



Courtesy of St. Michaels University School

Leading with Curiosity in the Classroom and Beyond



In 2011, St. Michaels University School (SMUS) Head of School Bob Snowden was seeking a way to stay fresh after being in the same leadership role for 15 years. He turned to coaching and quickly realized the impact it could have on his team and SMUS, a private day and boarding school in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. The initiative grew from coaching for the senior management team to the entire organization. Now, the school is a collaborative, feedback-rich environment.

In recognition of its collaborative coaching initiative, the International Coach Federation (ICF) named the organization one of five finalists in the 2017 ICF International Prism Award program. The Prism Award program recognizes organizations with outstanding coaching programs that yield discernible and measurable positive impacts, fulfill rigorous professional standards, address key strategic goals and shape organizational culture. (Learn more at Coachfederation.org/prism.)

Distributing Leadership

Once Snowden began his coaching engagement, he recognized that coaching could strengthen the school's

leadership in a collaborative manner, encouraging feedback and collective ways to address and solve issues within the school.

“Given where organizations are going, the importance of distributing leadership throughout an organization and developing a culture of collaboration were on our radar,” says Snowden. “When I brought up the idea with my colleagues, there was unanimous and enthusiastic desire to participate along with me.”

Within the first year, 200 staff members received coach training and 14 leaders became coaching champions. There are now 25 coaching champions within the organization.

Coaching has been integrated at all levels of the organization. Workshops and training are provided throughout the school to increase awareness of the coaching initiative. The workshops align with ICF Core Competencies, ethics and confidentiality—encouraging trust and transparency.

Senior leadership, management and their direct reports receive Executive Coaching from four external coaches, all of whom hold an ICF Credential. These leaders use coaching skills with and seek regular feedback from each of their teams. This process has proven extremely beneficial to the residence life team. “We’ve been able to take the themes that come out of those conversations and look at them more globally, and then I apply all the

coaching principles into how we're going to solve or come up with the ideas to support those initiatives," says Keith Driscoll, Director of Residence and Student Life. "We've had a tremendous amount of change in the past four years predicated on the feedback from staff."

Coaching components are also included in new staff orientation. All new hires are educated on coaching and the coaching model, receive some coach training, and can practice coaching skills in an intensive workshop setting.

Tailoring the Development Process

SMUS wanted to ensure its leaders received a solid foundation in coaching but knew that time would be a challenge. Snowden also didn't want people to feel like coaching was an obligation. As a result, SMUS and the external coaches developed the "Days in Residence" model. This model lets coaching champions determine how to best use their coaching hours, whether they decide to participate in one-on-one coaching, team coaching, supervision or mentoring. They can also gift hours to their colleagues.

Enriched through Feedback

There has been a positive shift in atmosphere and increased trust, safety and transparency within the organization. A coaching approach has been integrated into evaluation and goal-setting, and it is apparent in conversations, which are now filled with curiosity and inquiry rather than advice.

A survey, performed by the external coaches, found that 75 percent of leaders are more comfortable in giving and receiving feedback and in sharing decision-making power. An astounding 100 percent of respondents noted positive changes in how feedback is delivered and received.



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The coaching culture is trickling down to students, too. The quality of teacher-student relationships and educational practice has improved due to a shared language from coaching and the development of a workplace environment that is supportive of feedback. According to Driscoll, students are seeing the control that they do—or do not—have. They now know that they have the ability to empower themselves by asking questions and exploring their own path.

"Now as a school, I think we're able to explore more opportunities and make better, more timely decisions about which way we want to proceed. This makes the school a better place for students," says Driscoll. "I don't know if that could have happened 10 years ago without this culture."

The International Coach Federation (ICF) is dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high ethical standards, providing independent certification and building a worldwide network of credentialed coaches across a variety of coaching disciplines. ICF is active in representing all facets of the coaching industry, including Executive, Life Vision and Enhancement, Leadership, Relationship, and Career Coaching. Its 26,000-plus members located in more than 130 countries* work toward the common goal of enhancing awareness of coaching, upholding the integrity of the profession, and continually educating themselves with the newest research and practices.

**Numbers as of August 2017. Numbers are subject to change month to month.*



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