



ACSA/NTC Coaching and ACSA Mentoring: What Have We Learned? (*EdCal 2010 – February 15*)

ACSA Leadership Coaching Director Michael Bossi wrote the following article for EdCal. It is the second in a two-part series that began last week.

ACSA is convinced that both mentoring and leadership coaching services are needed. In fact, we encourage every educational leader to have a mentor and a coach. One relationship is focused on support, nuts and bolts and networking; the other is focused on ongoing personalized professional development that is truly embedded in one's current circumstance.

ACSA Educational Services remains committed to the proposition that formal training – classes, workshops, conferences, programs – fosters learning, can provide new skills, and helps one to see new possibilities. But, we also know that adapting, contextualizing and implementing new training is another challenge – a challenge that can be addressed through mentoring and coaching:

- Mentoring when one needs support with technical or "Level 1" change initiatives.
- Coaching when implementation calls for deeper, more complex adaptive or "Level 2" change focused on instruction and student learning

We also have learned that it is important to provide a spectrum of professional development services to meet the diverse needs of our members. ACSA has always had high quality academies, colloquiums, conferences and workshops. We have worked to expand our training to meet new challenges and expanded member demands.

We now have made more of our PD available in affordable, we'll-come-to-you packages. But, we've also learned that the rising stress, increasing accountability, higher expectations for student learning and declining resources call for a more personalized support. Hence, our development of, and efforts to expand, NTC/ACSA Leadership Coaching offered by ACSA and the New Teacher Center, as well as ACSA Mentoring.

Our younger members have helped us to become more aware that in the recent era of accountability, sanctions and "prescribed improvement," many have lost faith in other people who offer help.

Many "required trainings" are constructed to advance someone else's agenda and are not related to the leader's needs, nor do they clearly address the needs of one's school. Too often, "Let me help you improve," has been voiced by someone with a one-size-fits-all model that just

doesn't fit, or by an outside evaluator who holds a big stick behind his back.

"If this is professional development, who needs it!" I've found that many times it's not that people don't want to grow, but too often, they are so bogged down "responding," "justifying," "defending" and "making do" that it is hard to find the time or the resources to invest in themselves.

Mentoring isn't about having some tired old guy come in and tell you what to do, waste your time, or take you out to coffee. Leadership coaching isn't about having some straight-laced bureaucrat take over your school or provide you with one more set of goals and requirements. Our mentors and coaches know that more important than addressing the immediate is building the capacity, independence and self-confidence to lead on your own, in your own way.

First, mentors and coaches listen. They provide someone to talk to. It can be lonely out there. They provide support, advocacy and encouragement. They work to sharpen one's observation skills. They share experiences and resources. They ask questions to promote reflection and to build one's skills in anticipation and planning.

In this era of limited governmental resources, the message often conveyed is "help" is offered only to those entities that are "damaged," "struggling," "need improvement," are "deficient" or "out of compliance."

In the last few months we've heard, "Oh, yeah, coaching. Keep the coaches away from me. I know who gets 'coached' around here and, thankfully, I'm not a part of that group." We have had people talk to us about mentoring, asking for assurance that "no one will find out." Some have openly expressed to us their fear that even though their direct supervisor understands the desire for growth supported through mentoring or coaching, there is a fear that one's reputation as a strong, capable, independent leader could be damaged if it became known that one received mentoring or coaching.

I will confess that the first time I was confronted by such sentiments I dismissed them as an isolated example. But, as we've talked to more and more members around the state, these fears have been expressed again and again. We can't let this continue!

ACSA has taken leadership in the political arena to call for a focus upon growth and development in our students, as opposed to accountability, fear, sanctions and consequences. As we continue to cut resources for professional development and focus on what's "wrong," instead of growing the capacities of our people and building what "could be," we are making many with leadership responsibilities afraid to accept the helping



hand that is sincerely offered by ACSA Mentoring and ACSA/NTC Coaching.

We're educators, for goodness' sake. We're supposed to be dedicated to lifelong learning. Being a leader should mean each and every one of us models growth, learning and education as a personal and professional practice, as part of who we are and what we do. Being a professional should mean we reach out to one another and embrace one another, each of us committed to the fundamental premise that, as we help each other, we positively impact the health, growth and success of public education.

We're learning that the mission and vision of ACSA is more important and more relevant than ever. That mission includes a commitment to exhibit a strong belief in the importance of leadership and integrity; preserve and improve the quality of life through public education; cultivate and mentor California's educational leaders; ensure that needed resources are available at any time, in a variety of formats; and to be the primary provider of professional development and networking opportunities.

We've learned that it isn't just the state or the feds or NCLB or RTT or some other outside force that has made leaders a little hesitant to embrace one another. Sometimes, often unintentionally, the villain is us. Successful, respected region, district and site leaders need to make the time to clearly and consistently communicate to their people what it means to be a professional educator.

High expectations and accountability are needed, but the road to success will be paved by our sincere and positive investments in our people. Our words and actions must shout that we need leaders, not compliance technicians. We must demonstrate that we know judgment and evaluation don't produce sustained growth – that fear and learning are not colleagues.

Can there be less of an emphasis on compliance and sanctions and more focus on "doing the right thing" and learning from mistakes? Can we focus more on building capacity, self-confidence, independence, and upon empowering leaders to take risks? Can we take the risk ourselves of becoming more transparent, sharing the support we've received from our own mentors and coaches? Can we sincerely and consistently model our belief that the occasional mistake isn't a flaw or a weakness, but a learning opportunity that most often leads to growth? Can we make it safe to ask for and to receive the support that our young leaders so richly deserve?

Along these lines, we've learned to encourage our ACSA regions to celebrate those involved in mentoring and coaching. The content of those protégé-mentor, coach-coachee conversations must be confidential, but the fact that successful, experienced leaders are reaching out to

other leaders who are boldly investing in their own learning and growth should be recognized and honored – openly.

Our mentoring program is still very new, but enough of us have benefited from the help of others to know that the investment in mentoring will have huge payoffs. ACSA/NTC has been at coaching long enough to gather some research that clearly indicates leadership coaching:

- Helps in recruitment: Wouldn't you want to work somewhere that provided trained/certified coaches to ensure your success?
- Helps instructional focus: Coaches help efficiently address operational issues and consistently engage the coachee in efforts to improve instructional practice and lift student achievement.
- Helps retention: Leaders who have been coached are likely to be more successful than those who do not have access to coaching, and, thus, stay longer in the district and at the school.
- Boosts student achievement: Leadership matters, and leaders focused on instruction and learning have a positive impact.

We've learned that we desperately need you to help us to support the growth of courageous, energetic and dedicated educational leaders. If mentoring and coaching are really going to have a lasting, long-term impact, a culture of learning, of trust, and of focused and purposeful collaboration must be established and maintained in every region and district.

We're reaching out, offering mentoring and coaching to California's leaders. We hope that more and more take the hand that's offered.

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