



IT WORKED!

Step One: Build a Relationship

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The first step of coaching must be building relationships with teachers. Prior to becoming the math specialist, I was a classroom teacher in the same building. I was one of the youngest members of the math department and I replaced a well-established, long-time teacher and friend to many of the teachers. At the beginning of my tenure as a specialist, I found it difficult to have some of the tough conversations with teachers that are sometimes necessary. Although there was never a lack of respect, I occasionally felt like I wasn't taken seriously in my new position. I found that building trust and a rapport really made a difference in our interactions. This year, I made a conscious decision to put relationship building with my department at the top of my priority list.

I am in a school where I meet with each grade level PLC (professional learning community) team once per week. At the start of this school year, I decided not to structure these meetings. I came to the meetings and asked what I could do to help my teachers. I helped them grade papers, I made copies, I stapled things to bulletin boards. I listened to them. I made sure they understood that I was not there to evaluate them, but that I was there to support them.

By mid-September I started to create a more formal agenda for our meetings. I always make sure that there is still time designated for them to ask me for help with administrative tasks. There are some veteran teachers in my department who had previously been reluctant to buy-in to the new initiatives as they rolled out. Their reluctance had caused our meetings to feel very negative and unproductive. One of the comments I often heard was that they felt they had a lack of time to authentically implement anything new. This year, I haven't heard this complaint once! Just as with students, I have found that the time spent upfront building trust with my teachers has really paid off. We have implemented a new initiative this year with authenticity and without complaint. Our meetings are more positive and more productive. This year I am able to more effectively coach, and I credit this to the relationships I have worked to foster within my department.

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