

Coaching students toward success

While each of our paths was different, when we look back on how we ended up working in higher education, we realize that we didn't get here alone. In our corner we had a teacher, a mentor or a coach believing in us, instructing us and motivating us along the way. Bill Walsh, former coach for the San Francisco 49ers, is known for saying "The four most powerful words are: I believe in you" (Alaimo, 2018, para. 17). Sometimes that makes all the difference.

The word "coach" has been around for nearly 200 years. Although most of us associate the term with sports, it actually originated in academia in 1830 when Oxford University used "coach" as slang for their tutors who "carried students through an exam" (Wiktionary, n.d., para. 1).

Today, you can find a coach for every aspect of life (sports teams, personal fitness, financial choices, etc.) and no matter what, their role remains unchanged: They help set direction, they motivate toward set goals, they give feedback when mistakes are made, they encourage when things get frustrating and they challenge when monotony sets in. Our role in working with students is to help carry them through. Here are some tips for coaching your students to success.

INSTRUCT THEM TOWARD SUCCESS

In my many years on the basketball court and in the classroom, I've learned how similar my role is. In both areas, I instruct, motivate and encourage students toward learning objectives. At times, athletes on the court or students in the classroom get off track and lose sight of the goal. They might need clarification or further direction on a play or an assignment. Our role is to continue to lead them down the learning path, instruct them in the content and provide the means for meeting a learning objective.

BUILD UNDERSTANDING THROUGH PRACTICE

As a coach, I know the importance of practice. On the court, we drill many times each day so they can execute plays when it's game time. Practicing plays from a playbook consistently over time leads to increased understanding and mastery. Our classroom practice is similar. Students that consistently practice content throughout the course will retain information at a higher level and be able to apply that knowledge on assessments.

KEEP THEM ENGAGED IN THE GAME

It's easy to keep our star players or star students engaged. They are the ones who are in the middle of the game, deep in discussion or asking clarifying questions. Other athletes on the bench or students on the fringe can often feel disconnected with the content or isolated from others as they struggle to navigate coursework. Encouraging discussion, keeping tabs on those who miss assignments or ensuring initial understanding can go a long way to build student confidence and keep them engaged.

UNDERSTAND LIFE HAPPENS

While some might remember their coach on the sidelines barking orders in a hooded sweatshirt, successful coaches spend less time "on x's and o's and more time learning about people" according to Mike Krzyzewski, head basketball coach at Duke University (Kline, 2011, para. 51). While we can't know every battle that our students face, we can understand that life happens. Whether it's illness, military deployment, family struggles or financial problems, knowing that life happens and providing some caring flexibility can lead a student to success.

At UAF eCampus, we use these strategies to respond to students' lives and we work to keep students engaged. Recently we launched our eCoaching program where our Success Coaches help new students transition into college, help current students stay focused, and assist graduating seniors with career advising. eCampus Success Coaches are positioned to guide students through every level of college until they've reached success. Once they've mastered the playbook, they can move on to coaching their own teams. If we can assist your students in any way, consider referring them to us: <https://ecampus.uaf.edu/ecoaching/>.

References

- Alaimo, T. (2018, October 21). [16 Quotes From Bill Walsh That Every Leader Should Read](#).
- Kline, M. (2011, March 11). [Mike Krzyzewski's 20 Best Quotes from His Time as Duke's Coach](#).
- Wiktionary. (n.d.). [Coach](#).