



IT WORKED!

The Conversation IS the Relationship

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When our district decided to change our coaching model from having one coach per school to only having six for 28 schools, the principals, for the most part, were not in favor. One principal, in particular, at one of my schools, was very unhappy about it. During my first meeting with her she was very vocal about her concern and was not shy about stating the fact that she didn't really want district people coming in to disturb what they had established within their school culture. She was so upset about the change that she called a meeting with the Director of the Math Department and the Chief Academic Officer/Curriculum Instruction.

After some reflection and discussion following the meeting, I decided not to give up on the school but to go to my core belief about relationships. That belief is that the conversation is the relationship. Because of this, I made a plan to address the elephant in the room with a direct and open coaching conversation with this principal. During this conversation, I directly and respectfully addressed her concerns and ensured her that I was there to be a thinking partner for her and her teachers and that, although I was coming from central office, I had two main goals that would fit within her school goals. The first one was to build teacher capacity and the second and ultimate goal was to help improve student achievement as a result of building teacher capacity. In that conversation, my aim was to be authentic, transparent and begin to establish trust.

After the candid conversation, in which we both shared our goals and concerns, she began to shift a bit in her thinking. She didn't make a complete shift until she saw evidence of my work with the teachers of the school. Because I wanted her to gain confidence that I was not there to work as a one man show, I asked for her input on who she thought would most benefit from my services – she provided me a list. Within the first week, I helped a 4th grade teacher and a 5th grade teacher each progress toward a change in their approach to classroom management which led to the students being more engaged during math times. I also made some headway with a teacher who had been placed on an improvement plan. She soon pulled me into the leadership group and began to ask and value my opinion on mathematical matters.

I believe the evidence that my approach was effective came from her observing through our conversation that I was willing to directly yet respectfully confront her concerns without backing away from the challenge. There was also evidence that she could trust my integrity and she realized she could trust that I was there to be a thinking partner with her as well as her teachers and ultimately, she could trust that we both had the same goals in mind. It was that initial conversation that built the bridge to a better working relationship.

Brought to you by the NCSM Coaching Committee (May 2017)

Special thanks to the Arkansas Association of Mathematics Leaders (AAML)

