Top 10 Reading Coach Tips:

1. *Listen, listen, listen!!!* The best advice I ever got was to listen before speaking. And listening involves more than just being silent. It involves thinking about what the other person is saying. Usually when people are silent they aren’t listening; they are simply waiting for the other person to stop talking so they can say what they are thinking.

   a. There were so many times when teachers would ask me a question and I would wait 5 seconds before answering. Usually they would answer their own question before I responded. This way they built confidence in themselves and respected me for not simply telling them the answer.

   b. Listen intently. Put the other 50 million things you are working on aside and give your full attention to the speaker. Use eye contact, nod in agreement, say 'hmm' every once in a while. Sometimes when I was listening to a teacher’s concerns I would have the answer or a really good suggestion that I wanted to share so badly but I always tried to concentrate on what the speaker was saying before sharing. Often times my thoughts changed as I continued to listen. What I had to say was different than my initial thoughts and I was glad I waited to speak. I saved myself from saying the wrong thing, unintentionally insulting a teacher, or saying things that could have been interpreted the wrong way.

2. *Don’t fall into the gossip traps!!!*

   a. It took two days on the job for me to meet the first ‘gossiper’ in the district. She talked to me for two hours straight about everything from her personal life to the media specialist to the special education teacher. She didn’t ask me any questions about myself or my background; she just went right into the gossip. By the time I finally...
got away I was exhausted from listening, keeping myself quiet, and could barely see past my glossy eyes.

b. Having spent my first year as a reading coach splitting my time between two schools, I was often caught in the crossfire of gossip. I always tried my best to stay out of the drama. I was very careful with what I shared between the two schools. Often times teachers would outright put down the efforts of the other school and I kept my mouth shut.

c. I knew the second I joined in on the talk I would begin losing trust at both schools. Even though it was very difficult some days to keep quiet, I knew that speaking out would cost me much more than the discomfort of keeping my thoughts to myself.

3. Think about the effects of your words before you speak

a. You may disagree with a teacher’s teaching philosophy, instructional style, or what he/she is implementing in the classroom. You may also know that teachers are not using the best practices in reading.

b. Before you pick a battle with a teacher, make sure it’s worth it. You may destroy a professional relationship with a teacher in one conversation. You must choose your words carefully because the aftermath of what you say could last years. I know teachers who refuse to work with certain reading coaches because of something the coach did or said five years before.

c. For example, the reading coach I replaced told me that she had a battle with the fifth grade teachers about four years ago. The fifth grade teachers were using AR (accelerated reader) in their classroom as a competition. They even went so far as to make a chart with students’ names and AR points. They posted the chart in the hallway
and ranked the students' on the chart based on how many AR points they had. I completely agreed with the reading coach that this type of misuse of the AR program is ridiculous. It did need to be addressed. The reading coach went to my principal with her concerns. Long story short, the reading coach convinced my principal to make the fifth grade teachers take down the AR posters and stop using the program as a competition. Since this happened four years ago, the fifth grade teachers have refused to work with the reading coach. In fact, she hasn't even entered their classrooms since then. She told me that this year was the first year they have been socially polite to each other in the lunchroom and hallways.

d. So, you must be careful that if you chose to begin a battle with teachers that you are willing to suffer the consequences of severed relationships that could last for years. I'm not suggesting you don't do anything about situations you know are not good for children. But you do need to be careful at how you handle these delicate situations. And always keep in mind the long-term effects of your words and actions.

4. Ways to get on teachers' good sides right away

a. Give away free stuff at the first staff meeting. Go through all your teaching things and decide what you can part with and give it away. Make a ‘freebies’ box for teachers to browse through. If you are like me, I don't need all the stuff I have collected in my regular teaching classroom over six years; so, I gave a bunch away.

b. Offer to come into their classrooms and read to their students. I passed around a sign-up sheet at the first staff meeting for teachers to write their names in a 20-minute slot. Everybody wins by coming into the classrooms; the teachers get a break, you get to meet the
students, you can get a feel for the teacher's style and organization system, and you can begin to discuss literacy goals with the teacher.

c. Be friendly! Having a friendly face can go a long way. I know it sounds cheesy but just smiling and being kind to someone, even when you’re crabby, can make a big difference. People are more likely to say, “She’s always so crabby” in a negative way than they are to say, “She’s always so nice and smiley. I can’t stand how nice she is.” Even if someone is rude to you, be nice in return. Most of the time those crabby teachers will come around. Besides, they probably aren’t being crabby because they don’t like you; they probably have something else going on in their lives that you know nothing about.

5. Be Patient!

   a. Sometimes teachers have a difficult time with change. You may be in a position where your district mandates a new assessment or literacy curriculum. In this situation teachers will have a lot of questions for you. This can be extremely difficult to handle, especially if you are new yourself. I have found that I tell teachers the same thing over-and-over and they still can feel overwhelmed. Just remember to be patient and let them know you understand how difficult it can be to change and adjust old routines. You may have to give some teachers more assistance than others. It can be frustrating at times. Sometimes I wondered how many times I had to explain something, especially since it seemed so simple to me. But I always remembered to be patient and work with teachers as long as they needed me to.

6. Never trust teachers to read all their emails!

   a. So often I have put answers to teachers’ questions in my weekly newsletter that gets emailed every Friday only to have teachers asked me the same questions I just answered a few days prior. Or I'll give
my schedule to teachers only to have them question where I was one day the week before. Teachers often neglect to read their emails carefully enough to understand everything you do all day. Make sure to stay patient and persistent in your efforts to communicate with teachers. Keep emailing, send reminders for important upcoming activities, and always expect some teachers to not read your emails.

7. **Always carry your calendar and a note pad (ipad)…**

   a. So many teachers stop you in the hall and ask favors. They may want you to come into their room to help assess, do an intervention, or team teach. Without your calendar it is impossible to schedule a time. And without a notepad you’ll likely forget which teacher asked what from you. The requests can quickly become overwhelming. Even if you ask teachers to send you an email with all their requests, they will still stop you in the hall. Be prepared!

8. **It’s okay to say No!**

   a. I know how it feels to be the new kid on the block. You want to earn the respect of the teachers while at the same time making sure you are meeting your job responsibilities. Be careful you don’t say yes to everything teachers ask you to do. Remember, you are not their secretaries! It is not okay for you to be spending massive amounts of time on projects such as inventoring books or filing papers. Your job responsibilities are likely to assess, coach, and teach reading interventions.

   b. If a teacher asks you to work on a project ask yourself, is this something that an aide can do? If the answer is yes, give the job to an aide! You may want to explain your job responsibilities to the teacher again. Of course be polite, but do not accept large projects that can be completed by an aide. Teachers will not respect you as a
professional reading coach if you are doing their busy work. They will likely respect you much more for saying no, but finding someone who can help with their task. Maybe you could call parent volunteers or find an aide to get the job done.

9. Never act like you know everything...

a. Remember, just because you are the reading specialist, doesn’t mean you know everything. Don’t feel like you should know every reading research that has ever been conducted. Don’t put pressure on yourself to be an expert at every reading strategy program on the market. It is definitely important to know your stuff, but you can’t possibly know everything.

b. If a teacher asks you a reading related question that you don’t know the answer to, be honest. Let the teacher know you aren’t sure but you will do your research to find an answer. I know that I don’t know half the stuff there is to know about teaching reading. Do I know a lot? Sure. But, I certainly have room to learn more. I try to find one thing each day that I can use to help teachers in their classrooms.

10. Build yourself a layer of seriously thick skin!

   c. There will be days when teachers will be frustrated, overwhelmed, or simply anxious about their classroom situations and they will take their frustrations out on you. They may make comments or complaints to you that you have absolutely no control over. Do not take it personally.

   d. For example, sometimes teachers will complain that they have a student in their room that drives them crazy. They may complain to you and demand that you pull the student for interventions. If your schedule doesn’t allow this time, they may become frustrated with
you. At some point, frustrated teachers may even demand to know exactly what you do every day.

e. Don't take these kinds of situations personally. Remember the frustrations from when you were a regular classroom teacher. I remember looking at our school's reading specialist and thinking about how nice it would be to have students for 30 minutes and then be able to leave the room. Some teachers may simply be jealous of your position.

f. Whatever the reason, you will experience hearing teachers' frustrations over a variety of reasons. You have to learn to set your personal feelings aside and remember they are not attacking you as a person. It's kind of like the poor bank teller who gets an angry customer at her window. The customer is upset about an unapproved bank withdrawal. He/she begins to shout at the teller and complain loudly about the bank's policies. Even though the bank teller had absolutely nothing to do with the unapproved withdrawal, she unfortunately has to deal with the upset customer. That's kind of like being a reading specialist some days. You may have teachers complaining to you about district mandated assessments or programs that you have no control over. You have to find a way to manage their complaints without taking it personally.
Questions for Coaching During Pre-Observation Conference

Teacher Name: ____________________________________ Date: _____________

• Describe the objective(s) for the lesson I will be watching.

• How did you decide on this lesson?

• What is your primary goal for your lesson today, and how will you know if you have met it?

• On what would you like me to focus my attention while I am watching the lesson?

• What are your students' strengths in this area? Challenges?

• Anything else I need to know before my visit?
Complete what went well, something I learned, things to try, and resources before post-conference. Complete the rest during post-conference discussion. Make a copy for the teacher’s records.

**POST-CONFERENCE**

Teacher: _____________________
Lesson: _____________________
Date: _____________________

Observer: ____________________

- What worked well for you during today’s lesson?

- Were there any tricky parts to your lesson? What were they and how were they tricky?

- What would you do differently if you taught this lesson again?

- Things I noted that went well:

- Here is something I learned from you today...

- Things you might try for next time:

- Teaching Plan:

- Resources that will support your teaching plan:
Use when observing in the classroom. This will help when planning for the post-observation and future professional development.

**Observation Notes**

Teacher: _________________________ Observer: ______________________

Date: ____________ Subject: ____________________ Topic: ________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Teacher does/says</th>
<th>Students do/say</th>
<th>Note what is working well, suggestions, other observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use as a reminder for teachers to try out a new skill based on the post-conference discussion.

Teaching Plan

Teacher: __________________________ Date: _____________
Subject area: _________________ Topic: _________________
Teaching Plan: ________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
Assess with: _______________ Review plan on: ______________