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Mark Twain said, "Let us make a special effort to stop communicating with each other, so we can have some conversation." Our comment-thread culture has us believing that every point requires a counterpoint, that expressing one's ideas can be routine fodder for ridicule and hostility. Perhaps we don't need to stop communicating with each other entirely, but maybe we could transform our discussions into dialogue, turn our contacts into connections.

Source: ["Dialogue - Turning Contact into Connection"](#)

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Coaching requires clear, honest, and respectful communication in order to catalyze change in the classroom.

Teaching is hard; we must continually reinvent our teaching practices to meet the needs of the students we serve. Sometimes, educators need an acknowledgment of this fact in order to move forward. Coaches can improve their relationships with teachers by sharing their own challenges and struggles that they faced in the classroom. By sharing personal defeat-to-victory stories, instructional coaches can not only demonstrate empathy but model how to stay the course in the face of challenge.

Most coaches were teachers before they were coaches, so they can draw upon the resources and tools they've used in planning, delivering, and evaluating their own instruction to further fuel teachers' practice. Instructional coaches can keep conversations positive by reminding those they coach about the common goals: improving teaching and learning for all through collaborative, meaningful engagement.

Source: ["Navigating Challenging Communication as an Instructional Coach"](#)

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Teachers sometimes have legitimate reasons for resisting advice from others, particularly if that advice feels harsh or judgmental. If a coach comes across as all-knowing or lacks interest and curiosity, their affect will lead teachers to become even more resistant to change. Coaching should never be about assigning right and/or wrong to a situation; instead, teacher and coach should work collaboratively to adopt instructional best practices.

But doing so can present challenges. Sometimes, hard truths do need to surface in order to make change. In the coach role, an important distinction is to make sure one's feedback is framed as an observation, not a judgment. For example, if you observe sleeping students and assume they're disengaged, ask the teacher if they notice the situation, and what they think about it, before assuming disengagement. Who's to say that you, as coach, are correct in your assumptions.

Give-and-take conversations grounded in inquiry can enhance interpersonal relationships between teachers and coaches that, in turn, promote common understandings and increase teachers' openness to having difficult conversations down the line.

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Sometimes it's necessary to do less.

Often, when a teacher experiences strong feelings, coaches try to solve what they perceive as a problem for their client; they try to do more. What's actually needed is for the coach to do less.

Three tips might be useful when coaching someone who is experiencing strong emotions:

- Give your client space to talk. "Tell me more" is a great sentence stem to use in these moments. Flex your listening muscles in these conversations.
- Let them lead. "Where do you want to focus?" is a great question to ask. You need to trust your client to know what is going to be most helpful to work through and trust the coaching process.
- Don't try to fix it. This requires you doing inner work. Reflect on this: What is it that a client might say that leads you to offer a specific piece of advice? What is your criteria for when you move from being facilitative to directive? For example, I wait to give people a chance to identify their next steps unless they say, "I really need some advice/a suggestion."

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Communication through the lens of Jim Knight's Partnership Principles:

1. **Equality:** I don't believe any person or group is more valuable than any other, and I recognize and honor the dignity of every individual.
2. **Choice:** I communicate in a way that acknowledges the professional discretion of others by positioning them as decision makers.
3. **Voice:** I want to hear what others have to say, and I communicate that clearly.
4. **Dialogue:** I believe conversations should consist of a back-and-forth exchange, with all parties hearing and responding to one another's opinions.
5. **Reflection:** I engage in conversations that *look back*, *look at*, and *look ahead*.
6. **Praxis:** I structure learning so that it is grounded in real life.
7. **Reciprocity:** I enter each conversation open and expecting to learn.

Source: ["The Coach's Playlist: A Partnership Approach to Life"](#)

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