

There are many characteristics that effective coaches must possess. When asked for my top three, I include these: 1) the coach must be able to develop, nourish, and maintain relationships with both teachers and administrators; 2) the coach must have content knowledge in some area of expertise; and 3) the coach must be a life-long learner. Yes, a coach must have effective communication skills, must understand the internal workings of a school, must be a team player, and must be responsive to the needs of others without pride of ownership. An effective coach must also know what effective classrooms look like, how to get there, and how to help when the journey is a bit bumpy. An effective coach needs to recognize when his/her efforts are not yielding the positive results that are the desired outcomes for a specific conversation or series of conversations about change and know what to do to bring about the necessary change in direction. An effective coach does not let ego get in the way.

In *Coaching Matters* (Learning Forward), the authors state that *“Effective coaches convey the belief that others are capable of and committed to learning, growing, and developing as professional educators.”*

Coaches are the emissary of ongoing learning... they are the epitome of learning with others and advocating that learning happens beyond the subject matter and extends past the end of the school day. Just as every student can learn; every adult can explore new ways to approach teaching and learning. The coach's role is to support the idea that everyone is a member in a community of learning and practice. Coaches give their colleagues an opportunity to think and talk things through before delivery and to reflect about things after delivery. Coaching is an ongoing process, never just once and done.

Coaches cannot be afraid or uncomfortable to admit that they do not know an answer. Remember, coaches are not experts in every content area. They are, however, very skilled in asking the right kinds of questions, providing opportunities for colleagues to engage in professional conversations around teaching and learning, and creating environments that are risk-free so that teachers can practice their craft without fear of censure. They understand adult learning styles and approach their colleagues as partners in the learning cycle. Coaches are the critical friends who work together with colleagues and honor their voices and choices. They practice with their colleagues and help them become reflective practitioners.

As coaches are working with their colleagues, they also need to sharpen their own skills and reinforce their own knowledge base. This is not so they can know more than the teachers for whom they are coaches; it's so they can model the practice of collaborative learning, share practices across communities, and increase the frequency of peer discussions about lessons, materials, design, and student learning.

As coaches are helping teachers get better at what they do, the coaches are also getting better at what they do. Research shows that coached teachers practice new strategies more often and with greater skill than uncoached teachers do... I think coaches also benefit from the mutual learning and collegial conversations that result from nourishing their own professional growth and engaging in recurring discussions about practice. We need to practice just what we preach.

Click [here](#) to return to [Coaching Tips of the Month](#) .