

From the Principal's Desk

The Benefits of Effective

COACHING

for Principals and Teachers

Leadership is complex. How complex is seen in the recent proliferation of research and publications on all types of leadership, ranging from principal-centered to competency-based approaches.¹ One such approach to leadership is coaching, a topic vigorously explored as part of the new perspective in preparing leaders to raise their “level of skilling,” which will enable them to influence employees who are not meeting expectations.²

Many principals fail to become coaches because they do not understand how to use appropriate strategies to get optimum results.³ Adventist principals are no exception. More and more, a large number of great principals are trapped in a “management paradigm” that keeps them from leading effectively.⁴ As they focus on control, efficiency, and rules, they fail to capture the essence of specific qualities needed to rise above the ordi-

nary. The coaching process helps principals, especially Christian ones, to think deeply about their own character and motives, and become more effective in promoting “better morale and a higher level of commitment among the entire workforce.”⁵

Although coaching has been studied and discussed vigorously for decades, it was not until the 1960s that the subject took on enough importance to be considered a distinct method/tool with defined skills attached to it. The emerging surge lasted through the 1990s, according to several researchers.⁶ Since coaching is about developing people in the workplace, the educational community should give careful attention to how coaching, particularly its two variants (Transformational Coaching Theory and Team Coaching) can enhance educational leadership.

BY MARILYN DIANA MING

Coaching and Leadership (New Practices and New Language)

Transformational Coaching. Rachel Frumi's examination of Thomas Crane's theory of Transformational Coaching⁷ revealed that the heart of coaching is to shift "the organizational dynamic from Boss/Subordinate/Competitor to Coach/Client/Partner."⁸ In addition, according to Crane, coaching is "the art of assisting people to enhance their effectiveness, in a way they feel helped."⁹ To accomplish a successful partnership and satisfactory outcome, this model specifies that:

- Coaching must be a comprehensive communication process in which the coach provides performance feedback to the client.

- Topics should include all work-related dimensions of performance (personal, interpersonal, and technical or business skills) that affect the client's ability and willingness to contribute to meaningful personal and organizational goals.

- A coach must act as a guide by challenging and supporting the clients in achieving their personal and organizational performance objectives. When this is done by a trusted learning partner, the client feels helped by the coach and the process.

- The coaching process becomes the foundation for creating a high-performance, feedback-rich culture that flows full circle—down to direct reports, across to peers, and up to one's supervisor.

Team Coaching. Hackman and Wageman describe the Theory of Team Coaching as a superior leadership strategy in which success depends "directly and substantially on the degree to which coaching functions are fulfilled competently at appropriate times and in appropriate circumstances."¹⁰ These researchers concluded that a new model was warranted after their literature review revealed that "leaders focus their behaviors less on team coaching than on other aspects of the team leadership portfolio."¹¹

Team coaching opens the way for reflection and assessment of practice by the teacher clients. Small groups will benefit from intensive programs that give the clients what they need to grow professionally. The programs center on collaborative activities such as "action research, study groups, peer support groups,

professional dialogue groups, and electronic networks." Larger groups include self-reflection as well. According to Boyd and Cooper, "learning logs" and/or journals aid in the overall improvement process.¹²

Coaching: A Strong Tool

The objective of this article is to describe how coaching can help principals and other school leaders become more effective. Coaching leads to transformational behaviors that stimulate "an upward spiral growth" for the principal and establish a continuum of "knowledge, skill and desire."¹³ Coaching can help disgruntled school leaders who are tempted to quit their jobs because their roles seem too scripted. It gives them more opportunities to mediate change because it makes them aware of



a variety of opportunities for interacting with teachers that will assist them in "useful and practical ways."¹⁴

Boyd further states that "coaching is a form of professional learning which integrates the most effective learning about teacher work. Coaching is designed to integrate effective staff development and successful change management processes through providing a continuous growth process for people at all experience levels."¹⁵ More than a decade ago, James Flaherty recognized the great need for coaching people to a high standard of excellence in the workplace. He believes strongly that understanding people is the key that enables a coach to give them "a chance to examine what they are doing in light of their intentions."¹⁶ Flaherty argues that through the building of trust, an executive coach is able to infuse confidence and strengthen the competence of a subordinate client, but only when that executive is able to

self-examine and self-correct his or her own performance. Then, through a purposeful relationship with the client, the coach can guide him or her to follow the coach's example.

Whitmore states that “only when coaching principles govern or underlie all management behavior and interactions, as they certainly will do in time, will the full force of people's performance potential be released.”¹⁷ He notes that coaching “focuses on future possibilities, not past mistakes.”¹⁸ Whitmore insists that coaching “requires us to suspend limiting beliefs about people.”¹⁹ It is paramount for a solid partnership to exist “between the coach and client in the endeavor of trust of safety and of minimal pressure.”²⁰ Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler agree that not dwelling on mistakes helps to promote a more positive climate.²¹ Learning to approach the client in a non-threatening manner requires skill and time, but helps to foster a relationship. Coaching helps to debunk the idea that the administrator's job is “fixing people,” but it does hold the individual “accountable” and responsible for confrontations and for being non-abrasive. Both parties must be able to talk “openly and honestly. Both should be candid and respectful.”²²

Adventist principals can use these coaching principles while keeping in mind the need to also reflect the traits of the Holy Spirit as they interact with teachers. In a Christian institution, the coaching process takes on a higher purpose. It requires a commitment to godly service—treating people with love and fairness and valuing the gifts of the Spirit that are manifested in them (“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” [Galatians 5:22, 23, NKJV]).²³ For example, love demands action, so if love is present, principals will regard positive change as movement toward the noble ideals of true education. In short, the reflective practice reminds Christian principals of their mission—to serve others.²⁴ The administrator's commitment to coaching should lead to frequent conversations intended to promote teachers' personal and professional development. The following guidelines will help with the process:

- Emphasize Christian values.
- Envision and initiate change by persuading others to alter the status quo.²⁵
- Encourage and inspire teachers and support staff.²⁶
- Transform a climate of resignation into a climate of opportunity.²⁷
- Improve strategic planning and collaborate with teachers about the future you seek to create.
- Set higher performance goals and standards for yourself and others.
- Share practical know-how with teachers when asked.²⁸
- Intervene when appropriate to prevent avoidable mistakes.²⁹
- Provide targeted feedback, presented in such a way that the recipient can grow and learn from it.³⁰

The contemporary business world embraces coaching in order to improve worker efficiency.³¹ This performance-driven

strategy sets it apart from the use of mentoring in the educational community, which is oriented toward reflective practice. Implementing a coaching model does not mean that a principal abandons mentoring and other approaches to teacher learning,³² but rather that he or she becomes more aware and responsible, taking on the challenge of a new vision in the attempt to overcome barriers. When skills are mastered and strategies are carefully implemented, both principal and staff will benefit from coaching activities.

The Coaching Path to Change

A sustainable path to school change is never smooth or easy. Coaching experts believe that if an administrator is willing to become a possibility thinker and obstacle remover, is not ruled by assumptions, and is fearless and non-judgmental, he or she is ready to become a catalyst for transforming a school efficiently and effectively. Below are a few practical ways to accomplish the intended change:

Experienced coaches suggest that effective strategies must extend beyond monitoring performance. According to Reiss, “the language of change must be in the air.”³³ The effective leader will establish “self-directed teams” and vigorously seize opportunities.³⁴ This new role is critical because the principal must reach one teacher at a time and not prematurely judge or infuse his or her thoughts into the person being coached. It is important for the coach and teacher to spend time talking together so that “fears can be explored and a commitment made to moving forward.”³⁵

Coaching requires a long-term “commitment . . . to benefit from its results,”³⁶ as well as sustained practice to achieve maximum efficacy. Learning to coach may be one of the single most important decisions a principal makes in his or her professional life. Therefore, school leaders must acquire hands-on experience from high-quality leadership programs and/or workshops. For example, prominent New Jersey Coach Jerald Harvey, LLC, has had a successful practice for 25 years, helping individuals realize their maximum leadership capability. His programs are highly individualized and offer instruction, collaboration, reflection, and growth.

Today's school leaders need enhanced professional development programs that help them acquire concrete knowledge about “how to create a vision, share authority” and be “accountable for achieving the school's goals.”³⁷ Instruction in problem-solving techniques will provide practical solutions and strengthen the principal's ability to implement more effective coaching interventions. The mentoring component of the leadership programs/workshops will also enhance the principal's personal growth and career development.³⁸

Monroe asserts that often, the evidence of success in leadership is slow in coming or impossible to see.³⁹ However, leadership coaching is different; the approach focuses on positive change in individuals, thereby changing the culture of organizations in a short time because the process is so individual-

ized.⁴⁰ Indeed, coaching is one way of mastering skills and strategies that will enhance competencies and produce significant personal growth.⁴¹

Cope's Seven-C Framework

Cope offers a seven-C framework that helps principal-coaches become more optimistic about their teachers, learn how to get the best out of them, and help them see their own potential and find their own solutions.

1. Collaborative coach/sustainable change. Cope's "Collaborative Coaching Model" provides a blueprint for getting to know people through working together, clarifying expectations, and setting the stage for identifying core competencies that serve as markers for success.⁴² The process of coaching at this stage requires partnership and building trust between two people. Using these techniques, principals can sharpen their own skills and embark on a journey of self-discovery. With practice, coaching will enable them to get the optimum results from their employees.

2. Client awareness and willingness. At the very beginning, a principal should attempt to understand the teachers' "emotional, logical and behavioral drivers" because this will provide insight about their thinking and how their emotions affect their work.⁴³ By listening and learning, the principal will discover which issues the teachers wish to address. According to Cope, the goal is to understand "what has happened, what is happening and what the client [teacher] wants to happen."⁴⁴

3. Clarity: What's going on? The coaching principal must learn to interpret cues from staff members in order to identify the "blocks and barriers" that prevent clients from reaching their potential. In the case of limiting beliefs, the clients will experience unnecessary struggle if the coaching principal is unclear about what to do and how to help. During this clarifying stage, it is important that the "undiscussable issues" between both parties be addressed.⁴⁵ At this time, the clients need assistance from the coach to cut through negative behavior patterns (self-deception) caused by defensive thinking. A listening coach knows when it is the right time to lead individuals to share information about distressing situations in their lives. The coach never initiates the digging but gently leads the clients to share troubling aspects of their personal lives that impede their work performance. By helping to change client attitudes and actions during this time, the coach can expect to exert significant influence over the clients' lives. The coach uses skills to ferret out negative behavior patterns that affect the clients' effectiveness and well-being.

There are times when the coach must push resolutely on

when a teacher client seems to be hiding parts of his or her world or seems reluctant to answer difficult questions. The following techniques can be utilized at this stage:

- The *Fantasy Ladder*, which helps to map and manage limiting beliefs that the clients might have about themselves.⁴⁶ For example, how does a teacher view himself or herself in regard to professional performance? While respecting the client's beliefs, the coach should dig deeper. The challenge is guiding the teacher to identify and reframe negative thoughts (weaknesses/obstacles) about self to make him or her feel empowered and optimistic about the possibilities for the future.

- The *Shadow Map*, which helps the teacher-client to explore what difficult (uncomfortable) issues exist in the relationship and how these can be explored without causing too much pain.⁴⁷

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4. Create: Find the best solution. Time pressures will always be a problem in coaching relationships because of the many responsibilities of the principal and staff and their busy schedules. This new partnership is only a small part of each person's life. When both parties understand the value of the coaching, it can assume its proper place as a diagnostic and developmental tool. According to Cope, at this stage the role of the coaching partner (the principal) is important because he or she must help the clients "consider new ways to solve old problems and, once a solution is identified, to then test and ensure that the choice is an optimum one and not a rushed or less-than-optimum solution."⁴⁸ An examination of the two aspects illuminates the importance of this step. First, *Create* provides a strong indication of how well things are going between coach and clients. During this step, the coach helps the clients examine "diverse options" and then guides them in selecting the best course of action. Second, *Create* helps direct clients' attention to the "cost and consequences of the proposed solution and ensure[s] that they are using the

optimum solution and one that will deliver sustainable value.”⁴⁹

5. Change: What needs to be different? At this stage, the coaching partner makes sure that the new ideas work by listening carefully as the clients outline their action plans. The coach must act purposefully and follow through to ensure that clients make the changes that will produce the desired outcomes. Although this creates some pressure for the clients, most will accept it in order to achieve the desired outcomes. The coach partner (principal) continues to manage and act as a “driving force” to move clients from the comfort of planning to the actual fulfillment of their goals for personal and professional growth. Clients may need a light push in the right direction through gentle words, or a more “commanding presence to drive the change.”⁵⁰ This stage can be described by the use of two models:

- The *Y-Curve* considers how people go through change and how the smallest of changes (even self-imposed) can result in either dissent or loss of motivation, which in turn can trigger resistance.⁵¹ For instance, a teacher losing focus or harboring feelings of neglect due to rushed encounters with a coaching partner can abandon the whole idea and end the partnership.

- The *Change Framework* addresses the issues relating to mobilization in the coaching partnership and explores the level of force or control that the coach needs to apply in order to achieve the desired goals.⁵²

The continued learning of the clients (teachers) calls for actions that demonstrate the understanding of realistic high standards, and willing participation. For instance, the coaching principal applies gentle pressure to remind the teacher that each day’s actions must reflect the desired changes; therefore, in the spirit of openness and collaboration, they develop a template that records planning activity and observed reflections that reveal the teacher’s commitment to this effort. As a bonus, the template provides the coach with regular feedback.

6. Confirm/Continue: How to facilitate change. Humans will expend a great deal of energy to avoid unpleasantness. The natural inclination is to resist value judgments, especially if they involve assessment or measurement. However, facing this fear in the context of coaching will turn a negative into a positive for the person who wishes to improve self/skills. Two models are helpful at this stage. The first one entails a “Cockpit confirmation or developing the client’s capability to self-monitor and measure [his or her] level of achievement.”⁵³ The second focuses on the games that people play when faced with the need to do a realistic assessment of their progress.⁵⁴ Cope argues that for coaching and the new learning it entails to bring about change and become the norm in the workplace, there can be no room for games. Reality

needs to be faced, and both the coach and clients must commit to a conscious effort to identify barriers that prevent the achievement of the targeted results. There are no “miracle solutions” in this kind of people investment.⁵⁵

7. Close: Sustainability of the change. Coaching makes a difference because of the partnership that develops between the participants. The collaborative process helps ensure that positive outcomes occur: goal implementation, self-awareness, personal alignment with intended change, and sustained performance through the finding of and doing their personal best. All these behaviors result when the coach and clients persist to the end and understand that the process of change comes with real-

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life problems at home and in the workplace. When the coach displays a desire for collaboration, engages in a reflection on the results of the strategies implemented, and focuses on reciprocal accountability, he or she encourages the clients to “look back and learn” and to deal with any overlooked problems that could trip them up. This type of coaching seeks to achieve “sustainable change, not short-lived satisfaction.” During the process, the coach must assess whether clients are able to “fly solo before disengaging and moving on.”⁵⁶

Conclusion

Coaching is a way of strengthening school leadership and enhancing teacher effectiveness. A principal coach can implement this innovative option as a way to participate fully in the professional lives of teachers and to guide them in discovering their personal best. According to Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler, effective leadership and healthy school environments result when those involved with coaching are able to move forward in a positive way, celebrating their willingness to incorporate new methods of practice that work toward common purpose and goals.⁵⁷ The partnership results in positive change, not only in the relationship but also in the workplace.

Specifically, when highly effective professional learning occurs in school environments, students benefit. The goals and culture remain aligned because of the reciprocal and ongoing support provided to both clients and coach.

Coaching works—for both client and coach. As long as someone is willing to take a chance on someone else, it will remain a useful tool in the workplace, especially Adventist school environments. Frumi reiterates this premise when she asserts that “the only way to truly help people grow is to help them in developing new practices and new language, and that the only way to coach effectively is to enter into a reciprocal relationship where coach and client engage in a dance of mutual influence and growth.”⁵⁸



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