

Before You Give the Answer

A coaching protocol for helping teachers develop professional judgment rather than simply borrowing yours.

Use this when a teacher asks, “What should I do?”

Your experience matters. The goal is not to withhold expertise. The goal is to use it in a way that helps the teacher notice, interpret, decide, and learn.

The six-move coaching sequence

Move	Purpose	Possible language
1. NOTICE	Invite the teacher to describe what they are seeing before you interpret it.	What are you noticing? What happened that made you stop and think? What seems most important here?
2. INTERPRET	Help the teacher make meaning from what they noticed.	What do you think is happening? What makes you think that? What evidence are you using?
3. LOCATE THE GOAL	Clarify what the teacher wants students, colleagues, or the situation to move toward.	What are you hoping will be different? What would progress look like? What matters most in this moment?
4. GENERATE	Support the teacher in creating more than one possible response.	What are some options? What else could you try? If your first idea were unavailable, what might you do?
5. ANTICIPATE	Slow down the move from idea to action by examining likely consequences.	What might happen if you try that? How might different learners respond? What trade-offs or risks do you see?
6. CONTRIBUTE	Offer your own expertise after the teacher's thinking is visible.	Would it be helpful if I shared something I have seen or tried? Here is what I am noticing. How does that fit with your reading of the situation? What, if anything, from my experience seems useful here?

Before you answer, check your impulse

- ☐ I know a strategy that worked for me, so I want to offer it immediately.
- ☐ I am uncomfortable with the silence and want to fill it.
- ☐ I want to demonstrate that I am useful or knowledgeable.
- ☐ I am under time pressure and want to solve the issue quickly.
- ☐ I am assuming the teacher wants advice rather than thinking partnership.
- ☐ I am worried that allowing uncertainty will make me look less competent.

Three questions for the coach

What does the teacher need from me right now?

An answer, a question, perspective, reassurance, modeling, rehearsal, evidence, or simply space to think?

What will my response teach?

Will it strengthen the teacher's capacity to reason through future situations – or make my judgment the default?

What is mine to contribute?

What knowledge, evidence, experience, or alternative perspective can I add without closing down the teacher's agency?

When direct advice is appropriate

Coaching is not a rule against telling. More direct guidance may be warranted when:

- there is an immediate safety, legal, ethical, or student-wellbeing concern;
- the teacher explicitly asks for a concrete example after thinking through the issue;
- the teacher lacks essential information needed to make an informed decision;
- modeling or demonstration is the clearest way to make a practice visible;
- time-sensitive conditions require action before extended inquiry is possible.

Even then, close the loop: What did you notice? Why might this approach fit? What would you adapt? What did you learn from trying it?

A quick post-conversation reflection

Ask yourself	Notes
Who did most of the thinking?	
Did I understand the teacher's interpretation before offering mine?	
Where did I create agency? Where might I have reduced it?	

Ask yourself	Notes
What did I learn about the teacher's reasoning?	
What will I follow up on next time?	

The aim

A strong coaching conversation does not end with the teacher knowing what you would do. It ends with the teacher better able to reason about what they will do – and why.

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