



INSTRUCTIONS: The case study below is an amalgamation of various scenarios that leadership coaches have faced in their efforts to support principals. After you have finished reading the case study, take some time to reflect on how you might approach the situation and be prepared to discuss your thoughts with the interviewers.

CASE STUDY

It is October and you are about to make your second visit to one of your coachees, who is the principal of an elementary school. You have spoken to this principal several times since your initial visit a few weeks ago and she continues to report that while she is very busy, things are basically “fine”. You are not surprised to hear she feels very busy because on your previous visit, you noticed that she was reluctant to leave her computer, claiming that she was too swamped with things that needed her immediate attention to walk to walk through the building with you. You were, however, able to convince her to go on a walkthrough with you during your second visit and this time she says she will be prepared to do so.

In preparation for your visit, you review the principal’s Time Track data, notes from the initial meeting, and subsequent phone calls and e-mail communications you have had with the principal and SAM since your first visit. You notice that the principal has not met her instructional goals over the last three weeks.

You arrive at the school a few minutes early for your coaching session with the principal and SAM. The office clerk greets you and lets you know that the principal will be available for the meeting, but at the moment she is finishing up a phone call with a parent. Just then, the SAM arrives in the office and directs you to a conference room. While waiting for the principal, the SAM tells you that she was concerned about the principal’s lack of progress with engaging the upper-grade teachers in improving literacy instruction. The SAM says that literary supports in the upper grades have been identified in the School Improvement Plan as a key priority for this year. She explains further that for the past two years, the school has focused efforts in literacy almost exclusively on the early grades because they had received a Reading First Grant

that provided resources, training, and professional development for teachers of early readers. As a result of the wisely invested grant dollars, the school now has a well-developed book room, leveled libraries, classroom library spaces, and reading specialists who provide push-in services to support the guided reading balanced literacy model in grades K-2. However, none of those innovations have been scaled and/or adapted for the upper grade classrooms (grades 3-5). Unfortunately, the SAM stresses that the upper grades include the students that will be administered the PARCC assessment and that those scores will be made public and used to determine the performance and quality of the school. The SAM tells you that she has offered to schedule classroom observations with the upper grade teachers, but the principal continues to put that off.

The SAM also tells you that yesterday they received word from the district that the school's amended safety plan is now two weeks overdue. With national attention focused on a recent school shooting, school safety has become the utmost priority for the district. The school is located in what is considered to be a "safe" neighborhood and as such it has invested very little in building security in the past. This has made parents extremely concerned and they have been vocal about those concerns with district leaders.

The principal arrives in the conference room and suggests that you complete the walkthrough together before discussing in detail progress that has been made over the past few weeks. The principal seems energized and confident as she moves through the halls, openly greeting both staff and students by name. Before you stop in several classrooms, the principal tells you that in order to reduce distractions she will not be interacting with anyone and will only be observing today. After roughly an hour, you arrive back at the conference room. The principal appears pleased with the walkthrough activity, even expressing "I just love it when I can get out of the office, step into classrooms, and see all the learning that is occurring." You are encouraged by her enthusiasm towards spending time on instructional activities, but feel that she may not have picked up on some of the things that you observed.



Case Study Interview Questions & Examples of Indicators

Scoring Guide

- 3 – Response is appropriate, detailed and reinforced with specific evidence
- 2 – Response is adequate but not supported by sufficient evidence
- 1 – Response is inadequate

Questions Related to Case Study

1. Broadly, what were your initial thoughts on the Case Study?

Indicators of quality responses could include:

- Indicates an understanding that their perception of the situation is superficial until he or she can discuss the context with the principal, explore additional data, and collect more information;
- Acknowledges the positives: principal and SAM were aware and prepared for their meeting; Principals followed through with conducting a walkthrough; principal and SAM are using TimeTrack software, Principal appeared to know the names of the teachers and students; etc.;
- Acknowledges that this is only the 2nd visit to the school and they are still trying to develop their understanding of the school and they likely need to collect much more data/information to determine strengths and growth areas;
- Can articulate the types of additional information they would need to adequately understand the school's leadership structure and context.

2. What would be your immediate plan as a LEAD Coach in this situation?

Indicators of quality responses could include:

- Indicates an understanding that they have limited information and evidence from which to draw any conclusions;
- May enter into a series of inquiries that will help them better understand the principal's behaviors, perceptions, and expectations. Such as asking: was it a typical day for the school, do they typically conduct that type of walkthrough, if so how often, what do they hope to achieve through that type of activity; do they plan to follow up on anything they saw in the walk through; did they see anything that pleased or concerned them; if so, what will they do with that information, etc.;
- Does not plan to immediately address why the principal has not scheduled observations with the upper grade teachers, but rather explores what activities the principal is doing that align to identified priorities;
- Demonstrates an understanding for the need to build a trusting relationship with both the principal and the SAM and as such would not want to inform the principal that the SAM is concerned they aren't spending their time in a way that will address the upper-grade literacy issue;
- May ask the interviewers as to what type of coaching the project model is designed to apply (facilitative, directive, reflective, balanced, etc.) before answering;
- May ask interviewers whether there is a coaching protocol that is used in the project.

3. What are the challenges facing this principal?

Indicators of quality responses could include:

- Acknowledges that they are lacking information and need to hear from the principal and/or collect more information before making that type of determination;
- Identifies specific data or information they would like to explore to increase their understanding of principal within the specific school context;
- May want to explore if the SAM's critical comments are being shared with others in the school and whether that behavior is negatively impacting morale;
- After verifying the school did not comply with the district-imposed deadline for submitting an amended safety plan, the coach would want to explore why the new plan was not submitted: the deadline was extended; there was a breakdown with the distributed leadership plan; the principal didn't know how to amend it; the principal requested an extension to engage parents in the development of a new plan, etc.

4. How will you balance the relationship between the principal and the SAM, particularly in the case of the scenario where the SAM has been critical of the Principal?

Indicators of quality responses could include:

- Indicates the importance of building trusting relationships with both the Principal and SAM and that confidentiality is equally essential;
- Coach may want to explore both the validity of the SAMs feedback on the principal as well as whether the SAM is speaking negatively to others in the building, thus undermining the principal and/or negatively impacting morale;
- In order to maintain confidentiality with the SAM and determine the validity of the information she provided, the coach may set the stage for a discussion about the upper grade literacy by suggesting a review of the School Improvement Plan in order to ensure the principal is aligning their time to specifically reach those goal;
- In order to maintain confidentiality with the SAM and determine the validity of the information she provided, the coach may want to explore school safety by bringing up the recent school shooting, the District's need to address it locally, and how it might be impacting the school.

5. As a LEAD Coach, how would you support this principal in assessing and improving a school's culture of learning?

Indicators of quality responses could include:

- Candidate clearly defines the key elements of an effective culture of learning;
- Describes the specific ways in which they would take to support the principal in engaging teachers, staff, and parents in developing strategies to address identified barriers to the learning environment;
- Demonstrates a willingness to work with the principal to ensure they have access to and are collecting a wide variety of data and information to inform the improvement process

General Interview Questions

6. How do you define effective coaching and what would it look like in action?

Indicators of quality responses could include:

- Demonstrate a depth of knowledge regarding various coaching models (directive, facilitative, reflective, blended, etc.);
- Demonstrate they approach coaching principals from an inquiry perspective- exploring, inquiring, probing, etc.;

- Understand that principals are not empty vessels, but rather experts in their own schools;
- Understands that as a coach they do not have all the answers and that the best solutions come from those working within the specific school context.

7. In your current or previous roles, how have you developed great principals? How did you define progress in developing principals, and what were the results of your efforts?

Indicators of quality responses could include:

- Provides details on how they have worked with principals to improve instruction and outcomes;
- Provides specifics on a system for regularly assessing instructional quality;
- Describes a variety of strategies for developing principals beyond just sending them for professional development (e.g. providing opportunities to contribute to district leadership, developing and facilitating the learning of a professional community of school leaders, etc.);
- Describes a comprehensive and cohesive professional development plan for a specific principal (not just one-time trainings that are not reinforced through on-going supports);
- Provides evidence that a comprehensive and cohesive professional development plan was based on the specific needs identified through the principal performance evaluation process;
- Identifies the metrics used to determine results;
- Identifies details on the process for monitoring progress toward goals;
- Clearly defines his or her role in the development process as well as the role of the principal.

8. Describe how you would approach a situation in which a Principal is resistant to change (i.e. implementing the project model with fidelity).

Indicators of quality responses could include:

- Articulates a process for determining the specific cause of the resistance (technical vs. adaptive challenges);
- Communicates a culture of shared ownership for outcomes between the coach and principal;
- Works with principal to provide them with opportunities to observe specific project components in similar schools where they have experienced success with the project;
- Engages the principal in short term goal setting designed to incrementally bring about positive change;
- Describes a willingness to have difficult and crucial conversations regarding project implementation.