



School Provision #102 – Take Your School Performance to Higher Levels

It brings me great joy to send out the second school Provision from the [Center for School Transformation](#), a Center dedicated to facilitating the transformation of schools one conversation at a time. We enable schools to go beyond incremental improvements to vibrant, life-giving shifts. And what a difference those shifts make in terms of both day-to-day functioning and student achievement! We hope these Provisions, which feature interviews with some of the people the Center has worked with and/or trained, will give you a sense of what those shifts look like and how they are facilitated. We hope they will get you interested in taking them on yourself.

For this month's Provision, I interview Kim, a Title I Supervisor of Instruction at a large urban school district in the USA. She has a lot to share as to not only what the Center's [Evocative Coaching Training Program](#) meant to her personally, but also the specific applications she is making of the things she has learned through the Program in the district. Let's hear what Kim has to say:

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

Kim: A colleague and I are in a collaborative learning team, and he went through the Program first. As he was going through it, he asked me to be his accountability partner. He wanted someone with whom he could share, discuss, and practice the things he was learning. We did that for an hour a week. I bought the textbook for the Program, [Evocative Coaching: Transforming Schools One Conversation at a Time](#), and I followed along so we could discuss the core concepts together. Those conversations really motivated me to delve deeper into the material by taking the Training Program.

Bob: It sounds to me as though you wanted some consistency, with both of you using the same model.

Kim: Yes. It really wasn't about using the same quote, unquote "model", because we already shared a lot of the same values and approaches. I just wanted to go deeper and I wanted to gain more specific tools than what I had already learned in the initial training for my position. I mean my initial training was very strong, but I wanted to learn and master the most effective coaching strategies possible. That's what I got from the Evocative Coaching Training Program.

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

Kim: At this point I think it was the buddy coaching. That was a great way to take the learning and extend it over time. It was also a way to further develop my skills, since my buddy coach and I practiced with each other and talked through some of the concepts you offered through the Training Program by watching the YouTube videos. Nonviolent Communication, for example, is a very different way to understand and express empathy. My buddy coach and I helped each other “get” that and use it in the field. The same could be said for Appreciative Inquiry. We learned it in the training program, as part of the coaching model, but my buddy coach and I are working now to help each other apply it in our district.

Bob: That is really wonderful; exactly what we hope for. Can you explain to our readers just how you are integrating your learning and these principles in your District?

Kim: Simply by using them every day. And it happens on two levels: it happens when I coach someone and it happens when I supervise one of our coaches. During supervision people will often say, “Kim, don’t coach me! I just need an answer.” But I don’t do that all the time. I often find that coaching someone is the best way to help someone learn coaching and to find an answer that sticks. When that happens, it’s really great.

Bob: So how do you do that? If someone “just wants an answer”, how do you get away with coaching them?

Kim: I do what I call stealth coaching or coaching on the fly. I may provide some answers but my real focus is on asking evocative questions. That’s when they start coming up with great answers of their own. They had those answers inside them all along but they didn’t have access to them. Through Evocative Coaching people gain that access so as to find their own “better” answers to getting things done. And that’s when coaching really becomes transformational. It’s like scales falling from their eyes. Wow!

Bob: Just a couple more questions. Help our readers understand how the Evocative Coaching Training Program has influenced or transformed your relationships with others. How are they different now than they were before?

Kim: I think the big difference is the presence I bring to our conversations. I’m a very fast-paced person. I want to get things done, and I want to get them done now. And I always have a million things to do. Through the Training Program I have learned how to be present, in the moment, regardless of how many things I have to do. I mean, I was friendly before and I was listening. But I wasn’t really “there”, “with them”, if you know what I mean. Now I pay more attention to the quality of the space between us. I feel that has been the most influential thing. Even if I am rushing, if I am scheduled to meet with someone, I take the time to prepare so that I can be really present. Or if someone comes to me for help, unexpectedly, I bring myself up short, get silent, and really listen. It’s totally different.

Bob: So who exactly are you working with? Help our readers understand your role in respect to how those coaching skills are being used.

Kim: I am the Supervisor of Instruction for Title I. In that role, I am the direct supervisor of 14 instructional coaches. They have not gone through the Evocative Coaching Training Program themselves so I am really the frontrunner, to see if this is the model we want to use throughout the District.

Bob: I certainly hope so! Because 14 is enough people to put together a dedicated cohort, which can be scheduled at your convenience.

Kim: We're not there yet, but I hope so as well.

Bob: One thing I like to do is to combine on-site training with training in our live, phone- or Skype-based classroom. We start and end on site, and have 7 remote sessions in between. It has really proven to be quite effective.

Bob: How has your learning and practice of Evocative Coaching influenced or transformed the results you are seeing as an educator?

Kim: Well, I don't really work in the classroom. I coach the coaches, rather than the teachers themselves. So I shadow the coaches as they go into classrooms to observe and coach teachers. And my learning of Evocative Coaching has really made a difference there. When a coach initiates a coaching cycle, I am now able to work with them to incorporate Story–Empathy–Inquiry–Design into that cycle. We may even use video recordings to look at that later. It has been quite amazing to see what a difference the whole process makes.

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

Kim: Just that Evocative Coaching is a skillset for supervisors as well. Supervisors often stand back and fail to connect with people, thinking they will lose their respect. They think they will fail to get things done if they get too down and dirty with their people, in the trenches, so to speak. I understand that thinking. I've been there. But Evocative Coaching opens up an entirely new understanding and way of getting things done through people. To cite the title of your wife's book, "Trust Matters", and the Evocative Coaching skillset enables supervisors to build trust with their people. I would strongly urge supervisors to take the Evocative Coaching Training Program as well.

Bob: I'm glad to hear that, because that is the thrust of Megan's and my next book, *Evoking Greatness: Transforming Schools One Leader at a Time*. Leadership really does matter and the old command-and-control style of leadership just doesn't get us there. Thanks for bringing that into the equation.