



## THE COACH IS IN “THE FRIEND ZONE”

Candice had been a teacher in her school for 22 years before moving into the role of Literacy Coach. She was a reservoir of institutional knowledge for teachers and administrators, with a proven commitment to students. Unfortunately, her reputation and experience also worked against her at times. While Candice was very successful in coaching new teachers who had no previous relationship with her, others who were once her teammates frequently sought her out for “inside information” instead of instructional coaching, and she struggled to keep them on task when it came to coaching conversations. Candice herself admitted that she often slipped into conversational “shop-talk” because these teachers were also her friends, and she could feel her distinctive role as a coach slipping away.

Developing sincere and authentic relationships with teachers is a required skill for coaches, but rather than allowing these relationships to diminish coaching conversations, the coach should leverage strong personal and professional relationships with teachers to achieve great outcomes for students. The functional partnerships that result will in turn serve to inspire other staff members to seek out coaching for themselves.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Has the role and purpose of a coach been formally explained and clarified to teachers? How so?

Have you made or reviewed Coaching Agreements recently?

How might you be contributing to the erosion of professional boundaries?

What do you think needs to happen in order to break out of the “friend zone”?

## PLAN A: SET AND REVIEW COACHING AGREEMENTS

A critical first step in a coaching relationship is to set norms and agreements that both parties will share. Use **Developing Coach/Teacher Partnership Agreements (Appendix)** to establish necessary understandings of your partnership. Some basic examples include:

How will we communicate information, and how often?

What does our ideal meeting look like?

What resources and materials will we need, and who will be responsible for gathering them?

What are our priorities when we meet? How will we know when we've addressed them?

What information will be confidential, and what can be shared?

How will we work together if a problem arises?

When is it okay to cancel a meeting? When is it not?

If you have already set agreements but they have been forgotten or not completely followed, bring your agreements to a meeting for review. Discussing what is and isn't working will refresh your mutual purpose and goals!



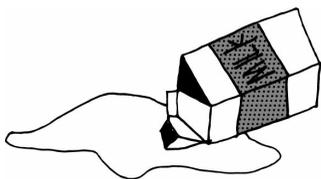
## PLAN B: LEVERAGE YOUR RELATIONSHIP

If you are good friends with another teacher on staff, no doubt you also respect their knowledge and experience as an educator. This is an opportune time to approach your colleague for a “passion project” of sorts. Together, you can collaborate on professional learning experiences that will benefit other staff members. Your colleague will likely appreciate being acknowledged for their skill and experience.

### IDEAS FOR COLLABORATION:

- Co-plan Peer Learning Walks or Peer Observations
- Co-lead a training at a staff meeting
- Identify new teachers who could be invited into the teacher’s classroom to see a strategy modeled with coach follow-up
- Co-lead a book study and invite other teachers
- Reverse Coach by asking the teacher to observe you while leading a training or meeting, and then provide you with feedback

## WORST CASE SCENARIO



Have you already tried setting agreements and still find yourself slipping into a non-productive space? It may be time to consider an alternate person to coach your friend. Of course, you will always

have a strong bond and you will inevitably lean on each other for support, resources and encouragement, but if the goal is for the teacher to grow professionally, it takes an incredibly strong coach to admit, “Right now, I’m not your best resource.”

This “other coach” can take the form of a principal, another lead teacher who can serve as a peer mentor, or even a content expert at the district level – anyone that you believe will have your friend’s best interests at heart.

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS	PITFALLS
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- ✦ Take coaching seriously
- ✦ Review guiding principles
- ✦ Lean into challenging conversations

- ✘ Ignoring the issue
- ✘ Playing favorites

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### YOU GOT THIS!

Personal connections are still important. Identify when personal conversations can occur in your day. For instance, set a timer for five minutes at the beginning of a meeting to connect personally, and then move into your scheduled tasks.



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### READ THIS

Joellen Killion, *Coaching Matters* (2012).

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### WATCH THIS

Debra Schmidt, "Relationship Before Task" on Youtube (Nov 16, 2017).

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### APPENDIX TOOLS

Developing Coach/Teacher Partnership Agreements

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