

# 33.

## COACH WANTS TO BUILD BETTER RELATIONSHIP WITH PRINCIPAL

While building strong, trusting relationships with teachers is a must for coaches, it is also necessary that a coach establishes a credible partnership with their leadership team, particularly the principal. In some cases, the principal has not been the one to choose the coach and may not know what skillset the coach has to offer, or may need help better understanding the role of an instructional coach. Principals also experience loneliness or isolation and the coach is in a key position to bridge the gap between teachers and leadership to increase the sense of shared community. At the same time, it is important for a coach to maintain appropriate boundaries so that they won't be seen as a spy, or "in" with the principal.

However, community building with the coach is generally not at the top of a principal's to-do list, and relationships can become strained when the coach and principal have different expectations, experiences, or communication styles. Therefore, a coach should work extra hard to establish relational trust and credibility with the principal by applying strategies for empathy and leadership coaching.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Do you have a regular, ongoing meeting with your principal?
- How familiar is the principal with the skill-set that you bring to the coaching position?
- What have you already done to establish trust and credibility with the principal?
- Has your principal shown interest in learning more about the coaching role?
- How does your principal like to be appreciated? How do you know?
- Have you already had any successful attempts at building a better relationship with your principal?

## PLAN A: LANGUAGES OF APPRECIATION

When a principal snaps at a teacher, ignores an email, or suggests that no one works as hard as they do, it's probably a symptom that they feel underappreciated. If the relationship with your principal appears to be lacking, consider putting your ego aside and spending a week or two focused on appreciation.

If you were to take a guess, which method do you think your principal prefers to be appreciated? How do you know? Below are some possibilities, and brief lists of strategies pertinent to each one.

**Quality Time:** Spending time together, discussing work and personal topics

- ✧ Stop by in the morning to ask how their weekend went
- ✧ Offer to collaborate on an upcoming project or book study
- ✧ Ask, "What have you done for fun lately?" or "What's the best book you could recommend?"

**Tangible Gifts:** Items that are handpicked for them that might contain humorous or sentimental value

- ✧ Find out what your principal's interests are and find a small token that reflects their personality
- ✧ For instance, a bag of coffee beans or a good book

**Words of Appreciation:** Authentic words of thanks

- ✧ A handwritten card is always a nice touch
- ✧ A quick email to thank them for something you noticed
- ✧ Verbal affirmation for something they helped you better understand or put extra effort into during a meeting

**Acts of Service:** Helping by taking on a task or lightening the load (without overloading yourself!)

- ✧ Offer to set up the room for a meeting or training
- ✧ Fill in for a morning of bus duty

**NOTE:** We are not suggesting sucking up! Instead, find authentic ways of building empathy and community to better serve your school staff as a whole.

## PLAN B: PLAN A MINI-RETREAT

No, we aren't suggesting that you go on vacation with your boss, but spending time together away from school can be highly beneficial.

Plan a Leadership Retreat for a half or whole day, much like you would design a professional development workshop with teachers. It can include just the coach and the principal, or an entire leadership team -- just as long as there is enough time and space for deep discussion and learning.

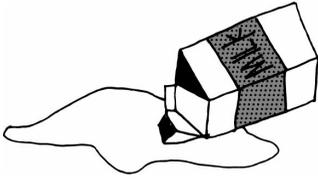
Explain that you want to strengthen your coaching relationship in order to be more efficient on projects seen as valuable to the administrator(s), improve communication skills together, and professionally grow your own facilitation skills in the interest of future teacher workshops.

This retreat could include:

- ✦ Short readings on leadership styles and communication (see **Read This** below for examples)
- ✦ Developing or reviewing **Developing Principal/Coach Partnership Agreements**
- ✦ Protocols or activities to build awareness of work styles (such as **Compass Points**)
- ✦ Consultancy or Problem of Practice protocol on a current school issue

Reserve a comfortable space with minimal distractions (ideally off campus), and arrive early to set up coffee, office supplies, etc. It is important that the principal can easily identify the value in this time so it must be set up for success.

## WORST CASE SCENARIO



Sometimes relationships are simply an oil and water situation. While a coach can put in the effort to improve the relationship with a principal, that doesn't mean it will always be well received or acknowledged. If you truly believe that you have done everything within your capacity, and your relationship with the principal is still strained (or even toxic), it is probably time to move on. Without a strong principal/coach partnership, a school-wide coaching program will be ineffective and your job satisfaction will suffer. Confidentially reach out to other supervisors or principals who could provide career guidance. Even if the right position is not immediately available, you should be able to find a leader with your needs in mind who can help you navigate that process.

### FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

- ✦ Honor the principal's appreciation style
- ✦ Be mindful of the principal's time
- ✦ Be authentic
- ✦ Keep on improving your communication skills

### PITFALLS

- ✘ Waiting to take the lead
- ✘ Gossiping

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## YOU GOT THIS!

To become a trusted thought partner and true collaborator, pay attention to how your principal prefers to communicate and handle business. If you need to make adjustments to your own personal style, do it in the spirit of professional growth.



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## READ THIS

Brian Brim, “How a Focus on People’s Strengths Increases their Work Engagement” from Gallup (May 2, 2019).

Gary Chapman and Paul White, “How Do You Successfully Encourage Employees During Difficult Times?” from *Appreciation at Work* (Apr. 27, 2020).

Peter Dewitt, “Collaborative Leadership -- How to Inspire Your Leaders to Become Learners” from *Corwin SmartBrief* (2018).

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## APPENDIX TOOLS

Developing Principal/Coach Partnership Agreements

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## SEE ALSO

#13 THE COACH FEELS ISOLATED

#32 PRINCIPAL IS NOT CLEAR ON THE COACH'S ROLE

#35 PRINCIPAL CANCELS MEETINGS OR DOES NOT SEE A NEED TO SCHEDULE REGULAR MEETINGS

