



The Leadership Letter May 2016

Coaching Basics

Leading a Season of Change

As our organizations move forward in a climate of ongoing change, it is important to cultivate good mentoring relationships so the wisdom gained from training and experience is passed on as new ideas are formulated and implemented. Effective coaching both provides for ongoing professional development and the strengthening of relationships that will undergird not only SECA and its affiliates, but the early childhood profession in the southern region as a whole. For this issue of *The Leadership Letter*, guest contributor Anita Daley, the SECA representative from Georgia, provides insights into basic principles of coaching that may be applied to leading our organizations.

Cultivating Relationships

"Happy teachers equal happy children and parents," states Courtney May, Director of the Suzuki School in Ponce City Market of Atlanta. Happy teachers do not happen automatically or by accident. Happy teachers are coached to be their best. May states, "Cultivating a partnership with the teachers is one of the single most important things that we can do to realize and remain a high functioning school."

Cultivating the partnership begins with the coach. He or she is the one who initiates the relationship with the coachee that must be founded in mutual trust according to Theresa Moreland, the Educational Manager for Macon-Bibb Economic Opportunity Council/Head Start and Early Head Start. "The major hurdles to overcome are fear and mistrust on the part of the coachee.

The coach needs people skills more than anything else-material can be learned, teachers can be trained, but trust and coaching have to be built and sustained for any real change to take place," continues Moreland. People skills includes reading the coachee's body language and facial expressions. Being present and genuine in conversation are also vital skills in coaching. Being present means being focused only on the present moment and what is transpiring.

Being Present

In our time multi-tasking has become a necessary skill, but it is harmful to personal and professional relationships. To relate to someone requires being focused only on the now. Being present means being in the moment and accepting things as they are. There is not good or bad. There is only what is. This is the reality. The coach cannot be distracted by mental clutter and noise, but be focused on the observations and questions of the coachee. The coach cannot change the coachee. He or she must make this choice for themselves.

Common Goals

Within the relationship, common goals must be at the heart of all conversations. Both the coach and coachee must desire and agree upon the same goals. Goals should be specific. Too broad of a goal may cause the coachee to become overwhelmed. Work on small changes at a time.

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Coaching Basics continued...

Frequent Conversations

Moreland states, "During conversations – the coach **MUST** listen to and talk to (not talk at) the coachee. This listening and talking is just as important as building relationships. During the process conversation must take place on a regular basis. The coach must listen to the coachee with not only ears, but with empathy." This means the coachee is giving their best effort, but may not be aware there are other ways to achieve the same or better results. Effective communication skills are needed to paint the verbal picture of what actions are needed, but also modeling the desired skills is a must.

Focus on Positive Behaviors

Dr. Becky Bailey in her philosophy of the Conscious Discipline approach states, "What you focus on you get more of. "When we focus on the positive actions of people we tend to observe more positive actions initiated. If we dwell on negative actions, people become defensive and avoid thinking about new ways of doing things because they feel criticized.

Therefore coaches desire to focus on the strengths of their coachees. Though it may take some time, look closely and long enough and positives will be observed. These will serve as starting points to move into the direction of your goals.

Notice Small Improvements

As your observations and conversations continue, notice where the coachee includes even small improvements. Observing for growth and acknowledging that growth is occurring inspires the feelings of accomplishment. This helps teacher to feel supported and appreciated

Use Technology

If your coachee agrees, use video to capture teacher behaviors and responses. Allowing the coachee to see their behavior will be powerful in allowing true reflection. Each person is their own best critic. Seeing our behavior can be a strong motivation for change.

Most important!

Teresa Moreland says, "One of the best (maybe the best) ways to coach is to model. Modeling takes some of the fear and mistrust away from the coachee and also establishes credibility on the part of the coach." Demonstration of the desired behaviors helps the coachee see that the coach's goals are reasonable and attainable.

Empathy

The coach must also be ready to admit to mistakes and being human. We are all still learning and growing as professionals. Offering empathy to coaches helps everyone realize there is no perfect or one correct way of achieving the goal. Change is hard and sometimes we slip back into old ways of doing things until we have completely reintegrated our thinking.

Documentation

Record your agreed upon goals and progress made over time. This can be completed through emails or a journal. Having documentation provides a concrete means of accountability and actions taken. Ways of supporting the coachee should also be recorded as well as the steps planned for the next few days for the coached teacher. The video recommended from the use of technology above is also helpful for documentation.

Conflicting Jobs

If you are in a smaller center or system, you may have the role of being the performance assessor or evaluator and coach. These seem to be conflicting roles and may produce uneasy feelings for the coachee to trust the coach. If you face this concern, be sure to share with your coachee that you do have two different roles, but will clearly identify when you are in each role. Obviously more of your time will be spent on coaching and problem solving to build more effective classroom skills.

Conclusion

As Courtney May says, "When teachers feel supported and appreciated it shows in how they perform in the classroom and ultimately this results in better outcomes for students. Open communication and trust, leading by example, and ensuring that you follow through with your commitments (small and large) as a leader at a school are important parts of this relationship. No one is right all of the time, and collaboration is key. Instilling in the teaching team that we are all on the same team, working towards the same goals, helps everyone make decisions that are in the best interest of the children, and you just can't argue with that logic!"

Sources:

Bailey, Becky. *Conscious Discipline*. Florida: Loving Guidance, Inc. 2001. Print.

May, Courtney. "Re: Coaching Teachers." Message to the author. 20 Apr. 2016. E-mail.

Moreland, Teresa. "Re: Coaching Basics." Message to the author. 19 Apr. 2016. E-mail.



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*Promoting Quality Care and Education for
Young Children and Their Families*

SECA is a "Voice for Southern Children"

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The Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA) is a regional organization committed to promoting quality care and education for young children and their families. SECA is committed to providing leadership and support to individuals and groups by:

- ◆ *Enhancing the quality of young children's lives through early childhood care and education.*
- ◆ *Supporting families in their roles of caring for their children.*
- ◆ *Fostering the professional growth and status of individuals working with young children and their families.*

SECA is a "Voice for Southern Children"

Additional Resources:

[Coaching and Developing Leaders While Enjoying the Journey](#) (video)

[Bill Gates: Teachers Need Real Feedback](#) (video)

Top 10 Tips for Coaching in Changing Times

New things are on the horizon in your state. How can you help members navigate through the transition? Remember these top 10 tips for effective coaching.

1. People will respond much better to negative feedback mixed with positive feedback than just positive feedback alone.
2. It is important to develop trusting, collaborative relationships with a lot more listening than judging.
3. Only give advice after you have given feedback.
4. Change is a process. Evaluate your personal stage in your readiness for change.
5. Relationships first, data second. You must get to know your people first before you can utilize data to guide their professional growth.
6. Avoid killing good feedback
7. Take manageable steps toward development. Pick out just a couple areas that you know you can have good success in improving. Success with these will provide increase motivation to attain the next new goals.
8. Engage in a conversational tone. Engage your coachees in a dialogue instead of talking "to" or "at" them.
9. Effective coaching can increase board retention. Designating experienced board members to coach beginning board members is effective in managing limited time, while supporting new board members as they learn their roles.
10. When you need to share negative feedback with your

coachee, use objective data. Your coachee is more likely to grow based on a conversation around data than what they perceive as just your personal opinion.

*Adapted from [Top 10 Tips for Instructional Coaching on the Teachstone Blog](#),
www.teachstone.com*



SECA BLOG

We hope these tips are helpful to you, but we would also like to hear about your thoughts and expertise.

Please visit the SECA Blog to engage in a conversation around early childhood topics that are important to you! You can connect with the blog [here](#).