

The Identify Questions

1. On a scale of 1–10, with 1 being the worst lesson you’ve taught and 10 being the best, how would you rank that lesson?
2. What pleased you about the lesson?
3. What would have to change to move the lesson closer to a 10?
4. What would your students be doing differently if your class was a 10?
5. Tell me more about what that would look like.
6. How could we measure that change?
7. Do you want that to be your goal?
8. If you could hit that goal, would it really matter to you?
9. What teaching strategy can you use to hit your goal?
10. What are your next steps?



Video 3.1

Crysta Answers the Identify Questions to Set a PEERS Goal



Video 3.2

Cat Answers the Identify Questions to Set a PEERS Goal

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or some combination of these methods. If a teacher watches video of the lesson, the questions would be the focus on the coaching conversation. If the coach needs to share data with the teacher, the questions would be asked after the information has been shared. Each question serves a specific purpose during the coaching conversation.

The questions are not to be asked robotically, the same way in each conversation. Instead, they are markers for a living conversation that is different every time, and most coaches eventually find other useful questions for their coaching conversations.⁵ What matters is that coaches collaborate with teachers to identify goals that will have a powerful, positive impact on student learning and well-being. If the Identify coaching session ends with a PEERS goal, then whatever questions were asked proved successful. The Identify Questions we use and why we use them are described on the following pages.

5. A very helpful book on coaching questions is Tony Stoltzfus's *Coaching Questions: A Coach's Guide to Powerful Asking Skills* (2008).

When coach and teacher discuss the question, “What teaching strategy will you use to hit your goal?” the coach has to be intentional about ensuring that the conversation is a true dialogue. To encourage dialogue, instructional coaches balance advocacy with inquiry by fighting their desire to solve teachers’ problems, by listening effectively, and by posing all ideas provisionally. To engage in dialogue means always to make room for the teacher’s voice. However, this doesn’t mean coaches silence their voices. A dialogue is two or more people thinking together, and the coach needs to be one of the brains involved in the conversation. Coaches just need to make sure they don’t become the entire conversation.



Video 3.3

Crysta Identifies a Teaching Strategy to Use to Hit Her Goal



Video 3.4

Cat Identifies a Teaching Strategy to Use to Hit Her Goal

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10. What are the next steps? David Allen is probably our generation’s leading expert on time management. The planning process he describes in his book *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity* (2002), often shortened to GTD, is embraced with the kind of zeal usually saved for rock stars. Central to Allen’s GTD process is determining the next action. According to Allen, “When a culture adopts ‘What’s the next action?’ as a standard operating query, there’s an automatic increase in energy, productivity, clarity, and focus” (p. 236).



I have a personal mission to make “What’s the next action?” part of the global thought process. I envision a world in which no meeting or discussion will end, and no interaction cease, with a clear determination of whether or not some action is needed—and if it is, what it will be, or at least who has responsibility for it. I envision organizations adopting a standard that anything that lands in anyone’s “ten acres” will be evaluated for action required, and the resulting decisions managed appropriately. Imagine the freedom that would allow to focus attention on bigger issues and opportunities.

—David Allen

Getting Things Done (2002, p. 236)



and design thinking. Jobs’s views on simplicity have deeply influenced the way we see innovation at the Instructional Coaching Group.

Lopez’s book on hope is wonderful and describes in many ways the work of coaches “making hope happen.” It really helped me understand the complex activity of creating goals that foster hope.

I also read many books that helped me put together my ideas about questioning. Marilee Adams’s *Change Your Questions Change Your Life*, 3rd Edition (2016) told in the form of a fable, is an easy-to-understand yet wise book about the power of mindset and how the questions we ask can improve our coaching and even shape the way we think. I found Warren Berger’s *A More Beautiful Question* (2016) to be an inspiring description of the centrality of questioning within invention and problem solving. Michael Bungay Stanier’s *The Coaching Habit* is a deceptively simple but powerful book that presents seven effective coaching questions and habits that I think would help just about any coach get better. Finally, Jackie Acree Walsh and Beth Dankert Sattes *Leading Through Quality Questioning* (2010) does a great job of summarizing the literature on questioning that any change leader might need to employ.



Video 3.5

Crysta’s Identify Stage—Complete



Video 3.6

Cat’s Identify Stage—Complete

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