



Questions for Coaches

Promoting equity requires continuous self-examination and a willingness to engage in difficult conversations

BY DENISE MICHELLE GAMBLE

“Leadership is found in the action to defeat that which would defeat you. You are made by the struggles you choose.”

—C.T. Vivian

Leadership coaching is an art, and in order to be effective in our role as leadership coaches, we must first look within—take a long look in the mirror in order to understand our own internal thinking and biases. Each of us also needs to look outward to consider the context of our unique coaching environment.

As a leadership coach, you should ask yourself: What are your core beliefs? What do you value? What is your “why”

or purpose? These questions should not be taken lightly. They will provide direction in your effort to effectively coach school leaders with an equity lens. I ask myself these questions on a regular basis to stay grounded as I engage in equity work.

A Simplified Definition

“Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

—James Baldwin

Initially, I defined diversity broadly, thinking in terms of understanding that every individual is unique. But I also needed to consider the various dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic sta-

tus, age, physical ability, religious and political beliefs, and other factors.

I constantly redefine equity as I navigate through each coaching experience, and you should do the same. For the purposes of this article, however, equity is justice for what is right and fair—the freedom from bias.

As you move forward, you will need to prepare to address the elephant in (and outside of) the room—implicit and explicit bias. Look at the images and words within your coaching contexts. Dig deep to consider how you can support school leaders as they confront (or avoid) issues of diversity and equity.

Changing Mindsets

Equity shifts are “shifts in mindset and practice that set the foundation for providing and sustaining equitable outcomes for all students.”

—*Tennessee Leaders for Equity Playbook, 2018*

As a coach, you will need to begin difficult conversations with coachees as you navigate a course down the educational equity path, often striving to change mindsets. There will be more questions: What is in the best interest of the school and community? Is everyone on board with equity work? What are the current views on equity in your school community?

The National Equity Project includes these checkpoints for diversity and equity:

- Student outcomes and experiences
- Teacher practices and beliefs
- Staff discourse and culture
- Parents and communities
- Community partners and other stakeholders

These can be used as conversation-starters with your coachee. They will offer opportunities for you and your coachees to view the environment close-up and from a distance to challenge practices of the past and present.

Ask your coachees questions during these conversations, such as, “What does diversity and equity feel and look like in your current reality?” This conversation can be a collaborative experience; encourage each coachee to share their knowledge and experiences to build a rich dialogue that might expand one’s thinking about diversity and equity.

Finally, the conversation should connect to your values and purpose. I recommend establishing an agenda prior to each meeting in order to stay focused during the conversation. Listen to what your coachee is saying or not saying. Encourage the coachee to speak their truth, but be prepared for emotions, personal recollections, and challenges.

As a leadership coach, you should also examine your own biases and reflect on your core beliefs frequently. Equity is an outcome, as well as a process—and the process requires the leadership coach to observe, listen, and reflect. Leadership coaches must be a resource and break down their own biases as they coach through an equity lens. ●

Denise Michelle Gamble is an NAESP principal mentor and a retired turnaround principal for Chicago Public Schools. She serves on NAESP’s National Task Force for Race & Equity.

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