

Coaches are not experts... so what does that mean? If coaches are not experts, what is the perception of their skill set?

This is a very good question and one that has raised many an eyebrow... after all, why would I ask someone for advice if I didn't think that the person to whom I directed my question was either an expert or very experienced in the content I needed?

Here's the thing... there is a big difference in expert and expertise. One implies that the person knows all there is to know about a subject and the other implies that there is a great deal of experience to share without the projection of knowing it all. One is emitting a confidence that may border on arrogance; that is, the person no longer needs to learn anything; the other suggests that the person is constantly learning new things and learning what works well and how to make necessary adjustments when something doesn't work as well as expected. One focuses on reflection, feedback, and building confidence; the other focuses on having all the answers regardless of the content and that stroking an ego is more important than the developmental process of learning together.

Coaches are not experts; they are, however, very skilled professionals who have a great deal of experience to share. They understand that listening more than talking helps others become reflective practitioners. They recognize that collective problem-solving becomes more about ownership, creativity, and innovation than about who is right. They appreciate the process more than the product and realize that collaboration and communication are essential to making changes in classroom practice. They value the "give and take" of professional conversation and collegial sharing. They know that their primary goal is to help teachers implement effective instructional practices and help them understand their role as a member in a community of learning and practice.

Coaches are not the problem-solvers but rather help teachers recognize and solve their own problems of practice. They ask the right kinds of questions and help teachers (and other school leaders) identify ways to address issues that surface in their daily routines. They help teachers plan and deliver instruction and most importantly, help teachers think about their thinking and make deliberate instructional decisions based on data, research, need, and desired outcomes.

As you reflect upon your year of coaching, think about the instructional decisions you made as

you helped teachers and other school leaders reach their fullest potential. Think about how each time you met face-to-face, supported by virtual communication, you provided support to teachers in ways that did not elicit “expert” advice but rather elicited collegial, collaborative ways to discuss challenges, issues, and everyday practices in a non-evaluative environment where expertise was shared and valued. As Stephanie Hirsh states, “... the need for adult learning is universal.” Instructional coaches ensure that the universal language and practice of adult learning is honored, respected, and supported in personal, reflective, and collaborative ways. As you plan for next year, focus on the areas of expertise that you can share as a colleague and learner.