

## Unlocking the Power of Instructional Coaching: Vanguard Coaching

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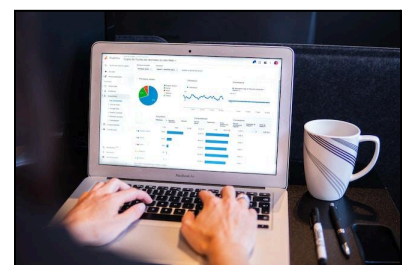
Instructional coaching is the final stage of the Vanguard program, aimed at enhancing teaching practices and student learning. The goal of the Vanguard program is to develop your capacity as instructional leaders and coaches in your role. It's important to distinguish instructional coaching from mentoring, as they serve distinct purposes. Instructional coaching, according to the [Coaching Federation](#), is “Partnering with [teachers] in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.” It involves a collaborative partnership between an experienced Vanguard and a classroom teacher. This partnership focuses on specific instructional strategies, models, techniques, and student outcomes to create a blended and personalized learning experience for students. Mentoring sessions are, in contrast, often a one-way relationship where a more experienced teacher imparts general wisdom and advice to a less experienced one. Vanguard Coach Year teachers are diving deep into the coaching relationship. However, any Vanguard, as a recognized leader in your building, may be called upon to help others or others will seek you out for help with an instructional problem. You will find yourself in situations where you have the opportunity to take on the role of an instructional coach. So let’s explore instructional coaching a little further.

### Instructional Coaching in Action

A Vanguard coach (little ‘c’) collaborates with a teacher who's trying to utilize a station rotation model in the classroom for the first time. The coach helps the teacher to set goals for the shift to a blended approach that are under the umbrella of “*Think Big, Start Small.*” The coach supports the teacher, who serves as the content expert, in selecting appropriate digital tools and resources and designing engaging online and offline activities. Together, they set student goals, analyze student outcomes and fine-tune instructional methods, ensuring a seamless transition to blended learning as part of a “coaching cycle” which is outlined in Chapter 4 of the book, [Power Up Blended Learning by Dr. Catlin Tucker](#). This book is given to all Vanguard Coach Year teachers.



In another scenario, a Vanguard coach works with a teacher who aims to personalize a unit of study based on student data. The coach assists the teacher in ways of collecting and analyzing assessment data to identify individual student strengths and areas for growth. The coach helps the teacher set SMART goals for student growth and provides support as they use data to



personalize the learning experience. Together they create a playlist for differentiating content, adjusting pacing and modifying assignments as needed to address each student's unique needs.

## Using SMART Goals

SMART Goals stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. Coaches work with teachers to define goals that align with these principles. A relatively simple approach, the teacher reflects on the five components as they decide on their goal. Typically, an organizer will be completed to identify what the coachee wants to accomplish. An example of a [SMART Goal organizer](#) is found in the Vanguard Coaching Guide. The organizer has the following parts.

**Specific:** Goals should be clear and well-defined. For example, a coach and teacher might set a goal to improve student engagement in a specific unit of the curriculum.

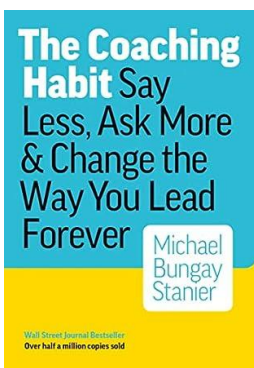
**Measurable:** A goal should include criteria for measuring progress, such as an increase in student participation or improved assessment scores.

**Achievable:** Goals must be realistic within the teacher's context and capacity. The teacher should be able to attain the goal with the available resources and support.

**Relevant:** Goals should be directly related to the teacher's professional development and student success. They should align with the teacher's role and responsibilities.

**Time-bound:** Setting a deadline creates a sense of urgency and accountability. For instance, the goal could be to achieve improvement within one semester.

## Getting Started



A valuable resource for instructional coaches is the book "[The Coaching Habit](#)" by Michael Bungay Stanier. This concise coaching guide contains practical ways to begin the coaching conversation with coaches who are not yet comfortable starting the conversation. Stanier outlines seven essential coaching questions, each serving a specific purpose in guiding coaching conversations:

**The Kickstart Question:** The first question is, "What's on your mind?" This open-ended prompt allows the coachee to initiate the conversation, ensuring the focus remains on their specific needs and concerns.

**The AWE Question (And What Else?):** The power of this question lies in its ability to push beyond initial answers. It encourages deeper reflection, as the coach asks, "What else?" This broadens the scope and often reveals unexplored solutions.

**The Focus Question:** To zero in on the core challenge, the coach asks, "What's the real challenge here for you?" This helps identify the key issue that the coaching session aims to address.

**The Foundation Question:** "What do you want?" prompts the coachee to articulate their desired outcomes, setting the stage for the development of SMART goals.

**The Lazy Question:** This question, "How can I help?" empowers the coachee to take the lead, encouraging ownership of their professional development.

**The Strategic Question:** "If you're saying yes to this, what are you saying no to?" guides coachees in assessing the trade-offs and implications of their decisions, fostering thoughtful planning. This is very important for busy teachers to ask so that they are not trying to do too much. This is in line with the mantra of the Vanguard Program, "Think Big, Start Small."

**The Learning Question:** Finally, the coaching conversation wraps up with "What was most useful for you?" This encourages reflection and cements learning. It is also good feedback for the coach to know what aspect of this iteration of the coaching cycle was most effective.

## Support for Vanguard

The Innovative Learning Team is here to support you on your Vanguard journey of instructional coaching. We invite you to reach out to any member of our team for guidance, resources and collaboration. Together, we can make a difference and help all teachers provide equitable and differentiated access to learning across all grade levels.

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