COACHING CONVERSATIONS

As coaches, we engage our partners in a results-oriented and reflective process that develops the skills, knowledge and mindsets needed to achieve educational equity. Coaching happens through conversations. Even as coaches employ additional strategies such as modeling a new practice, sharing an article or resource, or observing their partner in action, they also engage in related conversations to draw out the learning from those activities. Through regular coaching conversations, coaches support their partners to focus on their equity vision and goals, understand challenges in their practice, and to determine the most effective strategies and actions for achieving their desired outcomes. In a trusted coaching relationship, partners may surface underlying fears, concerns, and confront ineffective patterns of behavior in order to achieve transformational change. While the structure, protocol, and objectives of each coaching session may vary, the majority of conversations follow a similar trajectory: Open, Move Forward and Close.

OPEN

In each conversation, coaches begin by clarifying the purpose and focus of the conversation, asking questions like: “What do we want to accomplish today?” , “Last time we agreed that we would focus on ___ in today’s meeting.” or “Does that still feel like the most pressing topic to discuss?” Even when meetings are guided by established routines, it can still be helpful to check-in to ensure that those activities are the most useful and important things to accomplish during the conversation. During this conversation, the coach helps the partner to achieve balance between time spent on urgent needs and concerns and time spent working toward their most important goals. As a coach opens each new conversation, it is important to help the partner connect and recommit to the process by making connections to their vision, revisiting their goals, and by asking permission to dive into new topics and challenges together.

MOVE FORWARD

Once the focus of the meeting is clearly established, the coach leverages various techniques or stances to draw out their partner’s best thinking in service of the agreed upon objective. Masterful coaches learn to move flexibly among these stances, using their knowledge of the partners needs and preferences to guide their moves.

CLOSE

At the close of a conversation, the coach’s goal is to create a feeling of clarity and forward momentum that will ensure their partner can follow-through on the agreed upon course of action. And while reviewing and gaining agreement on decisions and next steps is essential, it is equally important to check-in on the partner’s affective state. If the partner is feeling nervous or indifferent about the work accomplished together, there may be additional barriers, challenges or support needs that still need to be addressed to ensure the partner is able to move forward. Finally, as the coach and partner reflect on what was accomplished during the conversation, it can be a good time for the coach to solicit feedback on how their support was helpful and understand how they can be even more helpful to their partner in the future.
## COACHING STANCES

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<th>In order to...</th>
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| Broaden or push thinking beyond the current state | **Expand**, drawing out new possibilities and imagine possible future states |  ● Could I suggest a wild idea? Can we push this thinking further? What if…?  
● How could we look at this differently? What other options do we have?  
● If you could let go of your current constraints, what would be your vision?  
● What would success look like for you?  
● What is driving your decision? What assumptions are we making? |
| Develop insights that will support them in problem-solving, self-discovery and self-directed learning | **Inquire**, drawing out beliefs, root causes and emotions |  ● What problem are we trying to solve? What is the root cause here? Why is this happening?  
● I heard you say __. What do you mean by that?  
● How are you feeling about this? What’s causing you to feel that way?  
● If you could do it again, how would you do it differently?  
● What needs to happen to reach our goals? What will help us get there? What might get in the way? |
| Validate or to build on what’s working or help someone let go of an ineffective way of working | **Affirm or confront**, Identifying patterns of behavior and connecting actions to impact |  **Affirm**  
● What is working? How can we build on this strength?  
● That really excites me because….  
● It is amazing to see this work because….  
● Your data shows that ____ is really working? What’s contributed to that success?  

**Confront**  
● Here’s a disconnect I see….  
● You’ve identified __ as important/something you care about. However, my observation is __.  
● We’ve spent time talking about this concern before. What might be keeping you from acting on that?  
● Data shows that ____ is not having the impact you intended. What needs to change to ensure success? |
| Make thinking explicit, help organize and clarify ideas and build consensus in a group | **Synthesize**, restating ideas, summarizing, grouping together like ideas, or creating visuals to represent ideas |  ● What I hear you saying is….  
● It seems like we can organize our ideas into three big categories ….  
● Let me make sure I’ve captured our conversation. I’m hearing _____. Is that correct? |
| Support a new way of thinking, enable someone to learn an unfamiliar process or help build a vision of what’s possible | **Consult**, providing recommendations, information, examples or modeling |  ● One possible approach….  
● Research indicates….  
● Our experience with successful schools….  
● My experience tells me….. |
# Planning for a Coaching Conversation

1. **Open & Clarify Focus:** What is the focus for your meeting?

   1. What will your school partner want to talk about? Who are they and what might they need?
   2. How are these objectives connected to what you talked about at your last meeting? To your equity goals?
   3. What do **you** want to talk about?

   **Based on all of this, what should your objectives be?**

   1. **Content Objectives:**
   2. **Relational Objectives:**

   What then should the 3-5 major topics of the agenda be? What roles will each of us play? Is there a meeting lead?

   Do I have a learning goal I want to work on in this meeting?

2. **Move Forward:** How will you move the conversation forward?

   - What **stances** might you leverage based on what your coachee's needs?
   - What questions could you ask?
   - What comments might be useful to make?
   - What forms of resistance might come up?
   - What can you do to avoid this? What will you do to respond?

3. **Close & Create Accountability:** How will you close and establish the next steps?

   - What will be important to summarize?
   - What might be important next steps?
   - What could be your future content objectives? Relational objectives?
   - How will these next steps tie into your goals and results-to-date?
   - How will these next steps tie into where you are in the coaching cycle?

4. **What conditions should I set up?** Are logistics (location, expectations, agenda, and people) set up optimally for the meeting to be productive?