

PEER COACHING

Expanding Your World Through Reflective Practice



"Change your thoughts, and you change your world."

Norman Vincent Peale

Robin Levien and Adair Eves

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Introduction

Inherent within every system is the opportunity for its professionals to maximize their potential. There are many structures that may already be in place to make this possible: Workshops, trainings, evaluations, retreats, study groups... all with great intentions, rarely with personal follow through and individualized support. Peer coaching is unique staff development in that it provides personal follow through for professional growth within a supportive environment. Research concurs that, “peer coaching is a very effective research-based professional development program” (Joyce; Showers 2002).

This handbook provides any organization... school, government, non-profit, service... with a guide as to how to set up a peer coaching partnership between any two individuals. This handbook includes:

- ♦ A definition of what it means to be a peer coach
- ♦ How Peer Coaching fits into the organizational framework
- ♦ What the ten essential skills are in order to be an effective peer coach
- ♦ A description of each skill
- ♦ Practice opportunities

This handbook is best used along with training that is provided by Robin Levien and Adair Eves. It can also be used to brush up on skills once you are trained as a peer coach. Following are testimonials from professionals who have participated in this training.

-This peer coaching experience has enhanced my professional practices as well as my ability to be a reflective practitioner... these applications result in immediate changes, versus other professional development where you have to later apply the skills... In education, we receive very little feedback whether it be praise or suggestions. We have heard about the knowing-doing gap. Peer coaching bridges that gap. — A supervisor

-Coaching has allowed me to become more reflective of my work and has provided a different avenue for receiving feedback. — A secondary teacher

-Asking my partner at the beginning of the feedback session, “How do you think it went?” gave her the respect for her voice in the instructional setting. I also believe that when the skill is at the level of unconscious competence it is a kaleidoscopic appreciation of the colors and designs of all of us. — A principal

*-I have strengthened another skill: using powerful questioning. I see the effect that open-ended questions and summarizing have in guiding my partner’s thought process. I enjoyed learning these important communication skills by taking the class and plan to continue using peer coaching methods in years to come. I think there is much power in self-discovery rather than someone telling you how to get somewhere.
— An elementary teacher*



Who is a Peer Coach?

A peer coach is someone chosen by a partner who wants to coach and be coached. The peer coaching pair enters into a non-evaluative and voluntary relationship between equals where each works together to reflect on current practices to expand, refine, and build new skills based on the request of the one being coached at any given time.

Peer coaching means many different things to professionals interested in working with someone to improve their skills. In order for this concept to hold meaning to those who participate in peer coaching, it is essential to share the criteria for a peer coaching relationship:

1. Peer coaching must be voluntary for both partners in order to maintain the integrity of the partnership. That each pair chooses to participate in the process is necessary for its success.
2. Reflections and questions are the means of dialogue between peer coaching partners. Advising, evaluating and judging interfere with the professional growth that peer coaching can provide.
3. The coachee is the only one who determines the focus for the peer coaching conversation. This is what ensures ownership and buy-in.
4. The coachee decides how the coach will collect data based on the focus area and what the tool will look like.
5. Peer coaching partners agree to work together as equals in a confidential, supportive partnership.

