



School Provision #101 - Generate High School Performance

I hope you will take the time to read this email. You are receiving it for one of two reasons: you have been either a subscriber to LifeTrek Provisions, the weekly newsletter from [LifeTrek Coaching International](#), or you have worked with the [Center for School Transformation](#) – a Center set up in 2009 by LifeTrek Coaching to make schools, early-childhood centers, and other educational communities more vibrant, life-giving places in which to work and learn through the evocative power of coaching.

The Center accomplishes its mission by training educators and educational leaders in its unique coaching method as well as by consulting with schools so as to improve the skills and morale of teachers and staff. Those dynamics are critical to generating high performance in students. Apart from high-performing, highly-motivated personnel, it's unlikely that student learning will shine. Everyone understands that connection. But what's the best way to get from here to there? What's the best way to motivate and equip school personnel? Today I share snippets from an interview with one person who went through the Center's Training Program in 2012 to understand how that happened for her and, perhaps, to interest you in going through the Training Program as well.

This person, Angela, is a Professional Development Program Specialist at a large, urban school district in the USA. Angela's work includes mentor and coach training for administrators, teachers, and instructional assistants. Her job also involves the observation of teachers and other educators so as to provide feedback that might improve their performance. This is why Angela went through the Evocative Coaching Training Program in the first place. She wanted to raise the bar of her own performance so as to more effectively and consistently improve the performance of others.

That's really what the Evocative Coaching Training Program is all about. As you can read more fully on our website, www.SchoolTransformation.com, the Training Program and other services of the Center for School Transformation are designed to make schools better. If you have anything to do with schools, whether as an administrator, a faculty or staff member or even as a parent, then going through this Training Program will give you the skills and credentials you need to do your job better. Let's hear what Angela has to say as to how that happened for her.

Bob: How did you find out about the program in the first place and why did you decide to go through it?

Angela: Some of the principals in our district were reading and doing a study of your book, [Evocative Coaching: Transforming Schools One Conversation at a Time](#), and I was intrigued by the title. Then I heard you and your wife, Megan, present at the Learning Forward conference. After that I wanted to go deeper into the material. I really wanted to learn and master the skills.

Bob: So how did that go?

Angela: It far exceeded my expectations. The training program was easy to participate in, since I could do it from anywhere using a phone or Skype, and it walked us through the book, chapter by chapter. I really came to understand the concept of coaching conversations as a dance. Those four steps – Story, Empathy, Inquiry, Design – I mean, like, Wow! They really make a difference and capture the essence of how to go about improving the performance of those who work in schools.

Bob: Can you explain to our readers how the Training Program works?

Angela: Well, the virtual classroom is really quite unique. It's not just a conference call. The ways in which we can break into small groups and dyads in order to practice the material that we are being introduced to, and then get immediate feedback from the instructors, that's just a great way to break things down and master the material. I really liked the format of the classes.

Bob: I'm glad to hear that. I thought it would be hard for our readers to understand how this works, but you really made it clear. It's far more effective than going to a conference or workshop. It builds skills over time, through 20 hours training, which is really the only way to learn new approaches and then to utilize them in the field.

Angela: Not only is the Training Program an effective learning experience, it focuses attention on exactly what we need to be doing as educators in the 21st century. Evocative Coaching is on the cutting edge of professional development in schools and very relevant and germane to the challenges educators are facing in today's world.

Bob: So what would you say was your best experience in the Training Program?

Angela: I liked that it was so live and interactive. We were not just listening to a recording or watching a DVD; we were being introduced to the material and then challenged to use it in the moment, in class, with one of our classmates. That made the whole training experience very dynamic. It was not staged. It was not a setup. It was free-flowing and real, just like the conversations we have in schools with our people. It was really very effective.

Bob: Thank you for making that so clear. I think it can be hard for people to imagine how a live, audio training program can be an effective learning experience – but you made the case better than I could.

Angela: I do wish there were more demonstration videos that we could watch. I think this would make the Training Program experience even more effective. But even without that, it is great just the way it is. I would put it this way: the audio classroom that you use, through Maestro Conference, is like Skype without the video. You really get to work closely with people, both one-on-one and in small groups; you just don't see their faces. It's really hard to do the Program justice because most people are familiar with conference calls. And Maestro Conference is far more than that. It enabled us to do everything that we could do at an on-site workshop and, in some ways, it enabled us to do more things and it was even more effective because there were no distractions. Nothing was going on around us. We could just focus on the subject at hand and, in the breakout sessions, we could get immediate feedback from the instructors. That made us better equipped to use those coaching skills in our at-home settings, on a week-to-week basis. This Program really improved my skills.

Bob: Wow! That is exactly what we hope for and it is certainly beyond what most people would expect they would get out of a training program that takes place on the phone or using Skype.

Angela: And now that we've had other people go through the Training Program, we're finding that we're using those skills even in our staff meetings. We're seeing that even in those contexts there are remnants, if you will, of Evocative Coaching popping up in the way people are now asking and answering questions. It has really shifted things here in our District.

Bob: I'm glad to hear that. When we tell people about our model – Story, Empathy, Inquiry, Design – it sounds like it would add on a lot of time and effort to people's jobs. We have found, however, that listening, responding to, and working with people in this way really moves things forward more quickly. Once people feel heard, they're ready to get to work.

Angela: I agree with what you just said but early on, at first, I was a skeptic. I mean, who has time to listen to stories and express empathy? We have real work to do in schools with real deadlines! And listening to stories sounds like a total waste of time. But I see things differently now that I have gone through the Training Program and started utilizing the model in the field. Listening to stories is not fluff. It is critical to effective coaching, it gets the ball rolling, especially when it's used in the way that you write about in your book and that we learned through the Training Program. The whole model is really amazing. It really changes things and makes a difference.

Bob: So how did Evocative Coaching get rolled out in your school district?

Angela: It started when some of the principals in our District decided to do a book study on Evocative Coaching. Then, after the Superintendent's office saw what a difference it made, the practice spread naturally throughout the District.

Bob: Is there anything else you would like our readers to know?

Angela: Just that this coaching model puts the responsibility for improving practice exactly where it needs to be: with the coachee. The coach is not giving directions and telling the coachee what to do. The coach is asking questions, making reflections, and facilitating a process for designing new approaches. That works with teachers as well as with administrators. I just love this model. It works and I have not encountered anything that is more effective. I also love the book. I have lots of pages bookmarked and I go back to them over and over again, as I go about my work. It's become such a part of our District that we have reached the point where we actually ask each other for coaching. Someone will come to me and say, "OK, I need to be coached right now." It was never like that before. There is no longer any embarrassment at all; on the contrary, coaching others and being coached is simply how we do things now. It's part of our culture. It's the new normal. The Evocative Coaching Training Program has helped to make that happen and has also become an essential part of the onboarding process, as new people come into the District. We want everyone to understand that this is one of the resources and methods we use around here. It's an essential part of how we make sure that our District is doing its very best.

Bob: That really is amazing, Angela, and it is exactly what we hoped for when we wrote the book. Thanks for taking the time to talk with me. I'm sure that what you had to say will make our readers make to learn more and to go further. Anyone can sign up for the next open cohort, just by going to www.SchoolTransformation.com. Thanks again.