KEY PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE COACHING
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PURPOSE
This section explains the philosophical principles that underlie a successful ECE coaching initiative.

THIS SECTION
- Introduction to seven key principles of effective coaching to child care.
- Applying the key principles to the realities of ECE coaching.

RATIONALE
Through our years of working with diverse child care settings and communities, we have adapted our coaching approach to best meet the individual needs of each client. This responsive approach, however, is grounded in seven unwavering fundamental principles. These principles have proven to be key in attaining and maintaining changes in client practices.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE COACHING
1. Client-driven Services
2. Systemic Approach
3. Praxis
4. Results-focused
5. Intentional Framework
6. Ongoing Support for Coaches
7. Relationship-based Capacity Building

These principles closely match those highlighted in the Zaslow & Tout 2010 Report on Professional Development.1

Consider carefully whether these principles align with your agency’s current service delivery approach, are new to your agency, or are in conflict with your agency’s current practices. If matching, or new but acceptable, your initiative has some strong foundation. If these principles do not resonate with you and your staff, our experience is that it will be difficult to sustain an effective coaching initiative.

To illustrate how these abstract principles can be put into action, we have provided a few samples of the principles in practice.

1. **Client-driven Services**

   Effective coaching is grounded in the interests and needs of the client within each unique environment, and respects and responds to the culture of the client, program, and community. Change is more likely to occur and be sustained when clients have the opportunity to develop their own improvement goals, after thoughtful reflection on cultural and environmental influences.

   **Principle in Practice**
   - The coach identifies areas of agreement among the client, the program leadership (if different from client), and the coach on areas of needs and strengths.
   - The coach cultivates authentic collaboration between the client, the program leadership, and the coach to develop specific and attainable improvement goals.
   - The coach adopts an attitude of cultural humility. The coach, in a partnership role with the client, learns about the unique mix of perspectives and cultures that influence the program. This learning informs the coach’s suggestions for change.

2. **Systemic Approach**

   ECE program quality results from the interaction of several systemic factors, including: program philosophy, policies, procedures, personnel, and the families and communities being served. Effective coaching supports clients in taking a systemic perspective when considering and instituting change.

   **Principle in Practice**
   - The coach begins services with a thoughtful assessment of needs and strengths, and a global-context perspective that takes into account the many factors that impact care.

3. **Praxis**

   Effective coaching not only assists ECE professionals in the acquisition of new theories and perspectives, it also provides support as professionals put these theories into practice in their complex, unique settings.

   **Principle in Practice**
   - The coach assists the clients in translating their quality vision into a prioritized work plan of specific goals and related activities.
   - The coach observes the clients as they attempt new practices and provides specific feedback on their efforts.
4. **Results-focused**
Effective coaching is based on achieving clearly defined goals through an adaptive process. With results-focused coaching, coaches help clients reflect on their progress toward goals, identify successful strategies, and maintain their progress despite unexpected challenges.

**Principle in Practice**
- The coach creates clear, mutually agreed-upon rubrics to measure the effectiveness of strategies and the progress toward stated goals.
- The coach conducts periodic assessments of the overall coaching initiative’s efficacy, including client reports, coach self-reports, and some form of objective pre- and post-coaching measure (pre- and post-coaching tests, third-party observations, etc.).

5. **Intentional Framework**
Effective coaching takes place within an intentional framework that includes a clearly articulated coaching philosophy and a well-defined coaching protocol.

**Principle in Practice**
- The coach establishes clear roles and responsibilities for the coach and client (and, if relevant, the other child care program staff and administrators) in implementing strategies.

6. **Ongoing Support for Coaches**
Coaching can be complex and intense work. To maintain efficacy, coaches need a supportive infrastructure that provides reflective supervision, peer support, and periodic professional skills training.

**Principle in Practice**
- The coach participates in monthly case-conference meetings led by a knowledgeable advisor or supervisor.

7. **Relationship-based Capacity Building**
The overall goal of effective coaching is to build a client’s capacity to lead change. Having a strengths-based attitude helps a coach to see beyond a need, to the capabilities a client brings to the work. An effective coach builds a relationship that fosters the client’s own abilities and lessens the client’s need for coaching.

**Principle in Practice**
- When creating strategies with the client, the coach focuses on what is currently working well in the program. From that frame of reference, the coach can empower the client to draw on individual internal resources as well as the programs’ strengths to navigate through current challenges.
- The coach regularly reflects on work and project progress to preclude unintentionally undercutting the client’s leadership and/or fostering the client’s dependence on the coach. The coach watches for the client’s increasing ability to deal with current situations, and builds on those successes to enable the client to independently handle future situations.