

5 Ways Administrators Can Serve as Instructional Coaches



As an administrator, it is easy to fall into this trap of being a *manager* who does (almost) nothing but take care of day-to-day (or weekly) issues/problems/events as they arise.

As current administrators, we can definitively say...We owe our students and teachers more than being *just* managers.

All administrators, regardless of position should serve as managers, leaders, *and* instructional leaders...or instructional coaches who work alongside teachers to continuously move instruction/learning forward for the benefit of the students. According to [Jim Knight](#), "When teachers receive an appropriate amount of support for professional learning, more than 90% of them embrace and implement programs that improve students' experiences in the classroom" (p. 4). The majority of this support *must* come from administrators, as (1) they interact with teachers on a consistent basis and not just during defined professional development hours, (2) teachers often look to them for support/resources/approval regarding their instructional shifts, and (3) a sustainable culture of learning is unlikely to exist if administrators are not modeling and leading the way.

That being said...Here are five ways we are working towards serving our district as instructional coaches:

1. Build relationships: Before we can do anything else, we need to spend time developing relationships. There are four ways we can build relationships: be visible, provide stakeholders with a voice, build trust, and recognize and reward successes. It is hard to offer feedback or suggestions when teachers/leaders do not see you in the classrooms engaging with students. As leaders, we also need to understand everyone has different learning styles, and we need to respect the needs of adult learners. We cannot expect all of our staff members to be at the same level. Instead, we need to meet our teachers where they are, and the only way this is possible is to truly understand our staff's knowledge and skills. Take the time to get to know people – their strengths, areas for growth, values, and approaches to their roles. Read more about these ideas in practice in [4 Ways to Develop Relationships](#).

2. Actively Listen: In a district of four schools, one of Ross's ongoing goals is to spend time in *at least* a handful of classrooms in each school on a weekly basis. While this time gives him valuable firsthand knowledge of what the district's instruction looks like, it also provides him with opportunities to interact with teachers. Teachers regularly use these occurrences to talk to him about their classrooms/students, the district direction, and/or education in general. While he is always excited to interact, he has to continuously remind himself that he will (1) learn more, and (2) better establish relationships with others when he actively and deeply listens to what others have to say. This intention is much easier said than done. According to [Stephen Covey](#), "Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply. They're either speaking or preparing to speak. They're filtering everything through their own paradigms, reading their autobiography into other people's lives" (p. 251). Nonetheless, if administrators wish to work *with* teachers, we must do less talking and more listening (and understanding, observing, etc.) to uncover "where they are" and what supports are needed to assist in moving forward.

3. Ask questions/Model the use of evidence: Teachers (and leaders) literally have data and evidence everywhere. As a building or central office leader, provide structures and supports so teachers (and leaders) can access and utilize the data. Whether you are working with a single teacher on improving Tier 1 instruction or a leader on a remediation program for state testing, always ask the question, "What does the data tell us?" For systemic improvement and sustainable data teams, consider your role in the data team. Learn more about [Data Wise](#) and a building-wide data review process in this [post](#).

After reviewing the data/evidence, work with teachers (or leaders) to develop a lesson idea or action plan. Support teachers during implementation, and provide feedback along the way. When working with teachers or leaders on a specific strategy or focus area,

remember to check-in. Inquire about what is working, what challenges are evident, and how you can help! Provide specific feedback throughout the process.

4. Allocate resources: Building and district leaders need to allocate human and financial resources for teachers to engage in professional learning opportunities. As leaders, it is important to earmark district or grant funds for teachers to attend local, regional, and national conferences so teachers can develop content and pedagogical knowledge while developing professional learning networks. We recently sent a team of 12 teachers and leaders to our state technology conference, PETE&C. When you as a leader encourage others to attend, and then attend alongside them, you send a strong message about the event.

In addition to financial resources, provide opportunities for professional learning with colleagues. For example, we partnered with other local districts to create the [Bucks-Lehigh EduSummit](#), a professional learning and networking experience. We also run a [Summer Academy](#) with interest-based sessions that are facilitated by our own staff members. Doing this builds capacity and promotes leadership. Remember when planning professional learning to consider the [Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning](#). Additionally, providing the opportunity for substitute coverage for a pull-out work session, a peer observation, or structured Data Dive can support teacher in this work.

5. Actively participating/learning during the PD days: During district professional development days, a lot can be learned about a district's culture by observing the ways in which administrators interact with teachers while instruction is taking place. One scenario involves all administrators sitting together at a separate table/location, as if they belong to an exclusive club in which checking/responding to emails is prioritized over teacher learning (and yes, we are both guilty of checking our email during these times). These actions tend to alienate teachers who may *already* rather be somewhere else. Best case scenario, we should all be seated amongst teachers, interacting with them as equals, and working together to learn, discuss, reflect, etc. These actions send the message that (1) administrators wouldn't have the teachers do anything they wouldn't do themselves, and (2) the district stands for *shared ownership* of learning and doing what is right by students, regardless of job title. Also, from our experiences, we can say with certainty that teachers do recognize the level of administrator involvement during professional learning. After all, if the leaders don't "get it," it's probably not going to happen.

In the End

Progress takes place if/when we are intentional about making it happen, not when the majority of our time is spent on daily managerial tasks with a few forward-thinking ideas sprinkled in arbitrarily.

For the benefit of all stakeholders, and due to the increasing demands being placed on teachers (e.g. Common Core) it is now a non-negotiable that administrators also function as instructional leaders or instructional coaches who prioritize these forward-thinking ideas and the teaching that takes place in classrooms on a daily basis.

After all, *this* is where students and teachers spend the majority of their time...in the classroom.

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