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“I didn’t ask the right questions.” “I tried too hard to get to a solution to the problem.” “We don’t have enough time to do a BDA.” “I don’t think that Teacher A really cares about her students and doesn’t seem open to trying anything new. I can’t get through to her.”

What do we do when self-judgments stream into our consciousness before, during and after the coaching conversation?

When we work with teachers with challenges of time constraints, professional and personal doubts, stuck perspectives on students and teaching practices, we know what to do: listen actively, ask clarifying and probing questions, give feedback, brainstorm together new possibilities, customize and use data gathering tools, and reflect together. What do we do when we notice our own uncertainties and doubt?

How do we dialogue with our own inner coach so that when we show up for others, we naturally match energies, make connections, bring calmness and patience, respond in judgment-free way and act from a deep place of integrity? How do we become truly reflective coaches?

Ellen Eisenberg reminds us in ***Instructional Coaching in Action*** that, “Effective teachers reflect in, on and about practice continually.” She states that reflection is “...a revelation about the thinking process and what was learned from the experience... Without reflection, there is no thought-provoking dialogue (or monologue) that results in adjustments to teaching in either content or process.”

Self-coaching is our ability to cultivate that same mindfulness and metacognition within our coaching practice. It allows us to get beyond our own blindspots and be empathetic toward ourselves. It invites us to come from a place of wholeness and welcome conflicts and dilemmas.

Here are some practices to support self-coaching:

- Notice your own behavior: Audio or video tape a coaching conversation with teacher's permission. Search for your own vitalities. Consider what you have done well. Also, wonder about where you might ask a question rather than give advice; where you might simply listen rather than ask a question. Be curious, not judgmental toward yourself.
- Enter into a reflective dialogue with your mentor. Invite your mentor to gather data on a coaching conversation based on a data-gathering tool that you agree upon.
- Write a debrief-reflection after coaching conversations. Write how you feel about what transpired. Note what questions got responses, where energy was high, and what idea or practice could be further developed.
- Pay attention to your own story. Cultivate the practice of journaling daily as a deep listening habit. This could be at the beginning or end of the day. More stream of consciousness than direct reflection. The fabric of your story will reveal itself through unexpected insights.
- Practice self-empathy: transform self-judgments into opportunities to show compassion toward yourself. As one coach puts it—pretend that you are your own best friend. (Indeed, you are.)
- Periodically ask teachers for feedback about the coaching conversation/relationship. Be receptive and receive comments with grace.
- Design your own professional learning experiments based on your goals and vision. Work with your mentor or fellow coaches to support this process.

Bring the same compassionate heart you bring to teachers to yourself. And, smile as you remember that living is learning.