



COACH'S NOTEBOOK

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While it's true that we all have the same 24 hours in a day, each of us has a unique story. It's essential to discover what works best for us individually.

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TO AVOID OVERLOAD, ESTABLISH PRIORITIES AND FOCUS ON YOUR GOALS

If I asked a roomful of coaches, “Have you ever experienced needing more time to do your best work?,” I would expect to see every hand go up. The job of supporting teachers to educate every child with equity and excellence is huge and can easily lead to a sense of overload. On top of that, we often find ourselves burdened with new responsibilities or imposing unrealistic expectations on ourselves.

Because we can't create more time, prioritizing our responsibilities and goals is key. This is one of the essential elements of the Compassionate Coaching approach that Kenny McKee and I developed, and we recommend it as a strategy to mitigate feelings of overload (Perret & McKee, 2021).

Even when teams establish priorities together, it's important for individuals to go through their own prioritization process as well. While it's true that we all have the same 24 hours in a day, each of us has a unique story. Instead of comparing ourselves to others, it's essential to discover what works best for us individually.

When collaborating with instructional coaches, I like to take a look at how they have prioritized the following areas:

- Defining the role of the instructional coach;
- Ensuring the instructional coach has dedicated time to fulfill their coaching responsibilities; and
- Monitoring and reflecting on time use.

Keeping these areas in mind, coaches can address challenges and prioritize time to ensure the effectiveness of instructional coaching.

A CLEARLY DEFINED ROLE

A well-defined role provides a clear sense of direction, purpose, and accountability. It enables coaches to effectively support teachers, promote reflection and collaboration, and align with the school's goals and priorities.

Adopting a systems thinking approach rather than an individualistic one is essential to establish a clearly defined role. Start by closely collaborating with school administrators to define your specific responsibilities as an instructional coach and explore how you can mutually support each other throughout the process. (See, for example, the principal-coach partnership agreement developed by Joellen Killion et al., 2020.) By working together, you can create a shared understanding of your role and maximize your impact on teacher development.

In addition to working closely with school administrators, it is crucial to include the voice of teachers in developing the instructional coach's role. We want to avoid the perception that coaching is simply an additional burden for teachers. By valuing and incorporating teachers' input, we can ensure that the coach's role is embraced and seen as a valuable asset rather than an extra demand on teachers' already full plates.



Remember that part of defining the role is defining what coaches should *not* do. When coaches are burdened with other excessive responsibilities, their ability to provide impactful coaching diminishes. Administrative duties, paperwork, and noncoaching tasks can consume their time, diverting their focus from the core purpose of supporting teachers' professional growth and improving instruction.

PRIORITIZING COACHING CYCLES

Coaching cycles are at the heart of a coach's work with teachers, and it is essential to prioritize time for them (Johnson et al., 2017). Coaching cycles comprise a three-pronged itinerary of meaningful goal setting, core coaching actions (co-planning, co-teaching, modeling, observation), and reflection (Perret & McKee, 2021), although they will look different based on teachers' goals and the settings in which coaches work (e.g., the number of teachers they serve).

Coaches can be proactive in prioritizing coaching cycles and engage in strategic planning to balance and make time for all of their responsibilities and those of the teachers they support. To do so, coaches first need to determine how many teachers they can feasibly work with at a time. To address this challenge, Diane Sweeney and Leanna Harris published a three-part blog series titled "Coaching Cycles — Getting to 60%" (Sweeney & Harris, 2019) that offers valuable insights. The authors suggest breaking down the coaching work into six-week

rounds. Within each round, coaches can determine the number of coaching cycles they can handle effectively. Additionally, they offer a weekly sample schedule to help coaches structure cycles within the rounds.

After mapping out potential coaching cycle blocks, coaches need to find available time in the teachers' schedules and be mindful of teachers' preferences. This builds buy-in, trust, and collaboration. In one particular school, where I facilitated the process of setting the school's master schedule with the principal and teacher representatives, we began by identifying the essential elements to include in our schedule (such as common planning times) and those that would be nice to have. In this process, we recognized that coaching was just one of several priorities. Because teachers felt their time was valued and their priorities respected, they were open to coaching opportunities.

MONITOR, REFLECT, AND ADJUST

Monitoring how you spend your time is essential to maximize coaching activities and minimize time spent on nonessential tasks. Regular monitoring and reflection allow you to make informed decisions about allocating your time and resources to support teachers effectively and demonstrate to supervisors how your responsibilities are — or are not — enabling you to help teachers improve instruction.

In *Compassionate Coaching*, Kenny McKee and I introduced readers to Michelle Te Grootenhuis, a former instructional coach who is now an

elementary principal in a rural Iowa community. She made a personal choice to set up a system to monitor her time. Each month, she logged her daily activities in an Excel spreadsheet and then graphed how she spent blocks of time. She also protected one hour a month to engage in her own personal coaching so she could reflect on her month, set a goal for the next month, and build in accountability to stay the course.

STAY FOCUSED

Prioritizing time is critical for instructional coaches to thrive in their roles and have a positive impact on teachers' professional growth. It's easy to get overloaded and overwhelmed, but straightforward strategies and ongoing reflection can help coaches stay focused and maximize their effectiveness.

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