Coaching for Educators

The inevitable impact on leadership

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As educational executives continue to discuss and identify effective leadership development tools for their leaders, they will have to include coaching as a job-embedded development for building leadership capacity and transformation. While no stranger to the business sector, this humanistic and partnering approach to educational leadership development documents the effectiveness of coaching and how it changes behaviors, develops mindsets and transforms the lives of our leaders in ways both seen and unseen.

In 2009, an urban school district stepped into the world of coaching as a way to support and develop its school leaders who were new to leadership, who led schools designated for school improvement, and who were new to the district as school administrators. While I, as the visionary of this coaching initiative, was certain about the purpose and goals for a district's executive coaching program, I was uncertain about the impact the coaching sessions with a carefully selected and trained coach would have upon the leaders who would be given the support of an executive coach. With these leaders being assigned an executive coach, their coaching development would be a year-long support and in some instances would last two years.

Seven years later, I have found that the results and impact of an internal executive coaching program have improved performance and changed the way school leaders think about their work.

Coaching Competencies: The Unseen Impact

The indirect impact was how coach presence and skills influenced the behaviors of others. Evaluation data collected by Results Coaching Global, our accredited coach training program (ACTP) partners, found internally in our district that the competency-based behaviors of the executive coach translated into these leaders' practice as they held conversations and led others in their work.

Many of the behaviors that emerged from the school leaders were grounded in the ICF competencies, which define standards for effective coaching.

Setting the Foundation (Competency 1 & 2):
- maintaining confidentiality
- shifting and maintaining focus of the important elements of the situation
- using time more effectively when holding conversations

Co-Creating the Relationship (Competencies 3 & 4) :
- Demonstrating positive regard by word and body gesture
- engendering the trust of the client
- building a trust relationship

Communicating Effectively (Competencies 5 – 7):
- applying strong listening skills
- asking powerful questions
- using positive presupposition when framing questions
- paraphrasing
- using silence or wait time as space
- using reflective feedback

Facilitating Learning Experiences (Competencies 8 – 11):
- helping them to think critically and from multiple perspectives with a co-thinking partner;
- helping them to set goals, celebrations, and praise of accomplishments
- developing a plan of action and following up from week to week for accountability

The executive coaches produced a set of transferable examples that became part of these leaders' emulation to repeat certain coach behaviors frequently in their execution of work. The intended presence of these coaching behaviors and skills in the executive coach gave merit to the influence of effective coaching on our school leaders. The finding also suggests that coaching competencies are linked to leadership practices that are conducive to leadership transformation in schools.

Coaching Transformation: The Seen Impact

From my personal storybook, coaching transformed my life and my work, and allowed me to find a better person within me. My transformation was not without struggles, as I had been a respected, vocal, and influential leader for over 20 years. As a former English teacher who had been trained to critique, evaluate and provide direct feedback (with the red pen), I had transferred these qualities into my role as a leader of leaders. My brutal honesty in many instances was endured but unwelcomed, factual but insensitive, a truthful but one-way versation to be right.

Now in my seventh year as an executive coach and mentor-coach in my district, I have replaced this ineffective hard wiring with new wiring to presume the best in others, to listen without evaluation of ideas, and to exhibit naturally the coach-leader identity to help people arrive at their own thinking and pathway that align with their goals and outcomes.

Many colleagues have noted the change in me and have remarked, "We see the new you, and we want what you've got." The coach-leader identity is transformative, contagious, and offers the opportunity to adopt a new mindset, behaviors and identity. The exposure to coaching saved my life as a person and created a new me that I, along with others, can appreciate as a person, son, friend, colleague, and leader.

Similarly, leaders of schools experienced the coaching impact that affected their work and/or their confidence. When

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one school executive was asked about the impact of coaching, he stated, "My work performance has been more effective, more time efficient – not always having to solve problems but to have people solve their own problems." Another leader remarked, "Coaching made me feel more in control, more positive about being a leader." A third commented, "I used my administrative power initially to get people to follow procedures. In my transformation, I found the value of having reflective conversations rather than threatening ones."

The results suggest that this coaching initiative in this urban district has had a positive impact on the leaders involved and has inevitably created a "culture of coaching" with and among educational leaders. Clearly, coaching is a requisite leadership development process toward the aim of improving leaders' problem solving, increasing their work capacity, and effectively communicating with others. The coaching process gives educational leaders the confidence to face the challenges of school leadership and achieve better results.