

"A bad attitude is like a flat tire. You can't go anywhere until you change it" (www.IAmLivingPositive.com).

Indeed, this statement says it all! And, it's not just referring to children; it's about adults as well.

We talk a lot about building confidence in students, making sure that every student feels part of the group, and that each person is a valued member of the community. Every student has something to offer and something to gain from his/her classroom experiences. We know that learning is social, and we want to make sure that each classroom encounter is one that promotes inquiry, success, and community. We want to build what Richard Sagor (EL, September 1996, Vol 54, No 1) says are the feelings of competence, belonging, usefulness, potency, and optimism necessary to ensure that our students can cope with society's obstacles and complexities of life. We want to make every learning environment a safe one and contribute to the growth of the students and their teachers. We want to foster an atmosphere where a "can do" attitude is the norm. In order to do that, we want to make sure that our teachers are well prepared, consistently supported, and emotionally comfortable in an environment that endorses teaching, learning, and inquiry. We want teachers to help students recognize the benefits and merits of a "can do" attitude and exhibit the same as well. After all, how will the teachers help move their students forward if they are trapped in a "closed" environment?

So, how does a "can do" mindset ensure success? How can a coach foster a positive attitude so that it rubs off on the teachers?

Coaches must believe that change is possible in order to help teachers share that vision. Remember, first practice is changed then beliefs are changed.

Carol Dweck says that how students perceive their abilities impacts motivation and that changing their mindsets, their achievement changes as well (Education Week, Vol. 35, Issue 05, September 2015). Specially, *"students who believed their intelligence could be developed (growth mindset) outperformed those who believed their intelligence was fixed (fixed mindset)."* And, in fact, encouraging students to focus on the process of learning gives them the tools they need to navigate their way through various learning experiences.

How is this idea of a growth mindset linked to instructional coaching?

Beliefs about teaching and learning are almost always challenged when discussing student performance. What a teacher believes a student can do either predicts high or low expectations. The teaching then follows those expectations... low expectations yield status quo; high expectations yield thinking about how to help all students succeed, not just in effort as Carol Dweck says, but in achievement as well.

Instructional coaches must have a growth mindset to help teachers recognize that their own bias in teaching and learning impacts how and what they teach. It's all about the attitude they bring to the table. But, in order to do that, a coach must recognize his/her own bias in teaching and learning as well. We say all students can learn; do we also think all teachers can learn? Teachers who understand growth mindset do everything they can to enable student success. Coaches must do the same with teachers. I believe every teacher wants to get better at his/her craft; knowing how is another story.

A growth mindset is steeped in reflective practice. While a student may not be successful the first time around, a teacher is responsible for taking action and trying to figure out an approach that will ensure that student's success. Working with an instructional coach who provides ongoing support, time to collaborate, and offers feedback on instructional practice is a solid and effective way to address the students' and teachers' needs while advancing the notion of a growth mindset. The coach and teacher reflect not only on their own individual mindset, but also on gathering feedback related to the goals of the practice. If an attitude adjustment is needed, the coach is there to provide that "pat and push" along with "nagging and nurturing."

By talking about practice and making that collaboration the norm, a mindset can clearly move from fixed to growth. Remember to presume positive intentions. Many with a fixed mindset do not recognize that in themselves. Often, it takes a learning partner to bring enlightenment and expose what is not said, ask the right questions, and nurture the learner to uncover the hidden pre-or misconceptions in teaching, and drive learning in the right direction.