

Reflecting on Coaching: Thoughts about resistant teachers

By Gina Fugnitto | Categories: Professional Learning

As I continue to expand my craft of coaching, I follow several people on Twitter that offer articles, blogs and insights into coaching teachers. Elena Aguilar (@artofcoaching1) is one of these educators whose blog, *The Art of Coaching Teachers*, inspires reflection.

I was drawn to her recent two-part series on coaching resistant teachers. A few thoughts come to mind:

- **The impact of perception.** The author contends that the label of resistance “carries a layer of judgment that may prevent us from trying to understand the coachee’s” story. I am reminded of the use of positive presuppositions. My wise colleague, Sue Wilder, has been coaching me to take stances that call for positive intent when working with others. *Results Coaching: The New Essential for School Leaders* outlines the intent, impact, and way to engage in the act of using positive presuppositions.
- **Go back to the basics by engaging in inquiry.** The stance of inquiry is a powerful way to come together and examine practice with the goal of “letting go of judgment for curiosity.” I say “back to the basics” because this approach is outlined in *Systems for Change*, one of the first coaching books I read. Lyons and Pinnell contend that “coaching is a conversation directed toward inquiry...making hypotheses and searching for information.”
- **There are some that are un-coachable.** This is one of the hardest lessons learned as a school-based coach. I was fortunate enough to have a principal that guided me to learn this lesson in an effective way. The author shares that, for some, “the conditions are not present that allow them to be open, vulnerable learners.” I have struggled and been heartbroken, yet the words of the author are powerful: “I have been engaged in a struggle that wasn’t winnable, that really wasn’t my struggle.” This huge lesson came I realized that as a coach, I cannot personalize the struggle of others.
- **Coach the others.** Work with those that are receptive. Who are the teachers that want to be agents of change? Who are the teachers that have a “problem to solve” and want to engage in collaboration? The idea of coaching “around them” can be powerful. I think about the day when a teacher I perceived as “resistant” asked me how we could work together. It was insightful for me to hear her share that she noticed the work I was doing with others and the impact it had on teaching. The experience taught me that by doing the good work of coaching with those who are already willing makes an impact across the culture of the school.

I remind myself when faced with the struggles of coaching that coaching is not for the faint of heart. As you read the following blog posts and reflect on your coaching practice, please share your thoughts on the matter.

“How Can I Coach a Resistant Teacher?”

- Part 1: Guest Blogger Shane Safir
- Part 2: Elana Aguilar