

## **A Coach Approach *Leading the Prairie Spirit Way***

**@prairiespiritsd #mpscpsd #pssdcoachapproach**

Prairie Spirit School Division (PSSD) [www.spiritsd.ca](http://www.spiritsd.ca) is located in Canada's midwest in central Saskatchewan. Located about two hours from the treeline, where the prairie gives way to the northern forest, the Division covers 15,000 square kilometres, an area over four times the size of Rhode Island (3144 square kilometres). The Division's substantial geographical size is the result of a 2006 amalgamation of three school divisions.

Prairie Spirit serves almost 12,000 students in 47 schools across 28 communities, including nine Hutterite colonies and three First Nations communities. The Division employs 650 teachers and continues to see considerable student enrolment growth each year.

Prairie Spirit's vision of "learners for life" guides our mission "to learn without limits in a world of possibilities," supporting student learning and employee growth based on system-wide pedagogical learning beliefs and educational practices.

Over the last several years, in-school administrators have been requesting assistance from Division leadership regarding developmental and performance feedback conversations with fellow teachers and support staff. Prairie Spirit's leadership team recognized the need for coaching and knew this direction would add value. Two Superintendents became certified coaches with Destination Leadership's [Expedition Coaching](#)® Certified Coach Training Program through Edwards School of Business, and received further certification as facilitators of the Expedition methodology.

The Director and Superintendents embraced the concept of leading by example. A coach approach was adopted and promoted with each other and with those principals and vice-principals they were working alongside. The leadership team was confident there would be a significant return on an

investment of time and resources in coaching, as well as improved employee engagement and relationships.

The next step in shifting PSSD culture was a two-day in-service of coaching development, conversations and focus for all Division in-school administrators, managers and supervisors, situated in the Division's culture. The Director and Learning Superintendents were all actively involved in this professional development and also led various sections with entertaining and informative role plays and book talks. Each approach highlighted potential opportunities to go deeper into the concept of leading with coaching.

The book talk for *The Coach Approach to School Leadership* was highlighted by Lori Jeschke, the Director of Education. Copies of this book were given to approximately 100 principals, vice principals, co-ordinators, superintendents and supervisors. Given the topic and the experiences of the authors—Jessica Johnson (public school principal), Shira Leibowitz (independent school principal, suburban and urban) and Kathy Perret (educational consultant)—*The Coach Approach* was, and continues to be, a favourite that is referenced regularly.

Other book talks helped participants decide which additional coaching books intrigued them and sparked an interest to continue the coach approach, based on their unique situations. These additional resources included: David Rock's *Quiet Leadership*, Bob Tschannen-Moran and Megan Tschannen-Moran's *Evocative Coaching – changing school culture one conversation at a time*, and Marilee Adams' book *Change your Questions Change your Life*.

Given the large size of the group, the two days were delivered twice for a total of four days with 30-50 participants in each cohort. The two days of coaching development were designed to build on the development in-school administrators had previously experienced, as well as the following main categories from the Expedition Coaching Program®:

#### Section 1: **The Coaching Role**

Big idea: Coaching is the art of creating an environment, through conversation.

## Section 2: **The GUIDE Coaching® Model**

Big idea: The GUIDE Coaching Model is a 5-step process that guides the questions of the manager-coach and the questions that the coach asks will guide the coachee towards achieving their stated goal.

## Section 3: **Intentional Listening**

Big idea: "To listen fully means to pay close attention to what is being said beneath the words. You listen not only to the "music" but to the essence of the person speaking.

You listen not only for what someone knows, but for who he or she is. Ears operate at the speed of sound, which is far slower than the speed of light the eyes take in. Generative listening is the art of developing deeper silences in yourself, so you can slow your mind's hearing to your ears' natural speed, and hear beneath the words to their meaning." Source: Peter Senge

## Section 4: **Intentional Questioning**

Big idea: Intentional questioning focuses on the coachee and the coachee's agenda... and requires a mindset shift in how we think about questions.

As managers and leaders learn to make the shift from being the expert problem-solver to being the facilitator of problem solving, the types of questions asked (and the intention behind the question) changes towards a focus on supporting people to move forward and achieve their goals.

## Section 5: **Coaching through change**

Big idea: Coaching is identified as one of the key success factors for leading and managing the people-side of change. The coaching is focused on supporting and shifting people through change and transition, overcoming resistance to accepting and embracing change!

## Section 6: **An Overview of Three Types of Feedback**

Big idea: Develop awareness and understanding around how to deliver feedback in a coach-approach distinguishing between three different types of feedback (performance, acknowledging and developmental).

## Section 7: **Providing Feedback: Performance**

Big idea: Provide an overview of the DIRECT Feedback® Model focused on providing "performance" feedback from a manager perspective. Develop awareness of the opportunity to use the coach-approach in supporting the coachee to develop solutions.

Next steps are being refined and practically planned as we move forward. The feedback from the two days reflected a very encouraging response to the efficacy of this approach and the desire to continue the learning towards leading as a coach. At the monthly in-school admin meetings, further scenarios were explored, with practical hands on application in working through the GUIDE® and DIRECT feedback® models, in addition to other models that were presented through the various book talks and

other promising practices. Coaching conversations continue at Admin Council and with in school leadership modelling the importance and continued focus.

Incredibly positive stories continue to be shared as the culture has started to shift and challenges are corrected before they become problems. Coaching development with other leadership groups in the Division has been provided and more is being planned. An annual process is being envisioned to ensure individuals new to the Division or new to a leadership role have the opportunity to understand and lead the Prairie Spirit way, utilizing a coach approach.

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