Indistar® Coaches
Lessons from *The Talent Code*

We will use the term "coach" to apply to the people external to the district who provide ongoing support for a District Leadership Team and the people external to the school who provide ongoing support for a School Leadership Team. In some cases, the person is called a "coach," and in other cases the term may be "capacity builder" or "education specialist." In coaching with Indistar®, your learners are primarily the principal and School Leadership Team. Or, if you are coaching a district team, then your learners are the superintendent and District Leadership Team. Of course, the work of the Leadership Team fans out to engage everyone in the district or school community, so the coach is always mindful of the ways the Leadership Team's lessons learned are internalized by others, how the Leadership Team's objectives are explained to everyone, and how the Leadership Team supports each person's mastery and application of effective practice.

Working within Indistar®, the coach supports the Leadership Team in its focused and candid engagement with:

1. The process of assessing, planning, implementing, monitoring, and celebrating the accomplishment of indicators of effective professional practice.
2. The indicators themselves, and the objectives that are derived from them: Explaining the objectives to everyone in the school community, determining the current level of implementation, providing the training and support for everyone to reach a high level of implementation throughout the school.

The Talent Code by Daniel Coyle (2009) offers great ideas for coaches of any kind, which are summarized here.

What is Coaching?
"Coaching is a long, intimate conversation, a series of signals and responses that move toward a shared goal. A coach's true skill consists not in some universally applicable wisdom that he can communicate to all, but rather in the supple ability to locate the sweet spot on the edge of each individual [learner's] ability, and to send the right signals to help the [learner] reach toward the right goal, over and over" (p. 178).

What is the Sweet Spot? What is Deep Practice?
For educators, the "sweet spot" is a readily understandable concept. Think of scaffolding. Think of knowing the learner's current level of understanding and mastery and then stretching the learner just enough to keep the task both challenging and attainable, and then upping the ante. We learn best when engaged in the learning; engagement requires an appropriate level of challenge to sustain interest.

Coyle calls this "deep practice." Deep practice is not based on an assumption that innate talent is the driver of success, but that success comes from the accumulation of small efforts, with scaffolding that moves the sweet spot as the learner gains mastery. "Small efforts produce big, lasting results" (p. 19). The sweet spot is that space between what the learner knows and what the learner is trying to do. In the sweet spot, we make mistakes, then self-correct, then move forward.

Coyle's Three Rules of Deep Practice
1. <u>Chunk It Up</u>: First, the learner must see the big picture—like exploring a room in the dark. You grope around and get the dimensions of the room, bump into furniture, and find the parts within the whole, see the patterns. Once you absorb the whole thing, you break it into manageable chunks, slow down, master the details.
2. <u>Repeat It</u>: "Practice is the best teacher" (p. 87). Each detail, each task, is repeated in practice to reach mastery. The work is daily, constantly perfecting the details. Little things matter—lots of little things done well.
3. <u>Learn to Feel It</u>: The learner, with deep practice, comes to "feel" when he or she has it right, to know when the note is off pitch, to self-correct. The learner picks a target, reaches, falls short, evaluates the gap, and reaches again.

Coyle's Concept of Ignition
Motivation. What propels the learner forward? While "deep practice is a cool, conscious act, ignition is a hot, mysterious burst, an awakening. Where deep practice is an incremental wrapping, ignition works through lightening flashes of image and emotion. . . Where deep practice is all about staggering-baby steps, ignition is about the set of signals and subconscious forces that create our identity; the moments that lead us to say *that is who I want to be*" (p. 101). Coyle says that ignition does not come from within but from outside. In finding the sweet spot, applying appropriate challenge, the coach triggers the ignition. The coach shows what "could be," sometimes by describing what other similar learners have done, always emphasizing the efficacy of practice.

Coyle's Four Virtues of Coaching
1. <u>The Matrix</u>: "The vast grid of task-specific knowledge that distinguishes the best [coaches] and allows them to creatively and effectively respond to a [learner's] efforts" (p. 178; taken from Gallimore). This knowledge is acquired through the coach's experience and practice, enabling the coach to find the sweet spot for each learner, to "see the learning the [learner] is capable of and to go there" (p. 178). The matrix is the coach's "technical knowledge, strategy, experience, and practiced instinct ready to be put to instant use to locate and understand where the [learners] are and where they need to go" (p. 179).
2. <u>Perceptiveness</u>: "The eyes are the giveaway. They are usually sharp and warm and are deployed in long, unblinking gazes. . . . Though the gaze can be friendly, it's not about friendship. It's about information. It's about figuring you out" (p. 184). Coyle explains that perceptiveness

requires attention to the uniqueness of each learner, to understand the learner in detail, to constantly "check" to see how the learner is responding to coaching. Good coaches are good listeners.

3. <u>The GPS Reflex</u>: The coach gives directions, like a GPS, not in a dictatorial tone, but with clarity, with specifics, with sufficient urgency: "Turn left, turn right, go straight ahead." These are "just-in-time directives" that guide the learner in the right direction. The coach probes, nudges, questions, applies "strategic impatience" to guide the learner in a productive direction toward the goal.

4. <u>Theatrical Honesty</u>: The coach uses "drama and character" to reach the learners with truth about their performance--candor, expressed with sincerity. Moral honesty. Connecting the learner with the learner's own high standards and expectations. This often means pointing out errors, challenging in a supportive way, helping each learner bring out his or her best. Making the work seem as important as it truly is.

Gradual Release: Learner Independence Achieved Over Time

"A [coach] is one who makes himself progressively unnecessary" (Thomas Carruthers, in Coyle, p. 196). The coach builds the learner's ability to find the sweet spot, to engage in deep practice, to self-correct, to apply the same criteria for analyzing his or her own performance that the coach has applied. The coach ingrains in the learner this mantra of "criteria and process" through repetition and reinforcement. The learner internalizes the coach's lessons, assumes responsibility for engaging in the process with integrity and high expectation.

Reflections and Application
Group Discussion and Reporting Out

After reading the summary of *The Talent Code* above, discuss the following questions. Jot down your group's conclusions to briefly and succinctly report out.

1. Based on your experience coaching a Leadership Team, what are two essential lessons that the team must learn to effectively engage in the process of assessing, planning, implementing, monitoring, and celebrating the accomplishment of indicators of effective professional practice?

    A.

    B.

2. Based on your experience coaching a Leadership Team, what are two essential lessons that the team must learn to effectively communicate expectations to everyone in the district or school community, determine the current level of implementation, and train and support everyone to reach a high level of implementation throughout the district or school?

    A.

    B.

3. What tools does Indistar® provide to facilitate your coaching?

4. How is a continuous improvement process different from annual planning?

5. How does Indistar® facilitate "deep practice"?

6. What three points from Coyle's *The Talent Code*, as summarized above, do you find most useful to you in coaching Leadership Teams?

   A.

   B.

   C.

7. How will you apply each of these three points in your coaching this year?

   A.

   B.

   C.