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Listening can cultivate growth

Q What did you do to overcome the challenge of resistance?

I always thought I was a good listener, but as I coached, I found out I wasn't. I was sitting with a teacher and he had a question. I anticipated the question and interjected. And he stopped me. At that point, I began wondering if I was not giving people a chance to ask me the questions on their minds. As much as I want to talk and share what I know, I had to learn to listen. There's something in listening that's greater than coming in and showing people. And the second thing is to keep it simple — offer something that the teacher can use the next day.

Many times, a teacher would say, "I've been doing this for 20 or 30 years and now the state is telling me what I'm doing is wrong." I had to tell them that no one is telling them they're wrong, just that there might be a better way to engage their

students. It's a lot of talking, of stroking, of giving alternatives. I'd ask, "Would you want to try ... ?" And I'd let the seed sit there rather than trying to plant the whole field at once.

To get through the rough times, I created a personal network. I started with teachers I knew. From there, I started to develop relationships with coaches from a lot of places through Twitter. I found them by clicking on my friends' names to see whom they follow and finding out who was a coach, then I'd follow them and they'd follow me back.

I might post something in a blog or on Twitter if I was down in the dumps and say, "I had this happen. What would you say to this person?" It was amazing the outpouring of support I got from friends and coaches in the same situation who'd say, "Why don't you try this? Here's what I did with a teacher like that and it helped." I built a great rapport with those colleagues and used those ideas. My personal network helped get me through. ♦

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