

# How Can a Coach Gain a Teacher's Trust?

By [Elena Aguilar](#) on September 2, 2013 8:51 PM EDUCATION WEEK TEACHER Teacher Blogs

A question I'm often asked is: How can I gain the trust of the teachers I'm working with?

In my book, *The Art of Coaching*, I offer ten steps for building trust with a new client and some suggestions for how to repair trust that's been broken. These steps include carefully planning for a first conversation, establishing confidentiality, and actively listening during that first conversation. I also encourage coaches to make a great effort to personally connect with clients and to find authentic ways to validate their emotions and experiences. I discuss the importance of being transparent about what your role as a coach entails and what you can offer, and I stress the need to keep commitments.

Building trust takes time, and while I provide these "Ten Steps," there are some elements missing in this puzzle. Perhaps they're the preparatory steps, the things that a coach needs to do *before* she engages with a new client.

## Start with Empathy

In order to build trust, a coach needs to empathize with her client. Whenever I'm going into a coaching meeting, I try to imagine where that teacher or administrator is coming from literally--where he has been that day, what he's been doing, and how he might be feeling. Often this helps me to get into his frame of mind and adjust my coaching moves to meet him where he's at.

When I think about teachers at the start of this year, I immediately think about the waves of change that are exceptionally wild right now. All kinds of things are changing, expectations and assessments and core beliefs about learning--and while it's not all bad and it is what it is, it's a rough and bumpy ride for teachers.

With change comes unknowns and uncertainty and that's an environment in which trust is essential and perhaps more tenuous to build. So coaches, remember this--being in a teacher's seat during times of change means that a coach needs to be even more mindful of the need to build trust. Cultivate your empathy for whomever you're coaching and building trust will almost naturally flow as a consequence.

## Set an Intention

Setting intentions is about orienting your mind and actions towards an identified end desire. It really is the launching place of all behavior. Before beginning a coaching relationship, and then before each meeting, I encourage you to set an intention. Intentions can sound like:

- My intention is to understand where my client is at, and to help her develop her practice in the direction she wants it to go.
- My intention is to be a kind and compassionate listener who can gently nudge my teacher to more efficacious instruction.
- My intention is to provide a safe space for reflection.
- My intention is to be a rock of stability and safety during this time of great change.

As a new coach, I now know my actions did not always come from such positive places. Had I taken the time to reflect on what my intentions were, I might have recognized that I was entering coaching situations with an intention to "fix" or change another person. As I shifted the intentions behind my coaching, I became a much more effective coach--and one who engendered trust in her clients.

As you begin coaching relationships, there are many things you can do to build trust. It doesn't end there of course--trust has to be maintained and tended to, but a good start is invaluable.

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