



IT WORKED!

Honest Communication Leads to Long-term Coaching

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Coaching relationships are more complex than they may appear. Developing a new relationship with a teaching colleague can be challenging. The following story illustrates how clear and honest communication is at the heart of a successful coaching relationship.

The teacher I was working with had a structure of discussing homework that did not appear to be working. The teacher had students exchange papers. He read correct answers; the papers were marked right or wrong and returned to the original student. He then asked them which problems they wanted him to 'go over' and he would show the correct work on the white board. Students were directed to correct any mistakes they had made prior to turning it in. Most students were disengaged and/or disappointed in their results. The students were not actually correcting their errors. I asked the teacher if I could take the papers with me and look at what they had done.

After analyzing the papers, I recorded data on a selection of problems that the teacher had re-worked during class. The data showed that, in most cases, less than 20% of the students that had the problem wrong actually corrected their work. I was excited to have objective, concrete data to support what I had observed in the classroom. I brought this data to the teacher in hopes to encourage him to look at his homework procedures. I asked him to think about whether or not he was using his time in class in ways that would most benefit the students. Even though the data was objective and straight forward, the teacher took the conversation as a personal criticism. I listened carefully to his perspective. I thanked him for being honest with me and re-directed our conversation to focus on the student work and the data.

I was concerned that our working relationship might not recover but the opposite has occurred. We continued to work together. I was careful to frame all my feedback on student work and to remain as objective as possible. Later, we discussed other options for assessing student understanding. He requested collaboration time in each of the next three years, and we have a successful working relationship today.

On reflection, I have been much more careful in my coaching conversations. I spend more time thinking about how my observations and data may be received by the teacher. The book *Student Centered Coaching* by Diane Sweeney, points out how important it is to consider age, gender, and personality in relationships with teachers. As I continue to work with this teacher, I carefully construct my feedback and observations so as not to offend him. The success in working through this difficult situation has empowered me to work through other tough conversations also.

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