

Coaching is confidential... or is it? Instructional coaching needs to be confidential and non-evaluative. In some places, the coaches, teachers, and administrators must be reminded that the relationship between a coach and teacher is built on trust and confidence; what is discussed remains private. Without the security of knowing that conversations are not shared, a strong relationship cannot be established and teachers will not choose to work with a coach. Teachers are more likely to talk about addressing problems of practice, trying innovative ideas, and strengthening their professional needs if they think their innermost thoughts remain behind closed doors.

There is a difference between confidentiality and secrecy. A secret is something that is hidden or concealed. That's not exactly what confidentiality means with an instructional coaching partnership. In coaching, the conversations are not shared but certainly the outcomes are... administrators engage in learning walks throughout their buildings and can "see" the implementation of effective instructional practices. These walks yield the expected results of ongoing conversations between the coach and teachers. Again, the conversations are confidential; the effects transparent.

Secrecy has a negative connotation. Some people are privy to the information and some people are not. Sometimes, those "in the know" misuse the information or misunderstand the meaning. Either way, once a secret "gets out," there's no turning back. That's why conversations and coaching interactions are not secret; they are sessions with privileged information that occur between the members of the coaching partnership. The only two people who need to know the contents of the conversation are the teacher and the coach.

Having said that, let me explain...although administrators need to know what is going on in their building, they "need to know" only what is necessary when it applies to a "classified" conversation. They need to know that coaches are working with teachers on a variety of topics. They need to know that implementation of the statewide initiatives, the district proposals, and the school wide projects are part of the ongoing dialogue and professional growth plan of the staff. Remember, coaching is not a deficit model so when coaches work with all teachers, both one-on-one and in small groups, they remove the stigma of working with only those assigned by the administrator, eliminate the need for the administrator to check on the progress of the coaching interactions, and change the kind of feedback required by the administrator.

Administrators need to be confident that coaches and teachers are working together to recognize and apply effective instructional practices, to collectively problem solve, and to

communicate openly about addressing their own needs as well as their students' needs. They need to know that coaches and teachers focus on collecting, analyzing, and using data to assess student needs and then collaborate about ways to improve student performance.

Coaches cannot breach confidentiality by evaluating teachers and sharing that assessment with the administrators. Albeit inadvertently, it cannot happen. At the same time, administrators cannot put coaches in the position of being asked to make an evaluative comment about a teacher or a teacher's practice. When these expectations about confidentiality become the norm, are shared, and consistently supported, a trusting relationship and positive environment result.