In *The Definitive Guide to Instructional Coaching*, best-selling author and coaching guru Jim Knight offers a blueprint for establishing, administering, and assessing a robust instructional coaching program laser-focused on every educator’s ultimate goal: the academic success of students.

Jim Knight’s humanity, depth of knowledge, insight, respectful communication, and systemic coherence quickly led me to realize that this is a definitive guide to virtually every form of leadership in schools and classrooms. It deserves an expansive readership!

—Carol Ann Tomlinson, EdD, William Clay Parrish, Jr. Professor Emeritus, University of Virginia

Jim has combined his knowledge of the science of coaching with his acute insights regarding the inner workings of schools, earned from decades of on-the-ground experience, to provide us with a comprehensive and transformational view of what coaching can and should be. The system Jim has laid out here is a model for schools that wish to become communities of learners.

—Robert J. Marzano, Chief Academic Officer, Marzano Resources

Jim Knight’s work around coaching occupies a unique place in efforts toward educational equity. In *The Definitive Guide to Instructional Coaching*, he shows us how to hold space for teachers and stand shoulder to shoulder with them so they can engage in authentic self-reflection, instructional decision making, and collaborative inquiry in order to improve their practice in the service of our children.

—Zaretta Hammond, author of *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*

I have seen Jim in action as a coach, and in this book, the king of coaching has revealed his soul, secrets, and success.

—John Hattie, Emeritus Laureate Professor, Melbourne Graduate School of Education

Jim Knight’s *The Definitive Guide to Instructional Coaching* provides a wealth of information that’s well researched, sound and wise, and actionable. New coaches should definitely have this book in their collection, as it will surely provide a springboard for reflection and learning.

—Elena Aguilar, author of *The Art of Coaching*

*The Definitive Guide to Instructional Coaching* is beautifully written, elegantly simple, fabulously displayed. Coaching made powerful. If you are a coach (which should be just about all of us in education), read this inspiring book to find out more deeply who you are, what you do, and where you work.

—Michael Fullan, Professor Emeritus, OISE/University of Toronto

“The definitive guide”? If anyone else claimed this, I’d scoff! But Jim Knight has set the standard for years, and this book is a culmination of his important work.

—Michael Bungay Stanier, author of *The Coaching Habit*
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Preface

There is a degree of hubris, I admit, in choosing to call this book *The Definitive Guide to Instructional Coaching*. But that title has served as the northern point on a compass, guiding me as I write. I have tried to create a document that lives up to it, providing a concise yet comprehensive review of the beliefs, processes, knowledge, and skills that instructional coaches can use to guide their practice and administrators can employ to create a coaching program that has an unmistakably positive impact on students.

Coaching is essential for the kind of growth we need to see in schools. Real learning occurs in real life, when people work hard to solve real-life challenges. Workshops, books, and webinars can provide us with an overview of ideas, but we only adopt and internalize these ideas when we apply them to our professional practice. That kind of real-life learning requires goals that matter deeply to us and to our students, both because they are based on a clear understanding of reality and because we have chosen them for ourselves.

Coaches help with each aspect of this kind of learning by partnering with teachers to (1) establish a clear picture of reality; (2) set emotionally compelling, student-focused goals; and (3) learn, adapt, and integrate teaching practices that help teachers and students hit goals. That kind of comprehensive learning is next to impossible for busy educators to achieve without a coach.

Coaching done well is an excellent investment in children’s lives. Successful coaches need to be experts at instruction while at the same time honoring the expertise of the professionals with whom they collaborate. They need to understand the complexities of personal change and communicate in ways that provide the support others need to change. Coaches need to lead, listen, and partner with teachers to move through a coaching process. They
also need to work in settings that are organized to give them the best chance to succeed.

I address all these ideas and more in my discussion of the Success Factors that are the focus of this book. These factors are the product of more than 25 years of research on instructional coaching. I have summarized that research, conducted first at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning and now at the Instructional Coaching Group (ICG), in many books— including Coaching Classroom Management (2006), Instructional Coaching (2007), Unmistakable Impact (2011), High-Impact Instruction (2013), Focus on Teaching (2014), Better Conversations (2016), The Impact Cycle (2017), and The Instructional Playbook (2020)—and in many journal articles.

This book collects the most vital ideas from all those publications in one volume. More important, however, it is intended to describe what we have learned about coaching since those materials were published. Over the years, my colleagues and I at ICG have interviewed hundreds of educators from across the world. I have also had the good fortune to work directly with many excellent coaches in various research studies I have led in Lawrence and Topeka, Kansas; Beaverton, Oregon; and Othello, Washington. Many of the strategies and skills you will read about here were developed by people who dedicate each day to having an unmistakably positive impact on students.

This book also summarizes the work of researchers and authors who have influenced the way I understand change, conversations, psychology, instruction, organizational development, learning communities, and so forth. This research places coaching in the broader context of recent insights into professional learning.

Perhaps most important, this book documents the many mistakes we have made and what we’ve learned from those mistakes as we’ve developed our understanding of instructional coaching. If you were to read everything I’ve ever written in order of publication, you would undeniably read a chronicle of mistakes and lessons learned. I share mistakes encountered along the way here so that you can avoid making them in your practice. As Eleanor Roosevelt famously said, “Learn from the mistakes of others. You can’t live long enough to make them all yourself.” In that spirit, I hope this guide helps you to make your own mistakes and learn your own lessons. Let’s keep the learning going, because when we learn, so do our students.
Learning Map for Introduction

Seven Success Factors for Instructional Coaching

What has to be in place for coaches to flourish

- Partnership
- Communication
- Leadership

Based on connecting through involving employing a

Ensuring success through using an gathering data

System support Instructional playbook Coaching process

ADVANCE COPY—NOT FINAL. NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION.
Megan Greene will never forget her first week as a K-6 instructional coach in Franklin, Indiana. As she watched all her colleagues get ready for their classes, she sat at her desk not knowing what to do. She missed being in the classroom, feeling at home with her students and doing what she thought she did best in the world.

When Megan was in high school, she didn’t really know what she wanted to do for a living. She had good grades, played sports, and had friends, but, in her words, she “was nothing to write home about.” In the end, she decided to attend Ball State University, famous for its educational program, and study to become a teacher.

Something clicked when Megan started her studies. “I was no rock star,” Megan says, “but when I stepped into the classroom, I knew that the passion was there, and I had such a strong desire to grow as a professional.” When she finally became a teacher, Megan felt for the first time that she was doing something well: “My work and students brought joy to me that didn’t compare to anything else,” she says. For 15 years, Megan’s classroom felt like home, and she flourished.

When a job posting came up for an instructional coaching position in Megan’s school district, her coworkers told her it was the perfect fit, but she decided that she couldn’t give up the classroom. Then two new positions were posted for instructional technology coaches, which seemed an even better fit for Megan—after all, she loved to learn, loved technology, and loved the idea of helping teachers use technology effectively in the classroom. This time she couldn’t resist, so she applied for one of the positions and was hired. After 15 years in the classroom, she was going to be an instructional coach.

Administrators knew that their coaches and principals would need professional development for their coaching to be effective, so they asked all coaches and principals in the district to attend the Instructional Coaching Group’s five-day Intensive Instructional Coaching Institute in Lawrence,
Kansas. (We—and when I say “we” in this book, I’m referring to my ICG colleagues and myself—don’t use the term intensive lightly here; the institute addresses much of the content in this book.)

While Megan was grateful for her administrators’ support, she still wasn’t sure she’d made the right decision. She loved the chance to be with her colleagues and appreciated the content and activities the institute offered, but at the end of the day, she felt lost. Sometimes, after putting on a brave face during the workshop, she would go up to her room feeling so confused and sad that she would burst into tears.

Not long after returning from the workshop, Megan told her husband she was seriously considering quitting her coaching job because she really wasn’t sure she could succeed. He reminded her that she had always found a way to move forward before. That night, Megan made up her mind: No matter what, she wasn’t going to quit. She would give coaching her best.

Back at school, Megan started by going into classrooms and asking teachers how she could help, explaining that they would be helping her by letting her help them. She also sought out the support of other coaches in her district who were experiencing doubts and insecurities about coaching similar to hers. Bit by bit, teachers became more comfortable in their coaching roles. Megan soon found teachers who were willing to move through the Impact Cycle (see Chapter 4), and she started to implement many of the ideas she’d learned at the institute. “Ultimately, coaching changed my life and literally hundreds of other lives in just one school year,” she says.

The results clearly show that Megan was a successful coach. She completed 46 deep coaching cycles, with 100 percent of participating teachers expressing interest in completing another cycle and saying they would recommend coaching to colleagues. Four veteran teachers with over 35 years’ experience each completed a cycle. A total of 556 elementary students and 2,630 secondary students were affected. At the end of the year, Megan wrote us to describe how she felt about being a coach: “I could not be more thankful for the people who believed in me when I didn’t believe in myself. I’m no longer lost—I’m reborn!”

Like Megan, thousands of educators go from teaching to coaching only to find themselves doubting their decision. Unfortunately, as we will see in future chapters, not all stories end as happily as Megan’s. When coaches don’t
receive support or learn and practice the knowledge and skills they need, they often aren’t successful. Coaching is a completely new position for most people, so they need guidance if they are to have the impact they dream of having.

All instructional coaches need a tool to help them know where to start and what to do, and it is my hope that this book can be that tool. I wrote this book to summarize what I have learned over more than 20 years studying instructional coaching and in my ongoing work with over 150,000 instructional coaches on six different continents. (You can read a summary of my findings at www.instructionalcoaching.com/research.) I’ve organized what I’ve learned into seven Success Factors that every coach, coaching director, and administrator should understand and be able to apply to create a powerful coaching program (see below). These factors are essential not only for coaching to be effective, but for any change initiative to succeed.

1. The Partnership Principles
2. Communication skills
3. Coaches as leaders
4. The Impact Cycle
5. Data
6. The instructional playbook
7. System support


**Who You Are**

**Factor One: The Partnership Principles**

In Chapter 1, I explain that the way coaches interact with others frequently determines whether their coaching is successful. If coaches see themselves as superior to others, they may find that others are not interested
in hearing what they have to say. As Massachusetts Institute of Technology
organizational development specialist Edgar Schein (2009, 2013; Schein &
Schein, 2018) has explained, people often resist ideas shared with them if they
perceive that the status they think they deserve is not being acknowledged.

Carl Rogers first popularized the phrase “way of being” in his 1980 book
of the same name. Put simply, “way of being” refers to how we are in the world
with others, including whichever set of principles we live by. (And whether
we realize it or not, every one of us lives according to a set of principles.) The
following seven Partnership Principles (described at greater length in Chap-
ter 1) form one such set that can serve as a foundation for mutually humaniz-
ing learning conversations:

1. **Equality:** I believe that everyone has the same worth. No individual or
group is more valuable than any other.

2. **Choice:** I recognize that I will only get commitment from others when
I honor their autonomy. As Tim Gallwey says, “When you insist, I

3. **Voice:** I act in ways that make it easy for my conversation partners to
share their ideas, thoughts, and emotions because I want to know what
they have to say.

4. **Reflection:** I understand coaching as a meeting of the minds that can
involve (a) looking *back,* to consider how something did or didn’t work;
(b) looking *at,* to consider how things are going; or (c) looking *ahead,*
by using what I know to make future improvements (Knight, 2011).

5. **Dialogue:** I ensure that my coaching partners’ ideas can shape my
thinking as much as or more than my ideas shape theirs. This means I
let go of the *need* to be right so that I can *do* what is right.

6. **Praxis:** I understand that we learn best when we apply ideas to our
day-to-day experiences. Learning happens best through action.

7. **Reciprocity:** I go into every conversation expecting to learn from
my conversation partner. As Robert Half is often said to have stated,
“When one teaches, two learn.”
Introduction

Factor Two: Communication Skills

Coaching is, above all, a conversation or series of conversations focused on professional growth. For this reason, coaches need to understand both the nature of the teacher’s personal experience of change and the communication habits and skills that make talking about change possible.

As I explain in Chapter 2, all change is self-change, and coaches are more successful when they stop trying to motivate others and start trying to create the conditions in which others can recognize and realize their own immense potential. Done well, coaching fosters hope and empowers others to motivate themselves. Such coaching requires what Christian van Nieuwerburgh (2017) calls “managed conversation[s]” (p. 5). Three skills are especially important for these conversations: listening, questioning, and balancing telling with asking.

Factor Three: Coaches as Leaders

The difference between coaches who have a positive impact and those who do not comes down to leadership. In Chapter 3, I describe what leadership looks like for successful coaches and what coaches can do to become powerful forces for good in their schools. Leadership is more complex than we might think, especially for coaches who engage in equal-status, peer-to-peer conversations with others. Leadership among peers in complex organizations involves much more than a persuasively delivered call to action.

I divide leadership into two parts: leading ourselves and leading others. To lead ourselves, we need to know our purpose and principles, how to use our time effectively, how to take care of ourselves, and how to develop habits that enable us to do these things. To lead others, we need to make good decisions, interact with others in ways that expand our capacities, foster deep knowledge and deep implementation, and create alignment with others.

Often we think of leaders as almost superhuman. These heroes—Dr. Martin Luther King, Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Theresa, and others—seem like saints who have accomplished so much that we could never approach achieving similar results. And yet their fights—for freedom, health, equality, respect, goodness—are fights all of us can join. When a coach’s kindness and empathy help a teacher find self-efficacy, when a teacher’s high
expectations compel a student to believe she can be more than she realizes, when a coach’s commitment to self-improvement helps him better coach teachers so that students improve—in all these cases, coaches and teachers are engaged in the same struggle as our saintly heroes: the fight to make the world a better place. To lead with the Partnership Principles in mind is to hold up hope that the world can and will be better.

What You Do
Factor Four: The Impact Cycle

The Partnership Principles suggest a way of being for coaches, but coaches also need a structure for coaching conversations. The Impact Cycle, a deceptively simple instructional coaching cycle, is one such structure and the focus of Chapter 4 in this book. There are three stages to the Impact Cycle—Identify, Learn, and Improve (see Figure I.1):

1. **Identify**: Coaches partner with teachers to identify a clear picture of reality; a powerful, emotionally compelling, easy, reachable, and student-focused (or PEERS) goal; and a strategy the teacher will implement to try meeting that goal.

2. **Learn**: The coach describes the strategy to be implemented, often with the help of a checklist, and shows the teacher one or more models of the strategy to ensure that the teacher is comfortable with it.

3. **Improve**: The coach partners with the teacher to make adaptations until the PEERS goal identified in the first stage is met.

Factor Five: Data

My friend John Campbell, one of the leading coaching pioneers in Australia, is responsible for one of my favorite quotes about coaching: “If there’s no goal, it is just a nice conversation.”¹ If John is correct, and I believe he is, then data, which I describe in Chapter 5, are essential. They help us to paint a clear picture of our destination and reveal whether we are on or off track. I suggest that data be gathered for two main foci for coaching—engagement and achievement:

¹When I asked John about this quotation, he was quick to tell me he first heard it from coaching expert Tony Grant.
1. **Engagement**: Data can be gathered on at least three kinds of engagement: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. *Behavioral engagement* measures whether students are doing what they are supposed to be doing—that is, whether they are on task. *Cognitive engagement* measures whether students are experiencing the learning their teacher intends for them to experience from an activity. Finally, *emotional engagement* measures the extent to which students feel they belong in their school, are physically and psychologically safe, engage in positive and meaningful experiences at school, have friends, and have hope.

2. **Achievement**: To measure achievement, teachers must first identify what students need to learn during a unit or a lesson and then use different kinds of assessments (e.g., selected-response or short-answer
tests, checks for understanding, rubrics). Sometimes an informal conversation is enough to identify achievement goals, but teachers usually need more precise methods of gathering data to make the adaptations necessary for students to meet those goals.

**Factor Six: The Instructional Playbook**

Goals are essential, but they don’t mean much without a pathway to reach them. For this reason, instructional coaches must have a deep knowledge of high-impact teaching strategies. Coaches partner with teachers to identify, explain, model, and adapt teaching strategies so teachers and their students can meet goals. These high-impact strategies are often organized, summarized, and described in what I call an “instructional playbook” (described at greater length in Chapter 6).

In my opinion, every instructional coach needs to have an instructional playbook consisting of three sections:

1. A short list of the high-impact teaching strategies that coaches most frequently use with teachers
2. A set of one-page documents summarizing the purpose, research, and essential information for each teaching strategy
3. Checklists for the strategies that coaches share with teachers

The playbook is a living document that should be used to organize learning about teaching strategies. Coaches should revisit all aspects of the playbook frequently, revising the contents as they identify new and better strategies.

**Where You Work**

**Factor Seven: System Support**

When coaches flourish, it is often because they work in settings where leaders are intentional and disciplined about providing the support necessary for coaching success. Without such support, coaches often struggle to have any impact at all. In Chapter 7, I describe what a supportive coaching system entails.
Districts that support coaches ensure that everyone involved understands what coaching is and why it is necessary to address the complexities of the stages of implementation. They also hire great coaches, clarify their roles and how they are to use their time, and explain what is and is not confidential during coaching. Successful districts also create structures and cultures that promote learning. Finally, in settings where coaches are most effective, principals explicitly support coaches and, in fact, are often coaches themselves.

Final Sections of Each Chapter

Each chapter of this book concludes with four sections:

1. **To Sum Up:** A quick summary of the main ideas in the chapter.
2. **Reflection Questions:** Questions for self-reflection or group discussion about the chapter.
3. **Going Deeper:** Suggestions for additional resources to extend learning about the ideas in the chapter.
4. **What’s Next?:** Some quick suggestions for how to start implementing the ideas in the chapter.

To Sum Up

The following seven factors must be in place for instructional coaching programs to flourish:

1. A coaching way of being grounded in the seven Partnership Principles of **equality, choice, voice, reflection, dialogue, praxis, and reciprocity.**
2. Using effective communication habits and skills to ensure that teachers experience productive coaching that leads to powerful, positive changes for student learning and well-being.
3. Leadership, which involves coaches leading both themselves and others.
4. An effective coaching process such as the Impact Cycle, which moves through three stages: Identify (develop a clear picture of reality, a goal, and a strategy to be implemented to reach the goal), Learn (provide clear explanations that often involve checklists and modeling), and Improve (make adaptations until the goal is met).
5. Gathering and analyzing engagement or achievement data with teachers so that they can set goals and monitor progress.

6. Ensuring that coaches have a deep knowledge of the instructional practices they share, possibly by creating an instructional playbook.

7. System support, meaning everyone in the system works together to support the coaching process so that teachers can learn and grow and students can excel.

Reflection Questions

1. Should you work from the Partnership Principles? If so, do you or does anything else need to change? If not, what principles should drive your actions? Is anything keeping you from working from the Partnership Principles?

2. How important is communication for a fulfilling life? What is one step you can take toward becoming the communicator you want to be?

3. What is one thing you can do today to improve as a leader? Why is this important? Are you going to do it?

4. What needs to be in place for you to learn and implement the Impact Cycle?

5. What data do you gather? How reliable are these data? Do you need to expand the kinds of data you collect? Do you need to change anything about the way you collect data?

6. Do you have an instructional playbook? If not, do you think you should? How deep is your understanding of the teaching strategies you share?

7. How might the administrators in your school and district better support coaches?

Going Deeper

Since the seven Success Factors discussed in this book are largely the culmination of the research and analysis my colleagues and I have conducted during the last two decades, I hope readers will forgive me for mentioning some of my own books here. (In future chapters, many helpful books by authors other than myself make up the bulk of the Going Deeper recommendations.)
• *The Impact Cycle: What Instructional Coaches Should Do to Foster Powerful Improvements in Teaching* (2018) is the most complete treatment available of the Impact Cycle at the heart of instructional coaching. The book contains detailed chapters about each stage of the cycle and dozens of resources that coaches can use.

• *Better Conversations: Coaching Ourselves and Each Other to Be More Credible, Caring, and Connected* (2016) provides readers with an overview of useful conversation beliefs and habits for coaches. Since conversation is what coaches engage in the most, I think this book is essential, but I also hope that it will inspire coaches to communicate in ways that are more respectful, affirming, and loving.

• *High-Impact Instruction: A Framework for Great Teaching* (2013) is my most complete discussion of effective instructional practices organized around four areas: content planning, formative assessment, instruction, and community building.

• *The Instructional Playbook* (2020), which I cowrote with Ann Hoffman, Michelle Harris, and Sharon Thomas, provides the tools people need to create an instructional playbook.

• *Focus on Teaching: Using Video for High-Impact Instruction* (2014) explains why video is essential to effective professional development and how any professional developer can help teachers use video to improve their practice.

### What’s Next?

When coaches first start to learn about the seven Success Factors, they may be overwhelmed by all the books, materials, and other information they encounter. Not surprisingly, they often ask a simple question: “Where should I start?” I believe coaches need to start by developing a deep understanding of the beliefs at the heart of instructional coaching: the Partnership Principles, which are the focus of the next chapter.
Learning Map for Chapter 1

The Partnership Principles

A way of being for mutually humanizing conversation

grounded in

Reciprocity

Praxis

Dialogue

Reflection

Voice

Choice

Equality

is about
Chandra Edwards was an accomplished, award-winning teacher who chose to become an instructional coach so she could have a bigger impact on students’ lives. “If I work with all the teachers in the school,” she reasoned, “I can make a difference for a lot of kids.”

Chandra didn’t receive much professional development on how to be a coach, but she felt she knew quite a bit about effective instruction. She’d gone to workshops based on Marzano’s and Hattie’s work and even felt a bit nerdy on the subject, since she actually enjoyed reading their research summaries. In her classroom, she used cooperative learning structures like Mix-Pair-Share and Numbered Heads Together, as well as learning maps from my own book *High-Impact Instruction* (Knight, 2013). She had also attended a lot of training based on Charlotte Danielson’s book *Enhancing Professional Practice* (2007), which her district used to evaluate teachers. Looking ahead to her first year as an instructional coach, she was excited to share what she knew.

Once she got started, however, Chandra was surprised to discover that teachers weren’t all that keen to work with her despite all she had to share. She knew teachers were busy—after all, she’d been in the classroom for 18 years herself—so she decided to focus on relationship building with a few of her closest work colleagues. When she asked them if they’d do her a big favor and work with her, they gladly agreed because they liked Chandra.

Chandra was kind of relieved that she was able to ease into coaching. She wasn’t sure what she should do once she had people willing to work with her. But she had been a successful teacher, and she assumed coaching would be a similar process. Since she knew about the power of feedback, she decided to observe teachers, share her observations about what seemed to be working well in their classrooms, and possibly suggest one or two areas for improvement. In other words, she’d share “a glow and grow” with every teacher she observed and then maybe talk about strategies they could use to grow their practice further.
Right away, Chandra realized the conversations she was having didn’t feel right. For one, she was doing most of the talking, which she knew wasn’t the way to coach. But most troubling was the fact that these teachers, who had gone out of their way to support her, didn’t seem to want to hear what she had to say. “It feels like they’re looking right through me when I talk,” she told a friend.

From there, things got worse. Her friends thanked her for her time, but they didn’t implement her suggestions and said they didn’t have time to work with her anymore. At the same time, Chandra’s principal expected to see results and wanted her to work with some teachers who were really struggling. “Those teachers need to get better quickly,” the principal told her, “because they are letting down their students and the school with their ineffective teaching.”

The principal was right to say the teachers were struggling. The classes Chandra observed were boring and confusing. But how could she help the teachers if they didn’t want to work with her? Sometimes they wouldn’t even look her in the eye when she gave them feedback. Chandra came to hate having these conversations, yet she also felt pressure to show results. Her position was grant-funded, and when the grant was gone, her job would be gone, too, if she didn’t clearly show that she was making an impact.

In an effort to turn things around, Chandra asked her principal to make teachers attend workshops she was holding before school every other Wednesday. But these compulsory workshops turned out to be agony for both the teachers and Chandra. The teachers made it clear that they didn’t want to be there, and their comments during sessions all seemed to be about why the strategies wouldn’t work. Chandra pushed harder, explaining why everyone should do what she was saying, and the teachers pushed back. “Why are these teachers so resistant?” she kept asking herself.

Chandra tried other techniques. She created a weekly email for teachers about effective teaching practices. She conducted walkthroughs of teachers’ classrooms, leaving observation notes in teachers’ mailboxes. She sat in on meetings of professional learning communities (PLCs). Soon she began to suspect that the teachers didn’t like her—and worse still, that she was having no lasting impact on instruction and student learning in her school.
Though Chandra Edwards is fictional, the anecdote above reflects comments I have heard from dozens of instructional coaches about their experiences working with teachers. People go into coaching with enthusiasm, eager but unprepared for the realities of their new role, and then are surprised to find that teachers are less than excited about working with them. If coaches then become more direct in their approach, teachers become even less interested, and eventually the coaches give up.

Teachers like the ones in Chandra’s school aren’t resisting ideas but, rather, poorly designed professional development. The problem doesn’t lie with them, but with underprepared coaches who treat their teachers the way they treat students. Thankfully, by learning about the seven Partnership Principles that are the focus of this chapter, coaches can help ensure that teachers welcome rather than resist the coaching process.

The Partnership Principles are probably the most impactful of all the coaching ideas I’ve shared over time. I created them by synthesizing theories from education, business, psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, and philosophy of science—in particular, the works of Richard Bernstein (1983), Peter Block (1993), David Bohm (1996), Riane Eisler (1987), Paulo Freire (1970), and Peter Senge (1990).

I’ve written about the principles in several other publications, including Partnership Learning Fieldbook (2002), Instructional Coaching (2007), Unmistakable Impact (2011), and The Impact Cycle (2018), and I’ve summarized them in many articles and books. The truth is, I’ve written about the principles so much that I can’t blame you if you thought, “What? The principles again?” when you saw what this chapter was about. But our conception of the principles has been transformed in recent years by both ICG’s own research and new insights gained from the literature. In this chapter, then, I describe a new way of understanding the principles.

What Is a Principle?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a principle as a “fundamental source from which something proceeds… the ultimate basis upon which the existence of something depends” (Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 2303). In other words, principles guide our actions whether we are conscious of them.
or not. For example, a person who lives by the principle “I want to live a life of service” will act differently than a person who adheres to the principle “I’m only interested in what’s good for me.” And principles are revealed in our actions more than our words: though you might think you live by the principle “I’m always honest,” for example, you may prove otherwise when someone asks, “Did you like my presentation?”

Principles provide us with a theoretical framework for being, but they are also very practical. They help us determine what to do in new or ambiguous situations. For example, if we embody the Partnership Principle of voice (see below) in our behavior, we do our best to talk and act in ways that show our conversation partners we believe their opinions matter.

Principles also help us describe both the person we are and the person we want to be. Though stating aloud that others matter doesn’t magically turn us into people who listen with empathy, it does provide us with a starting point, a way to reflect on our practice, and, often, a way to diagnose where we need to do more work so that others see that we respect them, believe in them, and have their best interests at heart.

The Partnership Principles

Equality

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights begins with this statement: “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. . . .” That same principle drives the approach that I think coaches should take when partnering with teachers. When coaches work from the principle of equality, collaborating teachers feel seen, valued, and respected and believe they are afforded the status they deserve as professionals.

To embrace equality is to believe that no one person is more valuable than any other. As Nelson Mandela said, “The world’s problems begin with the notion that some lives are more valuable than others” (Hatang & Venter, 2011). However, this doesn’t mean that everyone should be treated the same. People are as unique as their fingerprints, with their own individual sets of strengths, needs, characteristics, and histories, so it would be unfair and
ineffective to treat them interchangeably. Indeed, if we work from the belief that everyone is equally valuable, we should feel compelled to support policies and practices that differentiate for each person.

**Equality and resistance.** In their landmark book *Motivational Interviewing* (2013), about an approach to therapy that is grounded in the principle of equality, William Miller and Stephen Rollnick write that few people “appreciate…the extent to which change talk and resistance are substantially influenced by counseling style. Counsel in a directive, confrontational manner, and client resistance goes up. Counsel in a reflective, supportive manner, and resistance goes down while change talk increases” (p. 9). When we work from the principle of equality, we see the unique aspects of each person. We don’t see others as stereotypes—a new teacher, a special education teacher, a resistant teacher; instead, we see Keysha, Suzanne, or Kurt. We affirm, we show respect, we listen, and, perhaps most important, we remain fully present in conversations because we believe the other person counts.

Saying we believe in equality is easy, but our words can give us away if we don’t live up to them. In the many workshops I’ve led, the way people talk suggests that they are only able to pay lip service to equality as a principle. Questions like “What if the teacher doesn’t take my advice?” “What if the teacher’s opinion is wrong?” and “What if the teacher picks the wrong strategy to move toward the goal?” are really telegraphing that their suggestions are always superior to the teachers’ and that the teachers should always implement them.

While our experience and expertise may enable us to see things that others don’t, research suggests that our observations aren’t as accurate as we think. Most of us of tend to overestimate the value of our insights, for example (Buckingham & Goodall, 2019). Further, telling people what to do creates dependency by communicating that we don’t think they are capable of solving problems on their own.

**Equality and moralistic judgment.** We violate the principle of equality when we moralistically judge collaborating teachers, thinking or even claiming that they are not as good as we are. In his book *The Six Secrets of Change* (2008), Michael Fullan describes moralistic judgment, which he calls *judgmentalism*, as follows:
Judgmentalism is not just seeing something as unacceptable or ineffective. It is that, but it is particularly harmful when it is accompanied by pejorative stigma, if you will excuse the redundancy. The advice here, especially for a new leader, is don’t roll your eyes on day one when you see practice that is less than effective by your standards. Instead, invest in capacity building while suspending short-term judgment. (p. 58)

Moralistic judgment contradicts equality by placing others below us. That creates a gap between us and them that kills intimacy and prevents learning. We don’t run to get help from someone who will roll their eyes when we talk (and as I’ve heard Michael Fullan say in his presentations, there are many ways to “roll your eyes” without using your actual eyes).

Avoiding moralistic judgment does not mean avoiding reality. A clear picture of reality is essential for growth and learning. We can talk about reality and avoid judgment by communicating that we respect and believe in the teachers with whom we work. During a conversation based on equality, there is energy, openness, and a mutual sharing of ideas in part because the coach believes teachers should choose their paths for themselves.

Choice

When coaches embrace the principle of choice, teachers make most, if not all, of the decisions about changes to their classrooms. There is freedom in the conversation that isn’t possible when coaches try to control what teachers do. When a conversation feels “off” or “out of sync,” it is often because collaborating teachers don’t feel they are free to say, do, or think what is on their minds.

**What the research says about choice.** Working from the principle of choice is not just a nice thing to do but a practical necessity. More than three decades of research has shown that telling professionals what to do without giving them a choice almost always results in failure. Researchers such as Teresa Amabile, Regina Conti, Heather Coon, Jeffrey Lazenby, and Michael Herron (1996); Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (2017); and Martin Seligman (2011) all consider autonomy to be essential for motivation. Deci and Ryan characterize the conclusions they’ve drawn from decades of research as social determination theory—namely, the idea that people feel motivated when they
The Partnership Principles

(1) are competent at what they do, (2) have a large measure of control over their lives, and (3) are engaged in and experience positive relationships. The theory posits that the opposite is also true: when people are controlled and told what to do, are not in situations where they can increase their competence, and are not experiencing positive relationships, their motivation will be “crushed” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68).

A report from the Institute of Educational Sciences (Malkus & Sparks, 2012) summarizes research showing the importance of teacher autonomy:

Research finds that teacher autonomy is positively associated with teachers’ job satisfaction and teacher retention (Guarino, Santibañez, and Daley 2006; Ingersoll and May 2012). Teachers who perceive that they have less autonomy are more likely to leave their positions, either by moving from one school to another or leaving the profession altogether (Berry, Smylie, and Fuller 2008; Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff 2008; Ingersoll 2006; Ingersoll and May 2012). (p. 2)

Yet despite the important role of choice, research suggests that autonomy is decreasing for almost all teachers (Malkus & Sparks, 2012).

**Why choice is important.** Choice is essential for at least three reasons. First, top-down models of change usually do not work. Telling professionals what they have to do might yield compliance, but not commitment (Deci & Flaste, 2013). Many educators have experienced top-down initiatives that were rolled out with a lot of fanfare but wound up having little impact on how teachers teach and how students learn.

Second, controlling other people is dehumanizing. As Donald Miller has written, “the opposite of love is . . . control” (2015). Our ability to make choices largely defines our humanity. When we tell people they have no choice, we take away their ability to choose to commit—and, more important, to think for themselves. “Saying no is the fundamental way we have of differentiating ourselves,” writes Peter Block. “If we cannot say no, then saying yes has no meaning” (1993, p. 29).

Finally, choice is essential for accountability. We might think that accountability refers to people doing what they are told, but I refer to this as irresponsible accountability because it leaves out the crucial factor of personal responsibility. A few years back, at our intensive coaching institute in
Kansas, one instructional coach painted a vivid picture of what irresponsible accountability can look like in our schools: “Our principal went to a teacher to talk about her students’ low achievement scores,” she said. “When the principal raised the topic of the scores, the teacher pointed out that she was implementing the program the district had told her to implement. ‘I did everything I was told to do, and I did it with fidelity,’ she said. ‘If my students aren’t doing well, I’m not the problem—it’s your program.’”

**Responsible accountability** is different. When educators are responsibly accountable, their professional learning has an unmistakable impact on student learning, making them accountable to students, parents, fellow educators, and other stakeholders. Further, at the individual or school level, responsible accountability represents a genuine commitment, both individually and collectively, to professional learning and growth—a recognition that, to have learning students, we need to also have learning teachers, learning coaches, and learning administrators. In short, responsible accountability is essential for professional learning—and it isn’t possible without choice.

**What choice is not.** Research suggests that choice is essential, but that’s not the same as saying “anything goes.” Choice does not mean that teachers can bully students, lose assignments, or be toxic members of a team. Choice also does not mean that teachers can choose to ignore district initiatives, skip over nonnegotiables, or stop learning. Choice need not lead to incoherence, either. Indeed, true coherence requires commitment, and commitment requires choice. There will be better implementation and deeper commitment to coherence when teachers have an authentic voice in making the decisions that matter most to them.

Instructional coaching done well produces measurable improvements that lead to better learning and better lives for students. It also ensures that teachers set their own goals, choose the strategies they’ll use to meet those goals, monitor progress, and determine for themselves when their goals have been met. Further, coaches honor teacher autonomy by ensuring that teachers’ voices are heard.

**Voice**

When coaches work from the principle of voice, they listen to teachers because they believe that their opinions matter. Teachers’ thoughts, words,
ideas, and emotions genuinely shape the conversations and actions that occur during coaching.

Voice is the natural outcome of a commitment to equality and choice. If coaches truly see their collaborating teachers as important, and if they are truly committed to teachers making the decisions about what happens in their classrooms, then naturally coaches need to hear what teachers think. As Quaglia and Corso (2014) have noted, teachers should be “the subject of their activities, not the object of someone else’s” (p. 2).

Unfortunately, truly hearing someone else has become increasingly rare. The famous people we watch communicating on our various screens rarely listen carefully, and interruptions are the norm. Too often it’s the loudest voice, not the wisest, that wins the argument. This is because people associate the loudest voice with confidence. And if we are struggling to hold things together ourselves, we can be drawn to confidence, even arrogance, because it makes us feel like those who exhibit it have a way out of whatever complex challenge we are facing. But arrogance often leads to simplistic thinking, and the complex work of inspiring students to learn and grow is rarely addressed with clichés and quick fixes.

Unfortunately, evidence suggests that most of us aren’t really interested in hearing others’ opinions. Despite social media’s potential for democratizing discourse around important topics, in reality, it often seems more about pushing out a carefully crafted message than taking in what others are saying. It is about voice, but only my voice.

Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman (1999) surveyed more than a million employees and interviewed more than 80,000 managers to create a short list of factors that ensure an engaged, successful, happy, and productive staff. One of those factors was voice. Successful employees, they found, answer yes to the question “At work, do you feel like your opinions count?”

Gallup researcher Shane Lopez explored the idea of voice further. He surveyed doctors, nurses, truck drivers, restaurant employees, miners, teachers, and other workers to find out whether they felt their voice mattered at work. The day before Gallup released his research, Shane and I happened to meet at a little restaurant in Lawrence, where we both lived. When I asked him about his findings, he leaned across the table and said, “You won’t believe who felt that their voice counted the least. Teachers.” As Shane and Preety Sidhu write
in their paper about their research on voice, “Despite having higher engagement than the national average, teachers are the least likely of all occupations to say ‘at work my opinions seem to count’” (Lopez & Sidhu, 2013, para. 7).

And teachers are not alone in feeling like they don’t have a voice in school. As Quaglia and Corso (2014) have noted, student voice is also “not yet a reality in most classrooms and schools.” Quaglia and Corso partnered with Pearson Education to conduct a national survey of over 56,000 students in grades 6 through 12. The results showed that only 46 percent of students felt they had “a voice in decision making at their school” and only 52 percent believed “that teachers are willing to learn from students.” A mere 45 percent of students considered themselves “valued members of their school community… even though 94 [percent believed they could] succeed and 67 [percent saw] themselves as leaders” (p. 2). Quaglia and Corso summed up their findings as follows:

There may be thousands of students in our schools, maybe hundreds in any particular school, who, confident in their ability to succeed and ready to lead, feel shut out by adults they perceive as unprepared to listen to or value their ideas. (p. 2)

When I asked Russ Quaglia if there was a relationship between teacher voice and student voice, he was unequivocal: “Absolutely. When teachers don’t have a voice, students don’t have a voice, but when teachers do have a voice, students do, too—and when they do, they are five times more likely to feel engaged in school.”

Honoring others’ voices is essential, but that doesn’t mean coaches can’t share what they are thinking during a conversation. It just means they need to communicate in a manner that honors the thinking ability of their collaborating teacher. This ability to share ideas in a way that opens up conversation—to engage in a dialogue where people think together creatively—is an essential part of coaching.

Dialogue

Working from the principle of dialogue means the coach and teacher really hear each other and ideas flow so fluidly between them that both are
energized by the thrill of learning, reflection, and creation. In this way, dialogue is life-giving.

When we commit to the principle of dialogue, we embrace a way of interacting that is grounded in respect for others. We enter into conversations intent to learn from our conversation partners. In doing so, we let go of the need to force our truth onto others and choose instead to critically explore our ideas with them. Dialogue involves genuine curiosity and an authentic commitment to learning, and it is only possible when we let go of the need to be right so that we can do what is right.

Peter Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) helped me see the potential of dialogue as a mutually humanizing form of communication in organizations. Through dialogue, Senge writes, “people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (p. 3). Later, he adds that “all of us have had some taste of dialogue—in special conversations that begin to have a life of their own, taking us in directions we could never have imagined nor planned in advance” (p. 239).

The book that has most focused my thinking about dialogue is Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), in which Freire describes love, humility, faith, trust, hope, and critical thinking as necessary conditions for love.

**Love.** “Love,” Freire writes, “is the foundation of dialogue… [because dialogue] cannot exist… in the absence of a profound love for the world and for [people]” (p. 77). This is a challenging statement, in part, because the word *love* has been so trivialized that it has lost much of its meaning. My definition is shaped particularly by Thomas Oord, who writes that “to love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others… to promote well-being” (2005, p. 919). Simply put, when people “act intentionally… to promote well-being” of others, the opportunity for dialogue presents itself. Love is a prerequisite for dialogue.

**Humility.** “Dialogue,” Freire writes, “cannot exist without humility” (p. 78). Since dialogue is a back-and-forth form of conversation, we need to enter it open to changing, perhaps even expecting to change, our opinions. People
who are sure they are right and who aren’t interested in learning from others won’t experience genuine dialogue.

To be humble doesn’t mean we choose to have low self-efficacy (or worse, that we pretend to have low self-efficacy). We should believe in our ideas and be open to learning and willing to be wrong. When we approach others with a desire to hear what they have to say rather than with a desire to put them in their place, then we are moving toward a more dialogical way of being.

**Faith.** “Faith in [people],” Freire writes, “is an *a priori* requirement for dialogue; the dialogical [person] believes in other [people] even before he meets them face to face” (p. 79). Simply put, if we are going to have dialogue with people, we need to believe in them. If we dismiss them as having nothing to teach us, then dialogue is pretty much impossible.

One way to understand what it means to believe in people is to consider what it looks like when we *don’t*. If we see conversation as a one-way interaction with the goal to give advice, tell people what they’ve done right and wrong, and dictate what their next steps should be, we won’t experience dialogue. A school where professional development is designed to tell teachers what to do is often one where teachers eventually stop thinking for themselves and say to the coach, “Just tell me what to do, and I’ll do it.” When we believe in others, we see them as people who want to do good and who can teach us something. We approach them from the perspective of learners, not judges.

**Trust.** When we approach others with love, humility, and faith, trust is the natural outcome. As Freire writes, “it would be a contradiction in terms if dialogue—loving, humble, and full of faith—did not produce this climate of mutual trust” (p. 80). Trust is established by dialogue, but it will be diminished or destroyed without love, humility, and faith. “False love, false humility, and feeble faith in [people] cannot inspire trust” (p. 80).

**Hope.** “Dialogue,” Freire writes, “cannot exist without hope” (p. 80). If people have given up believing that a situation can improve and blame others or simply complain, they are not engaging in dialogue. A constructive dialogue is about what we *can* do, not why we *can’t* do things. “Hopelessness is a form of silence,” writes Freire, “of denying the world and fleeing from it” (p. 80). Dialogue, by contrast, is a conversation about a better possible future, and consequently not only requires but also nurtures hope.
Critical thinking. Finally, dialogue involves critical thinking. Drawing on the work of Bohm (1996), Peter Senge (1990) writes that the purpose of dialogue “is to go beyond any one individual’s understanding” (p. 241). Such learning involves critical thinking and conversations that push us to reflect deeply on our current reality, surfacing what Bohm calls “the incoherence in our own thought” (p. 81).

We can’t succeed at this kind of thinking on our own. We learn about our incoherence by talking with other people, through the back and forth of ideas at the heart of dialogue. It is in dialogue, Senge writes, that “people become observers of their own thinking” (p. 242)—a process we refer to as reflection.

Reflection

Coaches who work from the principle of reflection empower teachers to think deeply about what has happened in the past, what is happening in the present, and what will happen in the future. As educational consultant Lou Mycroft has said, coaching is where teachers should “do their best thinking.” As I first wrote in Unmistakable Impact (Knight, 2011), reflection can be described as having three dimensions: looking back, looking at, and looking ahead.

1. **Looking back** is reflection focused on considering how something went. Many coaching conversations involve this kind of conversation, looking back on a lesson or an event to consider what went well, what didn’t go so well, and what the collaborating teacher might want to change before the next lesson.

2. **Looking at** is reflection that occurs in the moment. For example, a teacher might decide to spend more time on a classroom discussion than planned after realizing that the discussion is leading students to some new insights. Most teachers do this kind of thinking all day, adjusting lessons as they teach so that students learn more and experience greater well-being.

3. **Looking ahead** means considering how an idea, a strategy, or a tool might be used in the future. For example, a science teacher partnering with a coach might “look ahead” to plan how students will create concept maps that deepen their knowledge, to decide which students will
work best together in which groups, or to determine how to differentiate learning for individual students.

To ensure that teachers do a lot of thinking, coaches need to resist the temptation to give advice. When coaches take a top-down approach, telling teachers what to do, they create dependency and rob teachers of the chance to think for themselves.

**Praxis**

When coaches work from the principle of praxis, learning is grounded in and shaped by the realities of the collaborating teacher’s classroom and life. Teachers are usually fully engaged in the learning because it addresses something important to them—typically better student learning or well-being. As such, praxis is learning in action.

The word *praxis* has been in use ever since Aristotle (1961) coined it more than 2,000 years ago to identify one of what he considered to be the three basic human activities: (1) *theoria* (thinking), (2) *poiesis* (doing), and (3) *praxis* (acting). The term has been used in many ways since then, but almost always to describe an experience that combines reflection and action. As I use it, *praxis* describes any experience that combines reflection, learning, and action. It is the creative act of applying an idea to an important, real situation. Praxis compels people to bring their true selves to whatever they are doing because what they are doing is authentic. You can’t fake it—either the learning is real, or it isn’t praxis.

This may all sound a little highfalutin, but praxis is by definition grounded in reality. People’s hands should be dirty, so to speak, from wrestling with ideas. Thus, praxis, as I describe it, is usually driven by a real issue a person is addressing. For example, a teacher might identify that many of her students don’t feel psychologically safe in her classroom and partner with a coach to address this by establishing and reinforcing classroom norms for safety.

Authors like Paulo Freire (1970) and Hannah Arendt (1958) have described praxis as an essential part of our humanity. In contrast, systems that take away our ability to creatively interact with ideas and apply them to our work and personal lives—that is, to what Arendt calls the “vita activa”—are dehumanizing.
Teachers who are engaged in praxis are learning and thinking through how to apply some new knowledge to real-life classroom experiences. According to Freire (1970), praxis should lead us to analyze our lives and the world around us so we can change both ourselves and the world. That is why Freire considers praxis revolutionary. “[I]t is reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it,” he writes. “To speak a true word is to transform the world” (p. 75).

Too often, we design professional development without considering the concept of praxis—we tell teachers what to do and how to do it, leaving little room for the creativity and knowledge teachers bring to school. To bring about the schools our children deserve, we need to ensure that teachers don’t turn their brains off when they walk into our buildings. To that end, professional development that is designed with praxis in mind brings the creative thinking of teachers to life. Teachers don’t unthinkingly implement what they’ve been told to implement; rather, they draw upon all they know to create something important—a great learning experience for their students.

**Reciprocity**

When coaching is grounded in the principle of reciprocity, coaches and teachers learn together. Coaches seek out and value the ideas teachers share, and teachers learn from coaches. The way coaches talk, listen, and act reveals that coaches are truly learning from teachers.

Some learning requires at least two people; it requires the second set of eyes or hands that a coach brings to our work and life. I see this during our workshops on coaching when I ask participants to coach each other on some issue. For the activity, which Michael Bungay Stanier developed and which he has generously allowed me to use, I post some of the questions from Michael’s book *The Coaching Habit* (2016) and then have partners ask them of each other. The main rule of the activity is that those asking the questions can’t speak after they have asked the questions. Each person takes turns asking questions and listening, moving back and forth through five questions.

What fascinates me about these micro-coaching sessions is that even though the coach does nothing more than ask a question and listen, participants almost always report that they find the conversations very valuable.
This has led me to wonder whether people would arrive at the same conclusions if they asked themselves the questions without a partner. But when I ask my workshop participants if people could just coach themselves, they always answer that they need another person to act as a sounding board, to listen, to nonverbally communicate concern, and to serve as an audience for their learning. The kind of learning that comes from coaching, it seems, is less likely to happen without a learning partner.

Coaches who work from the principle of reciprocity get as much as they give during coaching conversations. When they enter into these conversations curious and expecting to learn, they are usually rewarded. Everyone has something to teach us, and one of the joys of the partnership approach is that it makes it much more likely that we will learn from and with teachers. When the coach and teacher learn together, they share the joy of discovery, mutual exploration, and learning—and students reap the benefits.

To Sum Up

The Partnership Principles represent one possible set of principles to guide instructional coaching. Since one of the principles is choice, it would be staggeringly hypocritical of me to suggest that coaches must work from this specific set alone, but our research and experience do suggest that coaches will be more successful if they ground their work in the following seven beliefs:

- **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.
- **Choice**: I communicate in a way that acknowledges the professional discretion of others by positioning them as decision makers.
- **Voice**: I want to hear what others have to say, and I communicate that clearly.
- **Dialogue**: I believe conversations should consist of a back-and-forth exchange, with all parties hearing and responding to one another’s opinions.
- **Reflection**: I engage in conversations that look back, look at, and look ahead.
- **Praxis**: I structure learning so that it is grounded in real life.
- **Reciprocity**: I enter each conversation open and expecting to learn.
Reflection Questions

Equality
1. What can you do to be fully present in conversations?
2. How easy is it for you to avoid moralistic judgment? What can you do to be less judgmental?
3. What are some subtle ways that you might be communicating that you don’t see your collaborating teachers as equals? Do you think you engage in any of these behaviors? Do you want to change this?

Choice
1. To what extent do teachers make the decisions about what happens in their classrooms when you coach?
2. How do you go about explaining strategies while also honoring teacher choice?

Voice
1. Who does most of the talking when you are coaching? Do you need to change anything?
2. What do you do to ensure that you deeply understand the emotions and needs of your conversation partners?
3. What do you do to ensure that your collaborating teachers know that they have been heard?

Dialogue
1. Do you think dialogue is necessary for coaching? Why or why not?
2. Do you think it is important to demonstrate love, humility, and faith to collaborating teachers during coaching? If so, how do you demonstrate those qualities?
3. In your experience, what are the characteristics of a life-giving conversation?
4. In your organization, are teachers irresponsibly or responsibly accountable? What do you see in teachers’ behavior that supports your answer?
Reflection
1. How easy is it for you to let your teachers make the decisions about what happens in their classroom?
2. When are you most reflective? How much time do you set aside to look back, look at, and look ahead?
3. What difference would it make if you spent more time reflecting on your personal and professional life?

Praxis
1. What can you do to ensure that the professional development you provide genuinely addresses teachers’ real-life concerns?
2. What does it look like when teachers enthusiastically implement the ideas you discover and create together? What can you do to ensure that happens more often?
3. What can you do to ensure that professional development is guided by teachers’ concerns?

Reciprocity
1. Do you believe you can learn from every single teacher with whom you partner?
2. Are your collaborating teachers energized by your coaching conversations? Are you?

Going Deeper
- I first read Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1970) in a philosophy of education class when I was 19 years old. The book changed my view of the world then, and it continues to shape my thinking now. It isn’t an easy read, but it is worth the effort because it might change your life, too.
- Peter Block’s Stewardship (1993) started me thinking and talking about partnership as a model for human interaction. I now use the term partnership just about every time I talk with groups of people.
- Daniel Pink’s Drive (2009) is a must-read if you want to understand why telling people what to do almost guarantees they won’t do it. Pink’s
book offers an accessible and useful overview of more than 30 years of research on human motivation.

- Ryan Holiday’s *Ego Is the Enemy* (2016) is an inspiring treatise on why ego almost always stands at the heart of the messes we experience in life and work—a strong argument for the partnership approach to human interaction. Holiday explains why ego is so destructive and then explains what we can do to keep ours under wraps.

- Adam Grant’s *Give and Take: Why Helping Others Drives Our Success* (2014) offers an evidence-based argument for reciprocity. Chances are it will encourage you to be more generous in all aspects of your life. At least, that’s how it has affected me.

**What’s Next?**

The Partnership Principles are deceptively easy to accept. Most people find it easy to acknowledge that everyone should have a voice and that we should all learn from each other. The challenge lies in understanding our relationships as involving an equal distribution of power. As Peter Block (1993) writes, “Partnership means to be connected to one another in a way that the power between us is roughly balanced” (p. 28).

When you consider adopting the Partnership Principles, ask yourself, “Am I really willing and able to give up control? Am I committed to letting my collaborating teachers make the decisions about what they do in their classrooms?” Answer these questions by deeply examining your thoughts, words, and actions. Video can be a huge help with this kind of learning because it allows us to watch our coaching conversations and see if we listened more than we talked, gave advice, or balanced telling with asking.

Partnership can seem like a paradox, but that doesn’t make it any less true that the more we stop trying to influence others, the more influence we likely will have.
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About the Author

Jim Knight, Senior Partner of Instructional Coaching Group (ICG), is also a research associate at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning. He has spent more than two decades studying professional learning and instructional coaching. Jim earned his PhD in Education from the University of Kansas and has won several university teaching, innovation, and service awards.

The pioneering work Jim and his colleagues have conducted has led to many innovations that are now central to professional development in schools. Jim wrote the first major article about instructional coaching for The Journal of Staff Development, and his book Instructional Coaching offered the first extended description of instructional coaching. Jim’s book Focus on Teaching was the first exploration of how video should be used for professional learning. Recently, Ann Hoffman, Michelle Harris, Sharon Thomas, and Jim introduced the idea of instructional playbooks with their book on that topic.

Jim has written several books in addition to those described above, including Unmistakable Impact, High-Impact Instruction, Better Conversations, and The Impact Cycle. He has also authored articles on instructional coaching and professional learning in publications such as Educational Leadership, Principal Leadership, The School Administrator, and Kappan. Through ICG, Knight also conducts coaching workshops, offers courses on the Radical Learners website, hosts the Facebook Live program Coaching Conversations, and provides consulting for coaching programs around the world.

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