

# Preface

**C**oaching Conversations: Transforming Your School One Conversation at a Time provides a simple guidebook for school leaders that will introduce you to effective coaching conversation skills, which are critical for making systemic change. These skills will significantly increase your ability to engage and motivate the members of your school communities as you work collaboratively toward total school transformation. By investing a minimal amount of time to learn and practice the valuable conversational skills outlined in this book, you will experience a significant return on your investment.

Michael Fullan's research (2006) demonstrates the importance of motivating people to change and grow through relationships based on treating others with dignity and respect. We advocate that coach-like conversations focus on building relationships through committed listening, asking powerful questions that result in deeper thinking, and utilizing reflective feedback that holds each person to high standards while at the same time preserves their personal dignity.

Charles Payne (2008) establishes the case for relational trust as the most important factor in moving the lowest tier schools to higher levels of achievement. Through ongoing, respectful coaching conversations, space is provided for personal and professional growth and change within a framework of relational trust.

The content we share in this book is based on the training materials we use in our Coaching For Results, Inc., workshops. Many people in CFR have contributed to the ideas, examples,

figures, and text of its content. The examples and running dialogues we use throughout the book come from our work with school leaders. The names of the people and some of the details of the situations have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

*Coaching Conversations: Transforming Your School One Conversation at a Time* was written for school leaders at all organizational levels. School leaders include principals and their assistants, directors, superintendents, professional development personnel, and also teachers in leadership roles, such as instructional coaches, content specialists, and lead teachers. Anyone within the school community whose role focuses on collaboration with others will be able to learn and practice the skills described in this book to transform their schools, their departments, their grade levels, or their districts.

In the first chapter you will learn what distinguishes a coaching conversation from other interactions and how coaching conversations may transform your school community.

Chapter 2 distinguishes in greater detail how coaching conversations differ from supervisory and mentoring conversations. In addition, you will learn the importance of using coach-like conversational practices even when your goal for a particular conversation may be focused on serious supervisory concerns.

The goal of Chapter 3 is learning and developing committed listening skills, which are foundational to holding genuine coaching conversations and building relational trust. Until you truly understand by listening to both the words and essence of what another person is saying meaningful dialogue and change is unlikely to occur.

In Chapter 4 you will learn the importance of speaking powerfully, which includes forming a specific intention for speaking, choosing words that align with your inner thoughts, and entering the conversation with positive intentions about the other person. You will also learn to use open-ended questions that provoke deep thinking by other people, which helps them generate possibilities that lead to actions.

Chapter 5 introduces the reader to a very specific form of speaking called reflective feedback. This useful framework offers several options for delivering meaningful feedback. It can also be used to Coach-on-the-Fly as well as to structure a conversation about a difficult topic.

Finally, in Chapter 6 you will read two authentic case studies that demonstrate the transformative power of coaching conversations. The first example describes a single coaching conversation that shows how significant insight and the beginnings of change are possible, even within the short time-frame of a single conversation. The second case study allows the reader to witness the progression toward growth and change of a school leader who has been engaged in a series of conversations with her coach over a period of several months.

Transforming your school through coaching conversations requires dedicated practice of the skills outlined in this book. At the same time, utilizing these skills must be done authentically and honestly or people may feel manipulated or that the conversation is superficial. In other words, when coaching conversations are sincere, there is a high probability that trust will grow between the participants and that pathways for growth and change will develop.

We have written this book because we have seen amazing transformations occur in school leaders as they think deeply about what they want, get clear about their purposes, and practice the effective communication skills we promote in this book. We believe that when put into practice, coach-like conversations have the power to transform school cultures and impact the quality of the school experience for all children.