths and challenges as leaders. Although we knew little about coaching, we both had education and experience in implementing change initiatives. We also had the advantage of knowing our personnel: We had some understanding of the needs, motivation, background, and vision of our district, teachers, and principals. We determined to use these assets to build our project, and we embarked on a learning process about coaching, the missing link in our knowledge base. To compensate for our gaps in knowledge, we sought out experts and practitioners in the field by reading their work and, in some cases, by contacting them personally and asking for advice.

You may be in a different situation. You may be new to your position and know a lot about coaching and little about your school or district. You may be very familiar with coaching and know your personnel well but know little about implementing large-scale change. Your first step is taking an honest look at what your strengths and challenges are and making a research plan based on those. This book does not attempt to teach you everything you need to know about coaching, leadership, or change, and it certainly cannot teach you about your own school or district culture, personnel, and vision, but hopefully it will give you a framework on which to place your own leadership skills and knowledge as you develop a successful coaching initiative.

Boarding the Ship

When the two of us initially discussed writing a book about our experience with coaching, one of the first images that came to our minds was Homer's *Odyssey*. When we began implementing the coaching initiative, we felt like we were embarking on a long voyage that might have lots of exciting and sometimes harrowing adventures. What we were planning for was (in some cases) a drastic change in school culture. How we approached that change would have a great

impact on whether the experience would lead to growth or chaos. We needed a clear vision, a detailed plan, and ways to motivate others to embrace change. With that, we felt, we could handle whatever Cyclops came our way.

Schmoker (2006) argues that school and district cultures have created a protective buffer for America's classrooms by granting almost complete autonomy to teachers. Administrators have left teachers to themselves, rarely monitoring and supervising their instructional practices. Teachers have been isolated, withholding best practices from each other and experiencing very few professional collaborative experiences. While this isolation can be crippling to growth, it was what most of our teachers knew, and it seemed less intimidating than engaging in teaching as a public act. Our challenge was not to learn what teachers should do in classrooms—there is ample research indicating good instructional practices—but to make sure teachers could make those practices happen in the classroom. We wanted to make teaching a team endeavor, something that has eluded reformers for 50 years. Could instructional coaching be the answer?

In short, we had to cast off from the familiarity and safety of our so-called *Isolation Islands* and sail toward a collaborative culture where educators grasp the vital link between professional learning and student learning. We believe instructional coaches can help teachers (and principals!) maximize their individual and collective capacities by championing collaborative practices. However, coaching can banish isolation only if coaching becomes a part of the culture *and* changes the culture. In a brief few years, cellular technology has become both a part of our culture and has changed our culture. Looking back, isn't it hard to believe we all led perfectly full, productive, and happy lives without cell phones? Yet when they were first introduced, we remember people exclaiming, "I would never have one of those things! What a nuisance!" In many places, coaches impact the culture like cell phones. People stop their coaches in the hall and say, "How did we ever get along without you!" In other schools and districts, this is not the case. Instead of the culture being changed, the culture ends up changing the coaching. Sometimes coaches become de facto supervisors or assistant principals. In other situations, the coach becomes a general "dogsbody" (in the Royal Navy slang)—someone who does the work no one else wants to do. What makes the difference in coaching programs that change the culture and those that do not? To find the answer, we turned to theories of change implementation and tried to apply them to our situation.

For effective change to take place, people have to change their minds, emotions, and practices. Chip and Dan Heath's book on this

topic, *Switch* (2010), provides a compelling picture: Change is like a man riding an elephant down a path. You have to direct the rider (mind), motivate the elephant (emotion), and shape the path (systems and procedures) to get to the destination. To a leader starting a coaching initiative, this means that providing a clear vision and information that shows how and why coaching works is important, but only part of the process. You must also motivate people to have an emotional need to change and you must set up the processes that make the change as easy as possible. To translate Heath and Heath's ideas into our nautical metaphor, the sailor has to consult the compass, feel the wind in his or her hair, and sail with the current.

Consulting the Compass: Convincing the Mind

When starting any journey, we want to make sure we're going in the right direction. The same is true when we implement a new initiative, perhaps even more so because of the inherent responsibility we have for all those who follow our lead. So how do you know that coaching will move your own school or district in the right direction, and what evidence do you give others of that? Instructional coaching is a professional learning model, so we turned to Learning Forward (formerly the National Staff Development Council). Learning Forward defines professional learning as "a comprehensive, sustained, intensive and collaborative approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement." The definition goes on to state that "to ensure that effective teaching spreads, districts and schools must create professional learning systems in which teams of teachers, principals, and other professional staff members meet several times a week to engage in a continuous cycle of improvement" (Learning Forward, 2011, p. i).

In a 2003 report, Neufeld and Roper stated,

There is reason to think that coaching, thoughtfully developed and implemented within a district's coherent professional development plan, will provide teachers with real opportunities to improve their instruction, principals with real opportunities to improve their leadership, and districts with real opportunities to improve their schools. (p. 26)

Their assertions are supported by research that shows that the most effective professional learning is "sustained and intensive"

(Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Although this could be accomplished in several models, we believed the research supported coaching as an excellent vehicle to create these professional learning systems.

As a school leader implementing coaching in your learning organization, you will want to become very familiar with the literature on coaching, a body of literature that has expanded exponentially in recent years. In addition, we recommend you explore the resources available on the Learning Forward website and other online resources specific to coaching, many of which are sponsored or hosted by coaching experts and practitioners. It is also helpful to seek out school districts and schools in which instructional coaching is already established. We have found that most educators are eager to talk about their experiences with coaching. For now, here is a summary of the rational reasons for coaching you may want to share with your school or district as you help them start their coaching journey:

1. Student achievement is the goal.
2. More effective teachers lead to greater student achievement.
3. Systems of sustained and intensive professional learning lead to more thoughtful and effective teaching practices.
4. Coaching is part of one model that can help move a school toward a system of professional learning.
5. Coaching leads to far greater implementation of strategies learned in workshop settings.
6. Teachers reap many additional professional benefits from coaching, such as greater job satisfaction and confidence in their teaching skills.

This information is not enough to close the knowing–doing gap. When implementing change in an educational organization, the research is just the beginning. The leader must communicate a clear focus and goals that seem reasonable and attainable and motivate people to take the first steps in the right direction. You don't have to know every step you will take in the middle, but a clear view of the beginning and destination is vital. Your organization's mission and vision will point you in the right direction, but it is up to you as the leader to align your coaching program with that vision and communicate how your first steps will lead your organization toward its goals.

“When you’re at the beginning, don’t obsess about the middle, because the middle is going to look different once you get there. Just look for a strong beginning and a strong ending and get moving.”

—Chip Heath and Dan Heath (2010, p. 93)

Feeling the Wind in Your Hair: Convincing the Heart

There are strong emotional reasons to embrace coaching, and your job as a leader is to make these vivid. Teachers, principals, school staff, and community need to see clearly that coaching is for their own children’s achievement. They also need to shift their mental model of a professional teacher as an *expert* to a mental model of a professional teacher as a *learning facilitator* and *collaborator*. Professional staff must embrace this as part of their emotional identity, and others must see them in this way.

Emotional benefits from coaching are extensive, and when teachers begin to experience them, your coaching program will begin to thrive. Teachers can feel lonely and isolated, especially in the early years of their careers. As Barth (2003) wrote, “our lives are a trail of un-had conversations” (p. 4). Conversations with other professionals are limited by time, schedules, and sometimes even competition. Coaching can create the delightful synergy of two professionals working together to solve problems. It can help make a school really feel like a team and can promote shared accountability and celebration.

According to Pink (2009), autonomy, mastery, and purpose are what people need to motivate them, to get them into the “flow.” Coaching supports all three. It provides autonomy by allowing teachers to choose their own professional learning needs, mastery by providing a safe place to practice and improve with scaffolded support, and purpose to know that all they do is contributing to the team, which is in turn improving student learning. This doesn’t mean other needs such as adequate pay and working conditions are unnecessary—but many teachers report that coaching is what put the joy back in their professional lives. Knight, in his introduction to *Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction* (2007), wrote, “When people talk about learning, the experience should be exciting, energizing, and empowering” (p. ix). Barkley, in his aptly named book, *Quality Teaching in a Culture of Coaching* (2010), states it simply: “It feels good to improve, to change, and to succeed; it feels good to have someone in your corner, coaching you to high achievement” (p. 11).

Sailing With the Current: Structuring the Practice

Finally, and perhaps most exhaustingly, your job of developing a coaching program will require setting up systems and procedures in the environment (the path) that make the journey to a coaching culture easy. If you are a district administrator, you have several paths to forge—for your building administrators, your coaches, and your teachers. Each will require time, processes, and resources.

The goal of this book is to provide you with the tools to create an organizational structure for building a successful coaching initiative. The essential components of that structure are discussed in each of the chapters that follow. In **Chapter 2**, you will align your coaching program with the mission, vision, and goals of your school or district and answer some basic questions about your program's structure. In **Chapter 3**, you will determine how you will collect and use data to reflect, refine, and celebrate your coaching program. In **Chapter 4**, you will examine six characteristics of great coaches and strategies to discern them in the hiring process. You will plan preservice learning for school administrators in **Chapter 5** and preservice learning for newly hired coaches in **Chapter 6**. **Chapter 7** will take you to the heart of coaching as you create ways to motivate teachers and staff to take the first steps into a more collaborative culture. Regardless of how many years the newly appointed instructional coach may have taught in the classroom, transitioning to the role of instructional coach will require navigating unfamiliar and sometimes uncharted waters. In **Chapter 8**, you will develop a successful model of ongoing professional learning and support to help your fledgling and developing coaches. At the end of one cycle of implementation, the next cycle begins—reevaluation, realignment, and reimplementation. In **Chapter 9**, you will discover practical ways to monitor and sustain your coaching program in light of unforeseen promise and possibilities of the future. To help you on your journey, the **Resources** section includes sample forms to assist you in setting up and administering a coaching program from the planning and hiring process to the program evaluation stage.

We have also included a comprehensive **Facilitator's Guide** to use with your own small study group or professional learning community. The guide contains music, metaphors, and guiding questions to engage participants in reflective thought and dialogue for practical application to your school or district goals. Good teachers provide hundreds of mental hooks for students to connect information to prior knowledge or emotion—music, story, song, metaphor, humor.

We want our work to provide lots of hooks for you to connect the information, and we also want to provide you with a model that you can use in sharing this information with your colleagues.

Gardner (2006) asserts that telling stories is one of the most effective ways to change people's minds, whether we're telling stories to someone who is very close to us or someone who hardly knows us. We believe in the power of story and use many applicable stories and scenarios. In a broader sense, however, the book itself is a story of a journey, with inspiration from the great tradition of sea stories, plays, and songs. The metaphor of a sea journey is one of the strongest in Western literature and gives a narrative structure to the text that will make it easier to remember and, hopefully, to share.

Following North Stars: Understanding Coaching Basics

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the intent of this book is not to explain and describe what coaching is; rather, the intent is to guide you through the process of developing your own administrative model for an instructional coaching initiative that maximizes both individual and collective teacher capacity. Leading experts in the field of coaching provide a wealth of outstanding literature that clearly defines and describes coaching. You can learn **why** schools and districts include coaching as an integral component of their professional development programs by studying the work of Knight (2007, 2009, 2011), Killion and Harrison (2006), and Barkley (2010). Each of these authors combines research on the effectiveness of instructional coaching as a professional learning model with their extensive field experience as professional developers and "coaches of coaches." Costa and Garmston (2002) discuss the rationale for cognitive coaching, whose initial purpose is "to enhance an individual's capacity for self-directed learning through self-management, self-monitoring, and self-modification" (p. 5), in relation to the principles of constructivism, the "theory of learning based on a belief that human beings have an innate quest to make meaning from their experiences" (p. 389).

To help you understand what coaches do, Killion and Harrison (2006) identify and explain the 10 roles of coaches that include "a) resource provider, b) data coach, c) curriculum specialist, d) instructional specialist, e) classroom supporter, f) mentor, g) learning facilitator,

h) school leader, i) catalyst for change, and j) learner” (p. 28). Knight (2007) describes what coaching looks like and explores various coaching roles and responsibilities. In *Unmistakable Impact* (2011), Knight features a chapter describing “how instructional coaches (ICs) can support and stimulate the learning that is at the heart of Impact Schools” (p. 91). Barkley (2010) defines instructional coaching, the role of an instructional coach, and the skills required for coaching. He stresses the importance of creating a pervasive coaching culture within the learning organization to support and strengthen quality teaching.

There are also a number of great resources on specific **coaching models** used in schools today. Allen and LeBlanc (2005) describe their *2+2 Performance Appraisal Model* of peer coaching this way: “2+2 for teachers is a concept of classroom observation that focuses on the power of feedback, encouragement, discussion and discourse, and the importance of perspective and collaboration in the improvement of instruction” (p. 105), offering a remedy to the issues of isolation, stagnation, discouragement, and uncertainty among teachers. B. Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2010) incorporate the use of story, empathy, inquiry, and design in their *evocative coaching* model. By developing strong relationships based on honesty and trust, evocative coaches help teachers discover the motivation and power to improve their own professional classroom performance. Content-focused coaching models are described in the works of Morse (2009), Sadler and Nidus (2009), and Moxley (2006). In the book *Coaching Approaches & Perspectives* (2009), Knight synthesizes descriptions of a variety of coaching models by including contributions from experts in the areas of literacy coaching, data coaching, cognitive coaching, differentiated coaching, and leadership coaching.

Bon Voyage

Do you remember Bob Dylan’s 1962 song “Blowin’ in the Wind”? This song has meant many things to many people in the 50-plus years it has been around, but it serves to illustrate an important point if you visualize the road, the man walking down it, the wind blowing . . . an isolated and melancholy picture. Then visualize another person coming out to join him, cheering him on, helping him navigate the rough and smooth terrain as an equal partner. That is coaching. We walk the most important road in the world—the road that is the future of our children. Let’s make the journey together as learning partners.