

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR HIRING NEW COACHES

1. What does the term *coaching* mean to you?

Listen for:

- Collaboration.
- Partnership.
- Learning together.
- Focus on working with teachers as clients.
- Enhancing teacher capacity.
- Job-embedded professional development.
- Ultimate goal is greater student success.
- Emphasis on building strengths rather than fixing “weak” teachers.
- Coaching is beneficial for all educators.

Be cautious if you hear:

- “The” expert.
- “I want to get teachers to...”
- Emphasis on working with students (coaches’ clients are teachers).
- Emphasis on planning lessons w/ teachers as the focus of coaching.
- Judgmental tone in talking about teachers’ struggles.

2. When you think about your typical day as a coach, what kinds of tasks would you be doing?

Listen for:

- Working with teachers.
- Coaching conversations.
- Collaboration with professional learning teams.
- Demonstration lessons.

Be cautious if you hear:

- Working with students instead of teachers.
- Attention to pre-planned professional development workshops and topics; although coaches likely do some of this, *coaching* is really about job-embedded PD that is responsive to teachers’ needs/interests and their classroom challenges.
- Emphasis on observation in classrooms as the foundation of coaching.
- Emphasis on things that don’t necessarily lead to increased teacher effectiveness/student learning, such as planning special events.

3. What are the qualities of an effective coaching conversation?

Listen for:

- Coach listens before speaking.
- Conversation starts where teacher is, not where coach wants teacher to be.
- Questions are open and honest – i.e. coach does not know the answer and wants to hear teacher's answer.
- Problem finding and problem solving.
- Data are used to support claims, understand problems/challenges, plan instructional strategies, and determine effectiveness of changes made.
- Coach and teacher have adequate time to meet.

Be cautious if you hear:

- Assumption that coach must observe in the classroom in order for a coaching conversation to take place.
- Perception that coach asks questions to get the teacher to see what the coach sees and/or make changes that the coach has already decided are best.
- Conversation *begins* with data.
- Data are not mentioned as part of the conversation.

4. If you are successful as a coach in this school, how would I be able to tell that at the end of your first year?

Listen for:

- Teachers making decisions informed by data.
- Teachers articulating why they made particular instructional decisions.
- Greater collaboration among teachers.
- Coach in partnership with all teachers (or with all teachers in the identified pool, if the school is large).

Be cautious if you hear:

- Test scores increased. (Coaching is not likely to have that effect in one year.)
- Emphasis on "fixing" poor teachers.

5. How do you see yourself working with professional learning teams?

Listen for:

- Possible roles for the coach: facilitator, member, occasional contributor.
- Partnership.
- Job-embedded.
- Problem finding and problem solving.
- Helping teams work with differences among themselves.
- Purpose of teams is enhanced decision making, inquiry, learning to help our students learn.

Be cautious if you hear:

- Coach is always in charge of teams.
- Emphasis on sharing or lesson planning as the only activities for learning teams.
- Candidate feels overwhelmed at the prospect of working with teams that do not always agree.

6. As a coach, how would you develop trust with teachers?

Listen for:

- Listening.
- Confidentiality.
- Providing feedback in the form of paraphrasing to indicate understanding of teacher's perspective.
- No judgment.
- Body language.
- Separating coaching from supervising.

Be cautious if you hear:

- Coach will show all that s/he knows and can do.
- Coach will emphasize his/her years' experience.
- Coach will be passive and wait for teachers to approach.

7. What makes for a successful demonstration lesson?

Listen for:

- Demonstration lesson grows out of coaching conversation.
- Demonstration lesson addresses goal/need of teacher.
- Teacher is interested and engaged during the demonstration.
- The lesson is in synch with the curricular goals and standards for that class.
- Teacher and coach discuss the lesson in advance.
- A debriefing conversation takes place soon after the demonstration.
- The debriefing conversation discusses not only what was done but also *why* it was done.

Be cautious if you hear:

- No engagement by teacher.
- No pre-planning or follow-up discussions with teacher.
- "Showy" lessons rather than lessons that are planned with regard to where students are and where they might go.

8. What is the role of data in the work of a coach?

Listen for:

- Data does not drive the work; it is an essential *tool*.
- Good questions in the coaching conversation elicit data.
- Skilled coaches ask questions to help teachers analyze and apply data in decision making.

- Teachers and coaches together gather a broad range of data.
- Data are useful in making instructional decisions and in determining whether instructional decisions were effective.

Be cautious if you hear:

- The coach collects all the data.
- The coach tells the teacher what the data say.
- The coach relies *only* on standardized tests or state-mandated tests as sources of data.
- The coach believes that data start the coaching process. (They are tools, not the goal or focus.)

9. How do you perceive the relationship of a coach with the school principal?

Listen for:

- Coach meets regularly with principal.
- Coach and principal discuss overall direction of curriculum, instruction, assessments.
- Coach and principal do *not* share confidential information about teachers.
- Coach does not contribute to principal's understanding of individual teachers in a way that would affect the principal's evaluation of those teachers.
- Coach discusses his/her professional goals with principal.
- Coach serves as resource to principal in principal's role as learning leader.

Be cautious if you hear:

- "Good cop/bad cop" description of roles of coach and principal.
- Intention to report ineffective teaching to principal.
- Belief that principal will report to the coach the names of teachers who "need" to be coached.

10. Describe a difficult situation in which you were ultimately successful.

Listen for:

- Evidence of stamina.
- Evidence of attempts to understand others' perspectives.
- Regarding the others with respect.
- The ability to work with someone who has a different perspective.
- The ability to take a problem-solving stance and work toward a solution.

Be cautious if you hear:

- Joking about others' limitations or behaviors.
- Cynicism.
- Vagueness about the outcome – was it really a success?

11. Describe a time when you worked collaboratively to make a difference in your school.

Listen for:

- Collaboration that really engaged all participants.
- Evidence of problem solving.
- Respect for all participants.
- Specific evidence of how the collaboration made a difference.

Be cautious if you hear:

- One person actually did the work.
- Vague descriptions of feel-good types of activities.
- Unresolved relationship struggles.

12. Why do you want to be a coach?

Listen for:

- Commitment to teachers as colleagues and partners.
- Commitment to learning – students', teachers', and coaches'.
- Recognition of teachers' strengths.
- Coach's desire to form partnerships with teachers and teams.

Be cautious if you hear:

- Interest in conveying information as the focus of coaching.
- Focus upon providing large-group professional development workshops.
- Desire to "fix" weak teachers.
- Interest in ultimately becoming a principal. (There is nothing wrong with becoming a principal, but it should not be the driving force in becoming a coach).