

# 1

## Coaching Roles and Responsibilities

*I never teach my pupils. I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn.*

—Albert Einstein

There is nearly universal acceptance today that schools need to change. Our K–12 educational system has always been shaped by our economic and social needs. Unfortunately, Sir Ken Robinson observed, “The current [educational] system was designed and conceived for a different age” (Robinson, 2010). Most of us no longer work in manufacturing or on the farm as we did just one generation ago. Today we work in a service-based economy in which the success of companies like Amazon.com is driven by a “chief logarithmic officer.” For most of us, this is hard to imagine. Logarithms were one more aspect of math class that convinced us that math had no

## 2 Peer Coaching

meaning beyond high school. Now they drive innovation. Our life beyond work has also been transformed. Technology has changed how we communicate, access information, buy products and services, and even entertain ourselves. Who would have imagined just 10 years ago that a film about a guy who created a social networking app would be a Best Picture nominee for an Academy Award? Until quite recently, my social network was defined by how many people “liked” my Christmas card and sent one back.

Responding to these changing circumstances, business and political leaders in countries around the world have defined the

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- critical thinking
- communication
- collaboration
- creativity

skills they need and want from education. Educational and business leaders agree that there is a consistent set of skills students need to master to be successful in today’s changing workplace. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, a group made up of American business and educational leaders, reflects many ideas

commonly held by leaders around the world. These policy makers insist that students must develop skills in the four Cs:

- critical thinking
- communication
- collaboration
- creativity (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, n.d.)

Based on my conversations with thousands of educators from more than 50 countries around the world, it is clear to me that educators agree. When I have asked them to define the skills and competencies their students need for success, their lists always include the four Cs.

Most of these same educators believe that traditional education will not prepare students with those critical skills. Researchers agree. Richard Elmore (2004) found that in far too many classrooms today, student learning emphasizes

repetition and memorization; assessment typically asks students to repeat what they learned from the teacher or text by completing tests that stress recall and recognition. Educators and policy makers from across the United States banded together to create the Common Core State Standards, at least in part because of the growing consensus that traditional education was not preparing students with the kinds of skills they need for success. Even a cursory reading of the Common Core State Standards should make it clear that the authors of these standards believe there is a need for fundamental improvement in teaching and learning in ways that would help students develop 21st-century skills.

So here is the \$64,000 question: What do schools need to do if they hope to improve teaching and learning to meet students' needs? For more than a decade, I have found that Peer Coaches can play a critical role in helping teachers improve student learning. Coaches aren't the whole answer, but they are an important part of the answer.

### COACHING: GETTING STARTED

In its simplest terms, Peer Coaching is one teacher helping another to improve. A Peer Coach is a teacher leader who assists a peer to improve standards-based instruction by supporting the peer's efforts to actively engage students in 21st-century learning activities. Coaches help colleagues improve teaching and learning by assisting them to develop the necessary lesson-design skills and instructional and technology integration strategies needed to prepare their students for college and careers.

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## 4 Peer Coaching

deeper roots. The methodology dates back at least to Socrates more than 2,500 years ago. It is familiar to teachers. When prospective coaches learn about the roles Peer Coaches play, they insist that they have coached others. As one Peer Coach noted, “Peer Coaching helped give a formal name to things we’re already doing, and gave us permission to do these activities” (T. Calsyn, personal communication, September 8, 2011).

While the idea behind coaching is old and the concept of coaching is easy to understand, there is nothing simple about being an effective coach. To explore how complex the task of coaching is, let’s try to answer a question a brand-new coach raised just after she had completed the training designed to help her develop coaching skills. She was stuck and asked me, “How do I get started coaching?” What she really wanted to know was:

- What roles should I play?
- As my relationship with my peers develops, when will it be appropriate for me to play roles like expert or catalyst?
- How do I play these roles?

### Coaching Roles

If a coach expects to be successful at helping another teacher improve student learning, the coach needs a clear idea of what roles he or she will play before beginning coaching. The list of potential roles a coach might play is extensive, but a handful are key. Coaches help colleagues by:

- **Providing just-in-time training or resources** (Meyer et al., 2011d). Teachers may want their coach to help them find a great resource for a learning activity they are planning. For example, they might need a resource for an activity that asks students how to preserve a rainforest. Or they may want a bit of training on how to set up a SkyDrive so their students can more easily collaborate on a forest-preservation project with students in other countries.

- **Coplanning learning activities** (Meyer et al. 2011d). Teachers who collaborate with coaches often want to sit down for more in-depth planning. They may want a coach's assistance in revising an existing activity on preserving forests to emphasize problem solving, to engage students in assessing their own work, to recast the activity so it has more meaning to the students' lives outside of school, or to use technology so the students can share their work with the community and get feedback.
- **Modeling or team teaching to demonstrate effective teaching and reflection afterward** (Meyer et al., 2011d). I have found that teachers from all of the 50 countries that I have worked with want to see what strong teaching looks like. In fact, teachers who work with coaches often say this is the most effective form of coaching. To see strong teaching in practice, the teacher may watch the coach teach, or the coach and teacher may team-teach. Modeling is more than just showing. Typically the teacher and coach may meet before the classroom visit to define what they will be focusing on in the classroom and in their discussion after this observation. The reflection after the observation gives the teacher and coach an opportunity to discuss what occurred, how the collaborating teacher might adopt these ideas, and what kind of support the teacher might need from the coach as they adopt this practice.
- **Observing teachers and reflecting on what they observed** (Meyer et al. 2011d). At some point in the coaching relationship, after trust is established, teachers will ask their coach to observe them in their classrooms. In the reflection that follows the observation, it is important to define what worked and why it worked in order to discuss how the teacher could use what worked in other

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learning activities. These reflections also include what the teacher being observed might do differently next time. This process of observation and reflection is the most effective form of formative assessment for educators. It is their key to life-long learning.

- **Playing no role in teacher evaluation.** As we will see shortly, coaching rests entirely on building a relationship of trust between the coach and the teachers who collaborate with the coach. Nothing would destroy trust faster than having coaches evaluate their peers. A *New Yorker* article on coaching really puts the coach's role in perspective: "The allegiance of coaches is to the people they work with: their success depends on it" (Gawande, 2011).

Peer Coaches quickly grasp the roles they need to play, but before coaches begin coaching, they need to have some understanding of the environment they will be working in.

### **Understanding the Environment for Coaching**

Two-thirds of teachers and three-quarters of principals told researchers in a Met Life survey that they believed that greater collaboration "would have a major impact on improving student achievement" (Markow & Pieters, 2010, p. 11). Reading the summary of this survey could lead prospective coaches to believe that American educators understood the value of collaboration and were acting on that belief. If they drew this conclusion, they would be wrong. While most educators intuitively recognize the value of collaboration, working in isolation is still largely the norm in American schools (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Markow & Peters, 2010; Mirel & Goldin, 2012).

This conclusion may seem a bit confusing if you enter almost any school at the start of the day; you will find educators asking each other about birthday celebrations, movies, or a recent sports event. In fact, they will talk about almost anything but the craft of teaching. Despite these signs of personal friendship, there is little professional collaboration.

When I ask coaches to describe collaboration in their schools, many tell me that teachers work alone behind closed doors, and there isn't much collaboration when they come out of their rooms. For many teachers, photocopying and sharing common activities were the limit of collaboration and coplaning. Many coaches' comments echoed those of Melanie Hogan, an Australian Peer Coach, who observed that if you asked for help in her school, there were people willing to help. But for the most part, "People got on with their task in their classroom" (M. Hogan, personal communication, July 13, 2011). Let's not blame the teachers. Working in isolation is a by-product of their schools and school systems. In a study of professional learning, former Governor James Hunt concluded that schools use an "outmoded factory model of school organization," which produces "egg crate isolation" for teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 2). Rephrased slightly, Hunt argues that schools still use a production-line model of education in which individuals work in isolation to perform their part in assembling their product: students.

*Fear Factor* is a TV show that asks participants to take incredible risks and do things that frighten most of us so badly that we could not imagine doing them. Any coach who is just getting started needs to understand that there is little in the culture of most schools that supports collaboration, risk taking, or innovation. One fear factor that makes American teachers uncomfortable can be defined in four simple letters: NCLB (No Child Left Behind). Virtually every American educator understands that NCLB means student test scores must go up every year or the school will be branded a failure. More recently, teachers are concerned that the high-stakes standardized tests spawned by NCLB will be used to brand individual teachers as successes or failures. The Race to the Top program has put more pressure on school systems to adopt new systems of evaluating teachers and added another fear factor. Teachers worry that standardized test data from high-stakes tests will be the centerpiece school systems use to reward the successful teachers and deal with those who aren't successful. It is not an environment that encourages risk taking.

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Coaches also need to understand that for many educators, working with a Peer Coach, who asks the peer to take risks as they collaborate to improve the teacher's lessons and invite the coach

to observe the teacher at work, is like asking that educator to be a participant on *Fear Factor*. What the coach's learning partner hears is, "My coach is asking me to open the doors of my classroom and to demonstrate what I know and what I don't know. My coach is asking me to take risks and make mistakes in public." As one Peer Coach, Jennie Warmouth, noted, it is "hard to be willing to make mistakes in front of others, because it will be so hard to overcome this perceived failure" (J. Warmouth, personal communication, September 7, 14, 2011). Many teachers might define their fear factor as a Peer Coach who asks them to take risks and perhaps fail. Fortunately, these are challenges that a coach can address and minimize by understanding what makes a relationship with a collaborating teacher work.

## DEFINING THE COACHING RELATIONSHIP

Pauline Hunt, a Peer Coach in one of Sydney's suburbs, told me that as she begins collaborating with a learning partner, she wants that teacher to understand that their relationship will be defined by five words: *friendly*, *personalized*, *manageable*, *private*, and *supported* (P. Hunt, personal communication, June 29, 2012). While other Peer Coaches have not been quite as succinct in defining the factors that shape a coach's success, most Peer Coaches agree that these five words are critical to successful coaching. Let's take a closer look at how each of those words defines the coaching relationship and makes it successful.

### Friendly

Anyone with a career understands that friendship comes in two flavors: personal and professional. Peer Coaches will tell



you that having a personal friendship with a learning partner is important; having a professional friendship is essential. Peer Coaches often talk about the importance of using emotional intelligence or people skills. If a coach is using these skills, he or she understands that his or her colleagues must feel comfortable in the relationship if they want the relationship to be productive. Tracy Watanabe, a Peer Coach from Arizona, told prospective coaches that it “takes time and energy to build those relationships,” she insisted, “but it is the key in coaching” (Watanabe, 2011). Successful Peer Coaches from around the world have told me exactly the same thing: Without rapport and a strong relationship, coaches won’t be effective. In these same conversations, coaches described a variety of strategies to create these friendly relationships.

When many coaches meet with a collaborating teacher for the first time, they make a point of asking how the teacher is and asking about other educators or friends both know. This discussion might go on for 20 to 30 minutes before they get to anything related to teaching or coaching. These coaches are making a point of ensuring that their peers are comfortable. Other coaches who use the same strategy report that their initial conversations with peers occur over coffee, treats, or lunch.

Another key to building a friendly relationship, successful Peer Coaches believe, is to make it clear to their learning partners that they are true peers. Coaches repeatedly say that when they collaborate with another teacher, they work hard to prove they are equals who want to work and learn together to improve teaching and learning. Anna Walter, an experienced Peer Coach, insists, “You must present yourself as a peer, I am a teacher, you are a teacher and we are working together on a level playing field (A. Walter, personal communication, September 28, 2011). Knight’s (2011a) research on coaching led him to agree that having both partners share ideas and make decisions as equals is essential to a successful partnership.

Peer Coaches insist that establishing their relationship as peers requires that they create a respectful relationship with their learning partners. Experienced Peer Coaches understand that one way to show respect to their peers is to learn with

and from them. Paul Shanahan, one of the first Peer Coaches, says that learning is “always a two-way street. The coach always needs to make it clear [to their peer] that this is symbiotic, and [the coach] is always learning something from you” (P. Shanahan, personal communication, September 6, 2011). In other words, the coach needs to show respect to get respect. Successful Peer Coaches endorse this same concept. Some of them have told me that they try to be explicit about what they are learning from their collaborating teacher and how they use it. Other coaches also work hard to create opportunities for their learning partners to help them. In his article *What Good Coaches Do*, Jim Knight (2011b), agrees that this kind of colearning, which he calls reciprocity, is a part of a successful coaching partnership. Demonstrating that you are learning from a peer is one important strategy coaches use to build respect in a coaching relationship, but it isn’t some artificial step they take to build a relationship. Peer Coaches insist that the insights they gain from collaborating with their peers help them improve their practice as teachers. Learning with and from their peers is a major part of what they love about coaching and why they continue to coach.

## Personalized

If coaches want to personalize their coaching, they must understand that the needs of their learning partners must drive the collaboration between teacher and coach. This approach to shaping a coach’s actions is what makes coaching so precise and valuable and leads to improved teaching and learning. It is differentiated instruction at its best. Coaches may understand the need to focus on others’ professional needs, but it is a learned skill that takes time to develop. Coaches need a lot of experiences to avoid sentences that include “What I did...” or “In my classroom...”

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One effective way to personalize a relationship is for the coach to determine what assistance the teacher feels he or she needs. Coaches then need to focus on listening, not talk too much, and make sure to ask how they can help. In addition to strong listening skills, some coaches, like Anna Walter, have observed another key to personalize the coaching relationship requires the emotional intelligence to “listen and acknowledge their ideas, their concerns and fears” (A. Walter, personal communication, September 28, 2011).

Many successful Peer Coaches use their first meeting with a new learning partner to personalize the relationship and make it clear to the peer that his or her needs will drive the work of the coaching partnership. Alessio Bernadelli says one of his goals for this initial meeting is to ensure the “coachee really needs to feel like they have a need that they can address by working with a coach” (A. Bernadelli, personal communication, July 11, 2011). The coach and collaborating teacher typically talk about the school’s educational goals in this meeting and work to identify at least one learning activity the teacher feels she or he wants to improve to help reach these goals. The coach and teacher are defining a starting point for their relationship and making it clear that in this personalized relationship, the collaborating teacher’s needs are paramount.

## **Manageable**

Effective coaches have to work to balance the desire to improve learning with the need to keep the workload this effort imposes manageable. Coaches often note that they limit the scope of work their work with a partner because their colleague is already working at or near full capacity. You often hear teachers express this belief when they say, “I don’t have the time for anything new.” One Australian coach recognized this and tries to set reasonable goals and timeframes for action “so that my learning partner doesn’t ‘burn out’” (R. Grudic, personal communication, September 6, 2011). Strong coaches remind their learning partners that they might

suggest different strategies to reach the teacher's goals, and coaches are quick to remind colleagues that they will be there to provide support. Effective coaches also take a measured approach to improving learning that is based on their assessment of their peer's capacity and readiness. This assessment may suggest to the coach the need to move ahead, but it could also suggest the need to go slow, start small, or even back off and wait. There are other reasons that a successful coach works to create a manageable workload.

Every coach needs to be very clear in his or her own mind that coaching is not a magical cure that will dramatically improve student learning overnight. Elmore's (2004) study of school reform led him to conclude that "Changing practice takes a long time and several cycles of trial and error" (p. 38). Peer Coaches' experiences demonstrate that improving instruction is a long-term, iterative process. It takes time. While a coach may be successful with improving some aspect of learning, like critical thinking skills, on the first effort, coaches also report it is more likely their peers may engage in several cycles of improving some aspect of their practice, including trying the new practice, getting feedback, and making additional revisions before they successfully make significant changes in their practice.

The Coaching Cycle (see Figure 1.1) represents a continuous improvement process that recognizes the stress already on teachers and emphasizes improvement over time. Teachers and coaches may choose to improve a learning activity by adopting one fairly clearly defined innovation, like grouping strategies, and assessing its impact. After setting goals, preparing, and implementing the learning activity, the coach and her learning partner turn to reflection. The information gathered in the reflection process after completing each learning activity gives teachers the opportunity to think about what worked, what didn't, and how they could apply what they learned from this experience in other similar learning activities. They may also focus on what they would do differently next time. The key here is that reflection doesn't mean

**Figure 1.1** Coaching Cycle

Source: Meyer et al. (2011e).

collaborating between a coach and teacher is “over and done.” Reflection is part of an ongoing process of improvement. Reflection helps collaborating teacher and coach decide if they want to continue to work on the skill they focused on in this activity or move on to some other facet of improving learning. Even this brief description of the process of continuous improvement should suggest that dramatic improvements in classroom learning will take time. Many coaches report that they collaborate with the same teachers for years as they continue to work toward offering their students the kind of learning opportunities that will meet student needs.

Some prospective coaches have asked, when does this cycle of continuous improvement end? Judging when the relationship has successfully reached its conclusion is difficult. When I train coaches, I often use a synectic, a tool that asks participants to compare and contrast wildly incongruous items. One of these asks “How is Peer Coaching like or different from teaching rock climbing?” When I used this synectic at the Arizona Technology in Education Association’s Shift-up coaching conference, one participant observed that “When the climber gets to the top of the rock the climbing student, and their instructor, know they have been successful, but...it

isn't always so clear to the coach when they have successfully reached the end of the coaching process" (L. Foltos, personal notes, November 5, 2011). Perhaps they won't reach the end. Student data, teachers' needs, and ongoing social and economic changes that drive educational change suggest that coaching will need to be part of an ongoing process of improvement.

### **Private**

As I noted earlier, Peer Coaches play no role in evaluating teachers because that role would destroy the relationship of trust that is essential to successful coaching. This is not to say there is no communication about coaching between the coach and the school's administrators. Administrators often observe coaches and their peers collaborating, and effective coaches routinely brief the school's leaders on progress and challenges in their coaching work. Sustaining successful coaching programs requires this kind of communication, but none of these efforts at communicating is designed to be part of the process of evaluating teachers.

### **Supported**

As you read the roles coaches play and how Peer Coaches work to shape a friendly, personalized, manageable, and private relationship with their learning partners, you already see evidence of how a coach is building a supportive relationship. Effective coaches are careful to monitor how much support they are providing for their peer, because it is easy for a coach to cross the tipping point and take responsibility for the learning away from the peer. Ken Kay and Valerie Greenhill (2012) noted that technology coaches in one school district were responsible for helping teachers use technology and overall instructional improvement. "In reality, the coaches had become the 'go to' people directed by site leaders and teachers to attend to basic technology integration needs. The coaches

had essentially become high-level gophers for teachers who had adopted a ‘learned helplessness’” (p. 102). These coaches, with help from their administrators, rushed right past the tipping point; the coaches had assumed ownership of the learning happening in the coaching relationship.

Many experienced Peer Coaches, like Anna Walter, recognize that the coach needs to limit his or her responsibilities, or the teacher might “let the coach do everything; do all the work...If you want teachers to take ownership for learning, the coach can’t be the expert” (A. Walter, personal communication, September 28, 2011). Like Socrates and Einstein, effective Peer Coaches believe that the primary responsibility for learning rests on the shoulders of those learning. Ensuring that the learner is taking responsibility for learning is a key strategy coaches use to help their peers develop the capacity to improve their teaching practices. In other words, the coach’s role is to facilitate learning.

Instead of answering teachers’ questions, coaches respond with questions designed to help their peers to formulate strategies designed to answer their questions. The coaches’ role is to use inquiry to question current practices and encourage their learning partners to consider new practices and strategies. The coach may play an active role in helping the peer identify answers to the challenges they face, but ultimately the peer is making decisions and choosing a course of action. In this sense, Peer Coaching is very much like teaching rock climbing. As one coach noted, “At some point the person learning to climb has to be independent; so the instructor has to build the climber’s capacity” (L. Foltos, personal notes, November 5, 2011). Coaching is much the same. Teachers won’t grow professionally; they won’t have the capacity to improve their craft if their coach tells them what to do. Successful coaches build capacity, not dependence.

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To avoid crossing the tipping point and taking ownership of the learning, successful coaches discuss and develop

the roles they will play with their peers and school leadership. These same discussions should help the coach's learning partner to define the roles and responsibilities they will assume as they work with a coach. By defining these roles and responsibilities, the coach and their learning partners are also working to create individual and collective accountability for learning in a way that assigns the primary responsibility for learning to the collaborating teacher. This basic set of roles and responsibilities is critical to building an effective supportive coaching relationship. Without agreement on roles and responsibilities, the coach and their peers may find that coaching can potentially founder or fail.

Coaches need to understand that their success depends on more than establishing a coaching relationship that is friendly, personalized, manageable, private, and supported. Ultimately, their success as coaches will depend on their ability to create relationships based on trust and respect.

### RELATIONSHIPS, RESPECT, AND TRUST

Linda King is a teacher-librarian from Yakima who has been a Peer Coach for several years. When asked how she measured her success as a coach, it took her mere seconds to distill what she had learned from her experiences. "You know you're successful as a coach when teachers are willing to share what they know and willing to share what they do not know" (L. King, personal communication, October 2010).

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No one who has heard or read her remarkably concise thoughts has ever missed King's point. The coach and his or her learning partners are trying to improve learning, but the coach may also be

moving the teacher out of his or her comfort zone, encouraging the teacher to take risks and maybe to fail publically. Developing a relationship based on respect and trust between coach and learning partner is nonnegotiable for successful coaching.

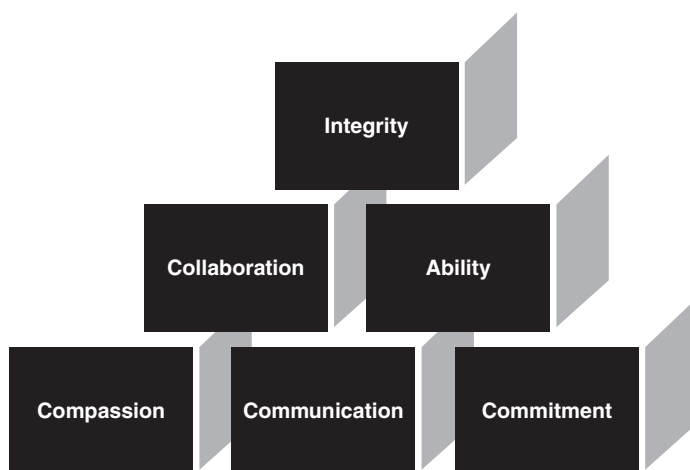


If you review the Building Blocks of Trust (see Figure 1.2), you will see that what coaches say or do as they work to build a personalized, friendly, manageable, supportive relationship goes a long way toward building respect and trust. We have talked about what coaches might say to build trust, and it is important to note that the coach's actions are equally important. Many teachers new to working with a coach feel like they are imposing when they ask a coach for assistance. They know how busy the coach's day is and imagine that they are taking valuable time from him or her. Imagine their reaction if the coach's door is always closed or the coach is consistently too busy to talk in the hallway or teachers' lounge. Actions count.

The Building Blocks of Trust also help us understand that the roles a coach plays in collaborating with a learning partner are important; how the coach carries out those roles is critical. Experienced Peer Coaches realize that they can and must do more to create a relationship based on trust and respect. As we explore these additional steps coaches take to create a trusting, respectful relationship, let's keep in mind

**Figure 1.2** Building Blocks of Trust

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Source: Meyer et al. (2011w).

the idea that what coaches do is important; how they do it shapes their success or failure.

### **Expert vs. Trust**

Many coaches who are just getting started ultimately have a very simple question: When can they tell collaborating teachers what to do? They are asking when the coach should play the role of expert. We briefly explored this issue earlier, so it shouldn't be surprising that every coach asks this same question at some point. While coaches don't want to be tagged with the label "expert," they do sense a dilemma. Many veteran coaches recognize there may be many reasons to take on the role of expert. They understand that their success requires that they have a proven track record of successful innovation working in their environment. They know that peers want a coach who could provide useful, relevant examples. Peer Coaches understand that coach training helped them develop a variety of new skills and expertise and that their peers may expect them to be the expert with the answers. So when is the time right for a coach to assume the role of expert and tell peers what to do and how to do it? Clearly, this is a serious dilemma. The way coaches respond to this dilemma seems simple, but it is fairly nuanced.

Let's start to answer that question by asking what their peers really expect from their coach. Over the years, I have asked teachers who collaborate with coaches to define some of the attributes of a successful coach. Some of these attributes include:

- Is able to build trust with peers
- Builds on what a teacher needs
- Communicates well and listens to teachers
- Is flexible
- Provides a safe, risk-taking environment and is non-threatening, nonjudgmental, and accepting
- Is recognized by staff as a strong/outstanding teacher (Meyer et al., 2011c)

Even a brief reading of these attributes makes it clear teachers want a coach to be a peer, not an expert. This is consistent with what collaborating teachers say in their assessments of coaching. Not one of them has written, “Thank goodness I have someone coming into my classroom to tell me what to do.” They clearly don’t want an expert telling them what to think or do, but they do want a knowledgeable, skilled coach. The word *expert* has a negative connotation for these teachers.

I often walk away from conversations with Peer Coaches believing that the need to be seen as a peer must be a part of a successful coach’s DNA. Experienced coaches seem to understand instinctively that if coaches position themselves as experts, their colleagues may feel inferior. Coaches have told me that few teachers will want to work with coaches who have put themselves on a pedestal. By contrast, if they build a relationship in which the collaborating teacher sees the coach as a peer, the coach would have created the sense of equality. Alessio Bernadelli, a Welsh Peer Coach, insists this sense of equality is critical to “promote honest dialogue about what the peer wants to develop” (A. Bernadelli, personal communication, July 11, 2011). Being seen as a peer is an essential first step to a coach’s success. But it is only a first step. A coach must develop a relationship as a true peer before taking on the role of expert in the coaching relationship. With time and experience, coaches understand that their colleagues will come to see them as true peers, but peers that have unique and valuable expertise.

The real irony here is that expertise is essential for Peer Coaches who want to avoid taking on the role of expert. As we will see in subsequent chapters, coaches who know how to use communication, lesson-design, and technology-integration skills do not take responsibility for learning away from a peer the way an expert would. Instead of telling their peers what to do and how to do it, they use these their expertise and skills to help their peers develop their capacity to improve teaching and learning.

These successful coaches have several important messages about building trust.

- It is important for coaches to recognize that they are peers, not experts.

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- Coaches don't see egalitarianism as a roadblock to their success but as a key to open the door to their success.
- One of those building blocks of trust (see Figure 1.2) is collaboration. It is hard to argue that playing the role of expert and telling peers what to think and do is consistent with the idea of collaboration.
- If a coach wants to be effective at collaboration, coaching expertise is far more important than being an expert.

## How Coaches Carry Out Roles

Coaches who want to create relationships based on respect and trust must understand that the roles they play as a coach are important, but how they coach is critical. In conversations about when it is appropriate for a coach to tell a peer what to think and do, experienced Peer Coaches offer us some insights into how effective coaches practice their craft.

Since effective coaches recognize that telling peers what to think and do breaks the relationship of trust the coaches are trying to build, they are very selective about when they choose to tell peers what they think. Paul Shanahan warned that before he advocates any idea, he weighs where he is in the relationship with a collaborating teacher. "Early on it is questioning, questioning, questioning. In year two or year three of a relationship, and you have something to give, they may want it. So you tell them what you think" (P. Shanahan, personal communication, September 6, 2011). Like Shanahan, many coaches take on the role of expert only when invited by

a colleague and even then ask “Would you like me to share my ideas?” before offering an opinion.

So if they are not telling peers what to think or do, what produces improvements in teaching and learning?

Effective coaches try to emphasize inquiry over advocacy in their coaching work. In other words, they rely on questioning strategies rather than advocating for any particular solution to the issues facing their peers. An Australian Peer Coach offered a view shared by many coaches when he said that the balance needs to be tipped to the probing questions and coaching. He rarely relied on sharing his answer, and did so “only when the trust and respect is there” (L. Foltos, personal notes, August 2011). By emphasizing inquiry over advocacy, these coaches are taking another step to build a relationship based on trust and respect. They are also helping their learning partners build their capacity to improve teaching and learning instead of creating a dependence on the coach.

Coaching can't succeed without a trusting, respectful relationship between the coach and the collaborating teacher. Fortunately, trust isn't a precondition for a coach to begin collaborating with a teacher. It is equally lucky that coaches do not need to have an innate Zen-like understanding of how to build trust. Coach training can help a coach develop an understanding of how to establish trust and respect. Collaborating with other experienced coaches can help a coach develop an even keener appreciation of how his or her behavior can build the kind of relationship essential to successful coaching. Even the most successful coaches realize that coaching experience is essential to help them develop trust and respect over time. As a coach who was in his first year of coaching noted, “I have learned to step back and to try not to impose my ideas. I have learned to become a better listener.” A second coach reported to program evaluators, “I realize the importance of being a good listener

Coaching can't succeed without a trusting, respectful relationship between the coach and the collaborating teacher.

and finding out what someone else's needs are. I have also learned that I can't force someone to do something" (Liston, Peterson, & Ragan, 2008, p. 68).

Peer Coaching is a powerful learning methodology only when coaches are successful in creating trusting relationships with peers. This relationship forms a safety net that is essential to encourage the coach's learning partner to take the risks necessary to improve instruction. It helps teachers face their fear factor. We will explore how coaches move beyond this initial stage in their relationship with their peers in the following chapters.

### Summary

Einstein insisted that his role in the learning process was to create the conditions for learning. Effective coaches do the same thing by:

- Collaborating with a colleague to improve teaching and learning to prepare students with the skills and competencies they need for college or careers.
- Recognizing that many schools don't have a culture that supports collaboration and risk taking.
- Being a peer who takes the lead in creating a relationship based on trust and respect.
  - Coaches are most successful when these relationships are friendly, personalized, manageable, private, and supported.
  - Successful coaches are careful to ensure what they say and how they act is consistent with their goal of building trust.
- Building trust by eschewing the roles an expert might typically take. Instead, they:
  - Work with peers to define the roles and responsibilities each will have in the coaching relationship.
  - Use their coaching expertise to provide the support teachers might need and use inquiry and other strategies to maintain their learning partners' ownership of their learning.