



Teacher Leadership Resource Tool

Shifts in Thinking (Cognitive Shift)

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Context

Cognitive CoachingSM (CC) conversations support individuals in an interactive way by listening intently to someone's thinking. This conversation with Elizabeth is her reflection on her work with a group of teachers and how she wants to support teachers in taking on more leadership roles. As her coach, I use the meditative tools and skills of CC to illuminate Elizabeth's reflective thinking around perceptions and decision-making processes. Specifically, the tool of creating a "cognitive shift" is highlighted in the model.

Why - Purpose and Intent

A skilled coach can be a catalyst for insightful, thoughtful work.

Cognitive CoachingSM conversations are about thinking, so these kinds of conversations provide an opportunity for the "coachee" to articulate his or her thinking to show that the "coach" values that individual. When there is trust on this level, this value translates into a shift in thinking, "mental models" (Senge, 1990) or desired outcomes. Cognitive Coaches call this shift in thinking a "cognitive shift." Cognitive shift is the sudden "ah ha" moment a coachee has during or after a conversation. A piece of leadership research indicates that focusing on cognitive shift, or changes in perception or thinking, rather than leadership behaviors and characteristics is critical to the work of organizational leadership. (Foldy, 2008) A coach's job is to create cognitive shift; without this type of shift in thinking change is unlikely.

How – Thinking process that led to the use of the tool

Because I believe all behavior is produced by thought, coaching conversations like this one allow others the opportunity to think about the decisions they make and the rationale behind those decisions. My question, "In thinking about what it might be like for the teachers sitting in the meeting as you document, what do you think they might be thinking?" is intentional to raise Elizabeth's consciousness about others and illuminates for her that she is not aware of the others' thinking. This question causes a shift in her thinking, so I pause, giving her wait time to let her think. Following the cognitive shift, I would paraphrase first and then ask another question; perhaps, "What might the others need to know about your actions?" or "How would knowing what the teachers think influence your work?" These questions have the coachee thinking about the importance of perceptions.

What – Using coaching tools

The coaching conversation video clip is a model of a conversation utilizing the Reflecting Map (Cognitive CoachingSM). Elizabeth is reflecting upon the support she has given to a team of teachers. The “coachee” describes the challenges she faces with the group in finding a focus area and following through with plans. This clip shows attention to the “coachee” by paraphrasing and posing a question in order to value her thinking. The question is intended to illuminate her perceptions and awareness of the teachers she supports. Her response indicates a “cognitive shift” in how others perceive her work. This clip of a coaching conversation highlights that my coaching can provide the “coachee” another way of thinking about a situation.

- I paraphrase to acknowledge the coachee, “This is a strategy that works for you,”
- She states, “Right,” as a signal to me that my statement is accurate
- I ask. “In thinking about what it might be like for the teachers...what do you think they might be thinking?”
- She indicates with several pauses, “...I am not sure what they think...”

Reflection

The videotaping process is a tool for reflection and therefore growth. Reviewing and noting behaviors like the matching non-verbals, is an indicator for me as the coach that there is rapport and trust between us. The trust allows for possibilities of thinking for the “coachee,” particularly as she indicates that she has not asked how the teachers might like her to support the team, nor considered how her actions impact the group. This shift in her thinking tells me, as the coach, that I have asked a question that has provided a new insight and furthered her thinking.