

## Coaching: A Relationship Built on Trust

**NO ONE will take the risk of growing in front of another person, or their advice and “coaching” unless they first have a relationship of mutual trust with that person.\***

In Literacy How’s professional development model, mentoring provides the essential relationship within which effective coaching can lead teachers to risk-taking and growth. As external content and adult-learning experts, Literacy How Mentors aim to meet teachers where they are in their knowledge and practice. This collaborative mentor-teacher relationship is built on a foundation of trust. Trust creates a safe atmosphere where learning and change can occur, a prerequisite for success in the coaching relationship.

Mentors make it known to the teachers they coach, and to school leadership, that this beneficial work is both *nonjudgmental* and *confidential*. Internal literacy coaches should be cautious about assuming an evaluative role, which could undermine their effectiveness.

### Coaching Behaviors that Build Trust

What does trust look like? Relational trust (Bryk and Schneider, 2002) is built on four criteria: respect, competence, personal regard for others, and integrity. Cognitive coaching experts Costa and Garmston (1994, 2016) have asked thousands of people to describe factors that help develop trusting relationships. Positive coaching behaviors that are consistent with the research include:

- maintaining confidentiality
- behaving consistently
- keeping commitments
- acting nonjudgmentally
- listening reflectively
- being visible and accessible
- admitting mistakes
- demonstrating professional knowledge and skills
- sharing personal information about out of school activities
- revealing feelings
- expressing personal interest in other people

It is not surprising that most items on this list describe behaviors that would support any healthy human relationship, whether between colleagues, family, or friends.

### Tips for Growing a Coaching Relationship

In the latest issue of [ASCD Express](#), Sara Tellman Veloz offers these tips for building the coach-teacher connection.

1. **Go slow on the feedback.** Instead of jumping right into observations and coaching, start with informal conversations and questions to build trust.
2. **Begin and end the coaching session off-topic.** Acknowledging a shared human experience helps to foster a true relationship.
3. **Ask questions.** Maintaining a cadence of inquiry keeps the teacher's voice at the center of the coaching conversation.
4. **Teach with, not for, the teacher.** Teaching in tandem, where a coach and teacher give a lesson in turns, offers support and demonstration while simultaneously disallowing escape and diminishing the emotional load of observation.
5. **Be of service with humility.** *What do you find most helpful in our debriefs? Is there something I could do better? How can I be of service to you?* Tellman Veloz says "life as a coach changed when I began to end all my coaching conversations with these simple questions."

She concludes, "Instructional coaching is a multifaceted craft that develops through learning and experience. Becoming a master coach requires the union of professional and experiential knowledge and an acumen that weaves together interpersonal communication and emotional intelligence. When done right, the practice allows fellow educators to link arms in support." That's true, whether support comes from outside the school or within.

\* University of Maryland School of Social Work (January 2013), [Coaching in Child Welfare](#).



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