t³ TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS ™

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF TEACHER LEADERS

How to *say it* like a coach

BY KATHY KEE

Successful coaches are educators who have a deep belief in themselves and in others to achieve and succeed beyond known parameters. This deep belief is aligned and congruent with eloquent language that champions confidence and support in every conversation and thereby presents an opportunity for a teacher to transform her work.

Susan Scott says this so eloquently in *Fierce Conversations* (Penguin Putnam, 2002): "While no single conversation is guaranteed to transform an organization, a relationship, or a life, any single conversation can."
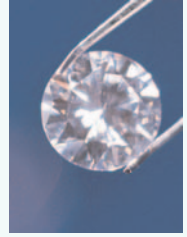
The job of a coach is to speak and listen as if this is the most important conversation you will ever have with this person.

First, believe it

As districts select new coaches, focusing on that first essential requirement — possessing an unwavering belief in another person — is often overlooked. An authentic coach believes teachers desire to be the best they can be. Because they are driven by that belief, these educators search for the treasures of talent hidden below the surface of knowledge and skills. Educators with this belief know that, with trust and a sense of safety, a teacher will willingly take the necessary steps to learn and improve.

Our goal: All teachers in all schools will experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work.

When entering a teacher's classroom, coaches are required to respect the background, prior training, and even the prior levels of supervision given over months or even years. When a new coach arrives with the news that they are there to help the teacher use new strategies and tools, the teacher's immediate response is to interpret that news as one of the following:

- "So they don't think I'm a good teacher."
- "Does this mean that all these years I was a bad teacher?"
- "I've been doing this longer than that person has been out of diapers, what do they mean?"
- "Here we go again, something else that will last for a few months."

The message is usually interpreted as "what I have been doing is wrong." The listener hears two seemingly contradicting messages of 'stop doing this' and 'start doing this.' Skilled language and an intention to support educators as they modify and adjust to potentially new strategies becomes a dance of building rapport and trust while communicating respect for where a teacher is or has been while on the journey to new and promising practices.

Cognitive Coaching^{SM} uses the metaphor of a stagecoach as a vehicle "to take a person from where they are to where they want to be." This conveys the belief that all teachers want the best knowledge and skills for their students. The coach must never forget that teachers chose this profession in the hopes of making a difference in the lives of students. Teachers and educators want to support students to be the best they can be. Teachers do their best to support students against pretty big odds. Consequently, educators who support teachers must believe equally in their colleagues. An authentic coach will reconnect to when they were teaching and recall what they had to do when encountering a challenging student. They will remember how they searched for new knowledge and skills, considered the interest or special skills of the student, how they

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• She serves on the board of directors for Coaching School Results, Inc; is a national trainer for the Center for Cognitive Coaching, Downey Walk Through for Reflective Practice; Powerful Strategies for Living & Leading; Powerful Coaching Strategies; and the Language of Supervision with colleague, John Crain.

• Before becoming a national consultant, Kee was assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction in a suburban Dallas, Texas, school district.

1. **The authentic coach uses language that sends a message of belief and possibility.**
   "As you consider your goals for your students this year, what are your greatest wishes and dreams for them?"

2. **The coach withholds personal opinions or judgments and asks questions that will support the teacher to think deeply about his or her practice.**
   "Thank you for asking but I believe the resolution to the situation lies with your knowledge, experience, and beliefs. When you were in this situation before, what guided you to a successful outcome?"

3. **The coach talks with the teacher about the data and mediates the teacher's own assessment of what new decisions or directions are needed.** "As you examine your data sources, what did you determine were your strongest areas and which areas will you target to get the desired results?

From the lips of the authentic coach

4. **The coach stands solidly with the teacher as he or she discovers new pathways and strategies for students.**
   "You said the way you taught the targeted objectives did not get the results you desired. So, as you consider new options, what do you think might be your next course of action?"

5. **The coach vows to speak the truth about data and labels opinion, points of view, and optional ideas.** Susan Scott says, "The success of our relationships depends on our ability to understand each other and be truthful with each other."
   "Are the results you're getting meeting your high standards as well as those of your campus?"

6. **The coach always demonstrates the belief in the teacher**.
   "Given your students and their needs, what decisions or options are you considering that will accomplish your goals?"

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had to differentiate for the student among others with so many needs. Now as a authentic coach, they will personalize and differentiate for the teachers they serve. Why? Because it is vital to believe that all teachers want to do their best for students, even if they may have actions or behaviors that are contradictory.

Second, express it

Language is the second most essential skill for a coach. Language that aligns with the deep belief in teachers who are being served and supported is crucial to building trust and rapport. Language can build trust or bust the bank account. Language can build a relationship that communicates, "I care about you as a teacher and I want to do whatever you need to shine as an exceptional teacher."

An authentic coach knows deeply the truth in Mother Teresa's reflection that, "I don't care how much you know, until I know how much you care."

To demonstrate that caring in an initial conversation with a teacher, an authentic coach might say:

- "It is such a pleasure to be in your classroom. I see your diploma on the wall. You must be proud to be in the group of graduates who always are such wonderfully trained teachers."
- "Hello my name is Kathy. I am so honored to serve as the literacy coach for your campus. I hear you are a new grandmother, like me. I'll show you my pictures, if you'll show me yours!"
- "Hello, my name is Kathy. I will be serving as the math coach for the campus. I have heard so many wonderful things about your leadership in math on the campus. Tell me about the great things you have been doing."

An authentic coach uses language that communicates the deep alignment of his or her personal belief in the teacher's desire to do a good job, to plan, to organize, to think through thoroughly, and to serve students. While coaches may have good intentions, frequently they may use language that sends a different message. Think about the deep messages of such common questions as:

- "Have you been using the literacy strategies we talked about?"
- "Do you have any goals for your students?"
- "Have you thought about using technology?"
- "Do you have a discipline plan in your classroom?"
- "Are you using the curriculum regularly?"
- "When do you plan to get started on small group instruction?"
- "Do you know any other ways to teach besides whole group?"

The above language is far too frequent and common. The sad part is that most coaches initially don't see anything wrong with the questions. But all of the questions above send an unconscious message that "I don't think you do." When that message is received, a teacher interprets that as, "If they think I'm not so good, then why should I bother to be."

The power of the authentic coach is knowing that language and belief must align to develop and create trust. Turning each negative assumption into a positive one sends an important message to the teacher that says, "I know you have good things happening in your classroom."

- "What literacy strategies generate the most excitement for your students?"
- "What goals are your students achieving that evoke the most pride for you?"
- "What technology best supports and accelerates your students' success?"
- "In what ways is your discipline plan directly impacting your students' achievement?
- "In what ways have the curriculum guides assisted you in organizing and bundling your objectives for pacing instruction?
- "What successful results do you see in your small group instruction?"
- "What instructional strategies produce the highest achievement for all of your students?"

If you want the best from teachers, then speak to them as if they are doing their best — or that you want them to. We must believe they have done the thinking, planning, or action and with a nobility of purpose — and speak to them with that message in our words. ◆

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Coaches zero in on quality teaching

Quality teaching is the heart of a coach's work each day. What a teacher knows and does is one of the strongest factors influencing student success. When coaches focus their interactions with teachers on quality teaching, they have greater leverage to influence teachers' instructional practice and student learning. Quality teaching has three dimensions. Coaches assist teachers to refine instruction, deepen content knowledge, and use appropriate assessment for and of learning. Through their interactions with teachers, coaches expand teachers' knowledge and skills related to content, assessment, and instruction, help teachers become conscious of their decisions and successes, and increase teachers' efficacy.

When teachers have deep content knowledge about the subjects they teach, they are able to break down complex concepts, skills, and principles into discrete components that they can then sequence as developmentally appropriate for students. Deep content knowledge allows a teacher to distinguish between enduring understandings and those that are nice to know. They are able to develop essential questions to guide the development of units and lessons. Teachers design interdisciplinary lessons built around enduring understanding.

Coaches engage teachers in deepening their content knowledge by organizing learning experiences in which teachers are first readers, writers, mathematicians, historians, scientists, musicians, and artists before they engage them as teachers of their subjects. Coaches help teachers access and use the approved curriculum, design standards-based units and lessons, and explore ways to differentiate curriculum for students with different levels of achievement.

In addition to deep content knowledge, successful teachers know how to use both formative and summative assessment strategies to measure student progress toward mastery of the content

QUALITY TEACHING
Staff development that improves the learning of all students deepens educators' content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares them to use various types of classroom assessments appropriately.

standards. They know how to design various types of assessments that permit students to demonstrate what they know and can do without the limitation of an assessment format that interferes with their success.

Coaches work with teachers to develop their assessment literacy. They engage teachers in designing assessments that are varied, authentic, and differentiated. They facilitate teams as they develop common benchmark or end-of-course assessments and work together to score those assessments. They examine student work to determine what students know and can

do. Coaches explore with teachers how to integrate more assessment *for* learning and less assessment *of* learning. Assessment *for* learning engages students in tasks that extend their learning. The assessment itself becomes an integral part of the instructional process. Assessment *of* learning provides evidence of what they know and can do and marks a transition in the learning process, such as the end of a unit.

Teachers make multiple decisions regarding instruction when they plan lessons and while teaching lessons. While planning, they determine which instructional strategy is most appropriate for the content and students they are teaching. They select from among research-based instructional strategies to increase the chance that students will be successful. They plan accommodations for students in their classrooms who learn differently or who have special learning needs. While teaching, they make adjustments continuously based on student responses. They may add more examples, introduce additional information for enrichment, provide additional practice, or revisit a previous concept if students are not ready to move ahead.

Because teaching is such a complex task that often seems simple on the surface, coaches help teachers become aware of the decisions they are making by engaging teachers in planning and reflection conversations. In planning conversations, coaches use skillful questioning to guide teachers to identify and make decisions about the multiple factors that contribute to a lesson's success and to increase their consciousness about the reasons for those decisions. After a teaching episode, coaches engage teachers in a reflection conversation in which they not only review what occurred in the lesson, but also form conclusions about what the teacher learned and identify how

How can coaches help teachers reflect on lessons?
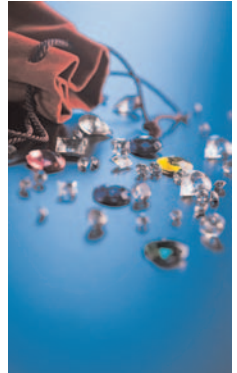
HERE IS A FORMAT ON P. 6.

that learning might influence future teaching episodes. The protocol on p. 6 offers one way for coaches to interact with teachers about a teaching episode.

As teachers seek to refine the quality of their teaching, coaches use multiple strategies. They might provide professional learning opportunities that develop teachers' understanding of their content area. They might facilitate study groups on topics related to quality teaching. They might read together and discuss research on effective instructional strategies. Coaches might hold demonstration lessons in which several teachers observe the coach teach a lesson and then meet with the coach to debrief the demonstration. Coaches might co-teach with teachers to boost teachers' confidence to try a new instructional strategy or teach a new concept with which the teacher may not feel completely comfortable. Coaches may meet with teachers in teams and facilitate the design of more authentic assessments. They might help teachers become more aware of the types of data about student performance that are naturally available within the lesson and how to capture and analyze those data.

When coaches interact with teachers, they encourage teachers to identify their actions and decisions and also to develop consciousness about the reasons. Their interactions with teachers are designed to build a teacher's sense of efficacy. Efficacy is the degree to which a teacher sees himself or herself as influential in student learning and the teacher's sense of confidence that he or she has the knowledge and skills to teach. Coaches can influence efficacy by identifying what teachers are doing well and by expanding teachers' knowledge and skills about content, assessment, and instruction. ◆

Multiple strategies are in the coach's treasure chest when leading the teacher to refine the quality of teaching.

Coaches can influence efficacy by identifying what teachers are doing well and by expanding teachers' knowledge and skills about content, assessment, and instruction.

For more information about NSDC's Standards for Staff Development, see

www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm

Reflective conversation protocol

Tell me about the highlights of your lesson.

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In what ways was this lesson different from what you planned? What accounted for that difference?

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As you taught this lesson, you observed students and used other information to help you know if students understood. What evidence was available to you in this lesson that helps you know if your students achieved the lesson's goals?

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Teachers make many decisions as they teach. I am interested in the decisions you made during this lesson. Tell me about some of them and share your decision-making process. How did you arrive at those decisions?

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What learning will you take away from this lesson that you will apply to a future lesson?

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After a teaching episode, coaches engage teachers in a reflective conversation in which they:

- **Review what occurred in the lesson;**
- **Form conclusions about what the teacher learned; and**
- **Identify how that learning might influence future teaching.**

Staying out of the buzzword soup

POP QUIZ:
List five educational buzzwords or phrases making the rounds in your school or district.

I'll bet that was an easy task!

When I ask colleagues that question, they answer things like brain-based learning, assessment *of* learning v. assessment *for* learning, and essential learnings. I've also heard professional learning communities; child-centered classrooms; and rigor, relevance and relationships. My favorite phrase: Using data to drive instruction.

Almost everywhere I've worked, dozens of buzzwords were part of the school culture. Collections of catch phrases defined who we were. "We're a Covey school," people would say in one. "We're a PLC modeled after DuFour," we'd say in another.

"We're using common assessments to amplify effective instructional practices."

"We're creating learning opportunities that engage students in the creation of knowledge."

"We're focusing on the needs of diverse learners."

Each of these phrases held value in my schools, forming a common vocabulary and providing direction for our efforts. It was easy to determine what was important by listening to our language. As Sheryl Nussbaum-Beach of the Teacher Leaders Network writes, "Just like school colors, team mascots, and other unifying symbols, the terms we use to describe our practice help to build a culture of educational thought ... between those that use them."

The danger in buzzwords, however, is also very real. Overuse can lead to casual interpretations that weaken meaning and lead to disagreement between dedicated individuals in the same organization. What "using data to drive instruction" looks like to one teacher may be completely different than what it looks like to another. Over time, a school that appears to be focused by a "collective commitment" to an "effective mission" and a "shared vision for student learning" may, in fact, be fracturing around what it values the most.

This danger grows exponentially as new members are added to a building's faculty. Without a foundational understanding of a school's core beliefs, these teachers are often left to learn by chance. Informal experiences — whether accurate or not — tend to shape their thinking, influencing 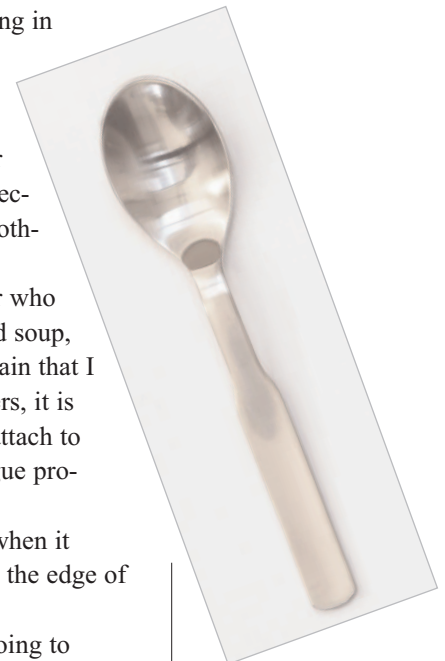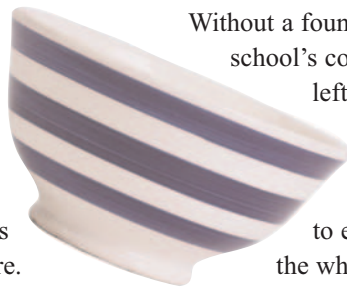their ability to effectively strengthen the work of the whole. Over time, what began as a strong commitment to shared ideals can become nothing more than a strong commitment to misinterpreted terms.

In short, a school ends up drowning in buzzword soup!

There is no doubt that teacher leaders play a central role in ensuring that the common language driving our buildings remains common. Our connections and credibility allow us to keep others focused on the true work of our schools. As Carol Midgett, the teacher who introduced me to the idea of buzzword soup, writes, "The challenge is to make certain that I do not fall in. When sharing with others, it is important to know the meaning they attach to these words/phrases so that our dialogue produces mutual learning."

Where does your building stand when it comes to buzzwords? Are you right at the edge of the bowl? How did you get there?

More importantly, how are you going to crawl out? ◆

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Join the conversation with Bill by logging into the NSDC members-only area and selecting the Blog link on the front page.

Overuse of buzzwords can lead to weakened meanings.

IDENTIFYING AND NURTURING TEACHER LEADERS

Is there a leader in the house?

BY CARLA THOMAS McCLURE

As professor and vice chair at a medical college, professor John Rogers sought to identify potential leaders among medical school faculty. He had observed that individuals' internal needs and motivations seemed to be related to their potential as teacher leaders, so he reviewed literature from several disciplines to see if research supported his observations. He found that individuals' internal needs for responsibility/growth and achievement consistently distinguish leaders from nonleaders.

How was the literature review conducted?

Rogers examined studies on leadership aspiration and ability in teaching, engineering, medicine, astronomy, business, and the military. He included primarily studies that involved both leaders and nonleaders. To frame his review, he combined the Porter/Maslow and Herzber motivation theories to create a "lens" through which to analyze factors affecting an individual's "drive to engage in leadership responsibilities beyond direct teaching."

According to Porter/Maslow, individuals are internally driven to reach for their highest potential (self-actualization), but must first meet lower-level needs for security, affiliation, self-esteem, and autonomy. Herzber identifies motivating factors (in ascending order) as recognition, responsibility, growth, work itself, advancement, and achievement. He asserts that "maintenance factors," such as salary and working conditions, are not motivators, but "prerequisites to motivation."

Rogers combined the two theories and categorized studies according to the resulting five levels of individual needs: (1) security and working conditions, (2) affiliation and interpersonal relations, (3) esteem and recognition, (4) autonomy and responsibility/growth, and (5) self-actualization and achievement.
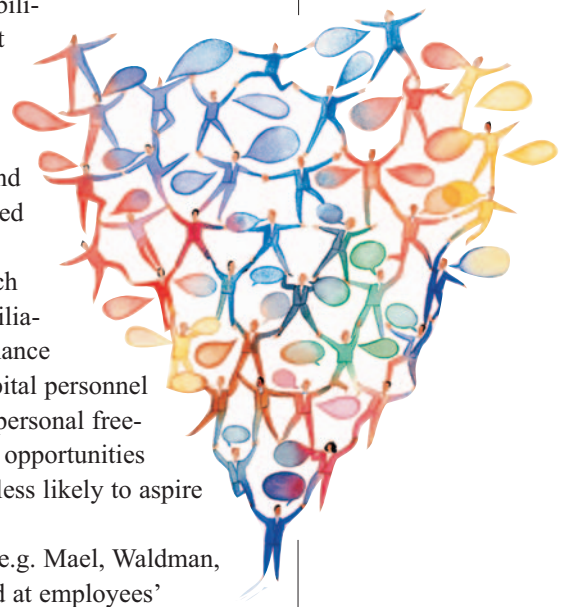
What differentiates leaders from nonleaders?

The need for responsibility/growth and achievement consistently distinguished leaders from nonleaders in several studies.

For example, Steers and Braunstein (1976) developed and validated the Manifest Needs Questionnaire (which measures achievement, affiliation, autonomy, and dominance needs) and found that hospital personnel who preferred autonomy (personal freedom and independence) to opportunities for promotion were much less likely to aspire to leadership positions.

Other survey studies (e.g. Mael, Waldman, & Mulqueen, 2001) looked at employees' need for responsibility/growth, characterized by Porter as a need for "control of work situation, influence in the organization, participation in important decisions, authority to utilize organizational resources." This need for responsibility, labeled as the need for dominance on the Manifest Needs Questionnaire, was more frequently found among those who held or aspired to positions in leadership, management, and supervision.

Correlational studies by Stricker (1989) and others support the finding that individuals motivated by a need for achievement are more likely than others to seek and hold leadership positions.

What role does work culture play in nurturing leadership potential?

Rogers hypothesized that poor working conditions might prompt individuals to "withdraw from job involvement" and focus on lower-level needs rather than seek greater responsibility. He found no studies that directly addressed this issue but notes that Orpen (1979) found that "job enrichment that increased autonomy led to significant increases in job satisfaction, job involvement, and internal motivation."

What messages are relevant to coaches?

Based on his literature review, Rogers suggests the following for those seeking to identify and nurture potential teacher leaders:

- Use self-assessment questionnaires and guided reflection to help individuals explore their capabilities, interests, and aspirations.
- Establish an educational "champions" leadership development program to support the continual identification and recruitment of teacher leaders.
- Seek institutional support for building a culture of continual improvement and providing time for training and sustained action.

Reference

Rogers, J. (2005, November). Aspiring to leadership: Identifying teacher-leaders. *Medical Teacher, 27*(7), 629-633. ◆

Rogers' review has pointers for the school-based coach in nurturing teacher leaders.