

# PIIC News

The Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching

## Inside...

- Letter from the Executive Director, p. 2
- Book Review: *Get Some Guts, Coach!* p. 2
- Building Relationships Regionally, p. 3
- Building Relationships is the Cornerstone of Instructional Coaching, p. 4

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## Establishing Healthy Relationships Even When There is a Challenge

By Sharon Deiling and Joanne Custer, Dauphin County Technical School Instructional Coaches

Imagine walking into school in the middle of December on the first day of a new teaching assignment. Other teachers are discussing the new lesson plan format, the number of students with IEP's in their classes, the best way to embed literacy strategies in activities, and the procedure to ask for a curriculum writing day.

This sounds like a foreign language to someone who had been working in a trade on

Friday and beginning a new teaching career on Monday! Such is the situation for many teachers entering the teaching profession from industry. This, however, is the reality of "on the job" training for K - 12 educators.

The initial experiences of a new faculty member, especially when starting in the middle of a school year, can be both overwhelming and intimidating whether the teacher has just completed a post-secondary program or is entering a career and technical classroom directly from industry. Coaches scaffold the transition to teaching and are a lifeline to beginning teachers. Support for them must become a priority. Consequently, immediately establishing a healthy relationship is critical to their success and to their transition into the school wide community. In order to do so a few key ideas are helpful to remember:

- Kindness opens doors. People appreciate kindness; making personal connections can go a long way to establishing trust. Consider having a basket of simple office supplies or a welcome note ready for the first meeting with a new teacher. Inquiry of a personal nature should proceed discussions regarding teacher practice.
- Focus on listening. Listening eliminates

assumptions and provides deeper insights to target a specific need. Often people can draw their own conclusions simply by having a listening ear.

- Remain an equal not an expert. Experience is limited for a new teacher, however, life and professional experiences and recent

studies can be more valuable resources to draw upon than coaching advice.

- Keep the focus on the data

not the person. Some conversations about practice can be tough, but often the data can provide a place to start without intimidation.

- Trust is earned and must be consistently maintained. Be true to your word. It only takes one broken promise or lack of confidentiality to end a relationship which can be contagious to all teachers.

These ideas seem like common sense, but it sometimes helps to go back to the basics when challenged in a coaching connection. Good luck in nurturing all of your relationships!

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***"Consequently, immediately establishing a healthy relationship is critical to their success and to their transition into the school wide community."***



The Pennsylvania Institute  
for Instructional Coaching  
A Partnership of the  
Annenberg Foundation and the  
PA Department of Education

### Professional Learning Opportunity Dates

January 4-6, 2017  
Penn Stater  
Conference Center  
State College, PA

May 1-3, 2017  
Penn Stater  
Conference Center  
State College, PA

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**PIIC'S MISSION: To support instructional coaching which helps teachers strengthen instructional practice, increase student engagement, and improve student learning.**

## Letter from PIIC's Executive Director

When a teacher solicits support, accepts feedback, and collaborates with other colleagues about practice, there is an expressed intent to improve that practice and impact student growth. There is a desire to go from good to great and engage in professional conversations that will yield positive changes in teaching and learning. There is a commitment from that teacher to work with other experienced practitioners and share a vision that promotes and supports school wide improvement so that all students are the beneficiaries of effective instructional practice.

Effective schools encourage healthy discourse and camaraderie between and among students and their teachers. In these schools, coaches help develop personal and professional relationships with caring individuals who build community, confidence, and academic achievement. There is a supportive learning environment with open communication and opportunities for collective problem-solving; a place where competence is collaborative, not competitive; alienation is minimized; and taking risks is rewarded not penalized. Unfortunately, this is not automatic and takes time, patience, and effective leadership to create an environment that helps build teacher capacity and improve student outcomes. And, it takes trust.

*"Trust is the glue of life. It's the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It's the foundational principle that holds all relationships"* says Stephen Covey. With instructional coaches, the ability to establish trusting

relationships is first and foremost, even more important than demonstrating one's skills, knowledge base, or understanding of the coaching process. Coaches must model what trust looks like by adhering to the basic principle of establishing a trusting relationship...confidentiality.

Hargreaves and Fink (*Sustainable Leadership* 2006) contend that *"trust is an indispensable resource for improvement"* and is the *"social glue necessary to develop school-based professional community."* These very words are the instructional coach's mantra. Without trust, one's innermost thoughts, beliefs, and guiding principles cannot be shared, especially without the fear of being invalidated or the risk of being labeled "incompetent."

In the report *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement*, authors Bryk and Schneider report four ways that establishing trusting relationships helps school improvement. They assert that trust 1) serves as a catalyst for innovation; 2) facilitates public problem solving; 3) helps coordinate meaningful collective action; and 4) constitutes a moral obligation to work with one another and focus on children.

Instructional coaches are experienced practitioners who understand the challenges of school wide improvement and the importance of trust in a school. They understand that confidentiality, reliability, transparency, responsibility, and consistency are component parts of trust. It's not enough to say, "trust me." Coaches must show by their actions that

they know what constitutes a trusting and trustworthy working relationship, devoid of ego, and overflowing with passion. Instructional coaches are change agents who challenge the status quo yet are flexible enough to know that there are multiple ways to approach a situation. They honor the teachers' voices and admire the teachers' tenacity and diligence in resolving issues and problems of practice. They help teachers reach their fullest potential by not giving them answers, but by asking them probing questions that inspire deep thinking and thoughtful responses. There is no risk in discussing options or in admitting that help is needed. That's a by-product of establishing healthy relationships where coaches listen with the intent to understand, respect other's points of view, acknowledge a person's right to choose, listen more than they talk, and support each other in achieving their goals. Coaches empower teachers to step out of their comfort zone and attain higher levels of achievement. They are non-evaluative supporters who help teachers identify effective practices and, at the same time, strengthen those practices that are vulnerable.

*"Deliberate action taken by a [school] party to reduce the sense of vulnerability in others – to make them feel safe and secure – builds trust across the community"* (Bryk and Schneider). That's what coaches do!

Sincerely,

*Allen B. Eisenberg*

Please access PIIC's online resource, ***The Instructional Coaching Resource Guide:***  
[www.instituteforinstructionalcoaching.org](http://www.instituteforinstructionalcoaching.org)

## Get Some Guts, Coach!

Book Review by Gail Porrazzo, IU 14 PIIC Mentor

Not only does the bold, white, "GUTS" on the cover capture your attention, but the title of Jill Jackson's book, Get Some Guts, Coach! intentionally stirs up a question, "What does it mean for coaches to have guts?" The subtitle of the book is "6 Steps That Every Instructional Coach, Team Leader, Mentor or Facilitator Must Take to Unleash True Coaching Power." Albeit a catchy title, Jackson's stance to coaching aligns to

what the research and experts agree that "coaching is the number one most readily available tool that has the real life

power to transform the quality of teaching and the impact of teaching on student performance." Her bottom line? "Coaching must be about observable improvement in teacher skill if we expect it to have an impact on student achievement."

***"Preventative coaching is a much more efficient and effective practice for teachers and their kids."***

The book "digs into the nitty gritty" of the coaching role and

*Continued on page 3, Get Some Guts, Coach!*



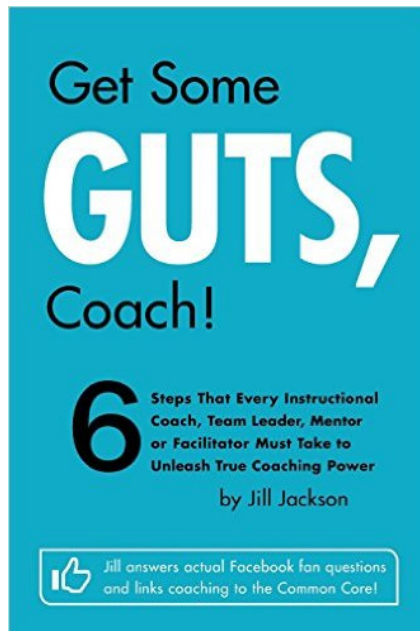
focuses on the quality of instruction for context and content. Jackson shares, “Besides forgetting to coach classroom management first, I see a second common error: Coaches jumping right into what the lesson looks like when the teacher is teaching the kids. What coaches are missing is this: without a high focus on preparation and planning, we are always going to be doubling back and trying to fix a preparation problem. Preventive coaching is a much more efficient and effective practice for teachers and their kids. We must put our instructional focus at the point of lesson inception: the teacher’s plan book, as most lessons are made or broken during the planning and preparation time.”

The 6 steps outlined in the book are *Get Focused*, *Get into the Flow*, *Get to the Dance of the Debrief*, *Get to the Heart of Teaching and Learning*, *Get Some Thick Skin* and *Get a Plan*. Throughout the book there are “Gut Check!” questions encouraging the reader to evaluate where they are in coaching thinking and practice. In order to establish a healthy relationship even when there’s a challenge, *Get Some Thick Skin* is the step in the book you need to read!

While the purpose of this book is to help teachers do two things: (1) reflect upon the impact of their teaching practice and (2) refine their teaching skills so they can increase that

impact, this book lives up to its name and provides “threads of gutsiness and straightforwardness” for any coaching practice.

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*“Coaching exists to increase the quality of the teaching to the extent that it will positively impact and increase the performance of students.”*  
**Get Some Guts, Coach!**

## Building Relationships Regionally

By Amber Molloy, IU 23 PIIC Mentor, and Virginia Glatzer, PIIC Regional Mentor Coordinator

Instructional coaches need their own community of practitioners to share ideas, validate their practice, and elicit support for their coaching work. They need the support of a connected community in order to achieve their goals. Building trusting relationships among coaches and between coaches and mentors is one way to give coaches the community they need to navigate the challenges that they often face alone.

PIIC promotes ongoing multiple professional learning opportunities for coaches at local monthly coach

networking meetings and statewide professional learning opportunities (PLOs). In each case, it’s never one-and-done. Coaches establish relationships and share their learning with their colleagues. However, when there are thousands of coaches across the state, only a small percentage can attend the statewide gatherings. One coach who recently attended a PLO commented to a mentor, “Wouldn’t it be nice if we could do something like this at the regional level?” With that nugget of an idea, the mentors from Bucks, Montgomery,

Chester, and Delaware counties decided that they could make it happen. They could provide the coaches with a space to connect with other coaches from across the region and share experiences.

The Southeast Region mentors knew that building a sense of community and trust was paramount to establishing healthy

***“Building trusting relationships among coaches and between coaches and mentors is one way to give coaches the community they need to navigate the challenges they often face alone.”***

relationships with coaches from across the region. To create a core group of coaches who knew each other, they encouraged coaches from the four IUs to build camaraderie at the statewide PLO.

Very purposefully, the mentors designed opportunities for the coaches to have authentic conversations during their combined day recognizing that their network was much bigger than their school, district, and IU. For these conversations to be honest, the coaches needed to feel comfortable sharing

real stories in a confidential setting. They needed to know that many of the coaches in the room shared the same experiences, challenges, expertise, and successes. The events of the day promoted such an environment, beginning with interactive and powerful icebreakers, collaborative learning, and interactive problem solving. The momentum continued throughout the day because of the intentional planning aligned to the team’s goal of making authentic connections and building relationships.

The day was spent with over 120 coaches refining and expanding their instructional coaching skills by broadening knowledge of useful practices while deepening their understanding of effective coaching. The instructional coaches felt energized, connected to, and supported by the other coaches in the SE region of PA; they are not alone.

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# Building Relationships is the Cornerstone of Instructional Coaching

By Dave Freidenbloom, Chestnut Ridge SD Instructional Coach

I have failed to follow sage advice, and for that I am proud. At the outset of my instructional coaching career, I was given the prudent guidance to take nothing personally. As school professionals, we are charged with the humbling responsibility to provide the best educational program possible for our students. As instructional coaches, we have an integral role in supporting effective instruction within our buildings and districts through job-embedded professional development. I have no illusions of grandeur and I recognize my sphere of influence is minor, but I carry the privilege of my responsibility as if I were Atlas. My students and their teachers deserve nothing less. This is and always will be personal.

In order to establish effective coaching practice, we need to create and maintain healthy relationships with teachers and administrators, even if it is a challenge. We sometimes deal in isolation and rejection and, of course, it becomes personal. The challenge is placing aside the personal sting, regrouping, and refocusing on the larger mission which bears far more importance than our feelings. As coaches, our success is not measured by the process but rather by the outcomes, especially seeing how teacher practice and student performance change. Through good fortune and invaluable PIIC mentoring, I have been able to develop a few core beliefs that have aided in establishing productive coaching relationships when engaging teachers in the BDA cycle of coaching.

- 1. Assume Positive Intentions:** Seems obvious, but, if you coach long enough, you may find you need a little reminder from time to time. Even if you know better, approach all relationships believing that the other party has positive intentions.
- 2. It's Personal, Not Emotional:** Yes, anger and frustration may build, but you must not react. Coaching is a precarious tightrope walk between two worlds. It takes time to establish relationships. Sarcasm or anger can irreparably harm relationships. And, teachers talk.
- 3. Be Worthy:** Effective coaching is reliant upon trusting relationships. If you want to be trusted, be worthy of it.

- 4. Be Credible:** No, we are not experts. But, understand that instructional coaching requires a commitment to research and data collection. Our work is collaborative which implies we better have something to contribute. If we stagnate, so do our relationships.
- 5. Lose Yourself:** Your victories are those magical moments when a teacher shines. Fade away and allow teachers to bask in their moment. Pass the glory.

The work that we do requires a personal investment that is both exhilarating and daunting. When the results do not equal the effort, it can be personally demoralizing. We are humans and are prone to internalizing our professional practice. What is important, however, is that we can compartmentalize these feelings and not let them enter into the sanctity of professional relationships which are the vehicle through which coaches drive positive change.

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***"As coaches our success is not measured by the process but rather by the outcomes, especially seeing how teacher practice and student performance change."***

## The PIIC 4-Quadrant Framework

PIIC advocates **one-on-one and small group support** for teachers, coaches, and school leaders using the **BDA cycle of consultation**

PIIC focuses on **collecting, analyzing, and using data** to identify student needs, assess changes in classroom instructional practice and measure student progress.

PIIC emphasizes the use of **evidence-based literacy practices**.

PIIC supports **reflective and non-evaluative** practices.

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