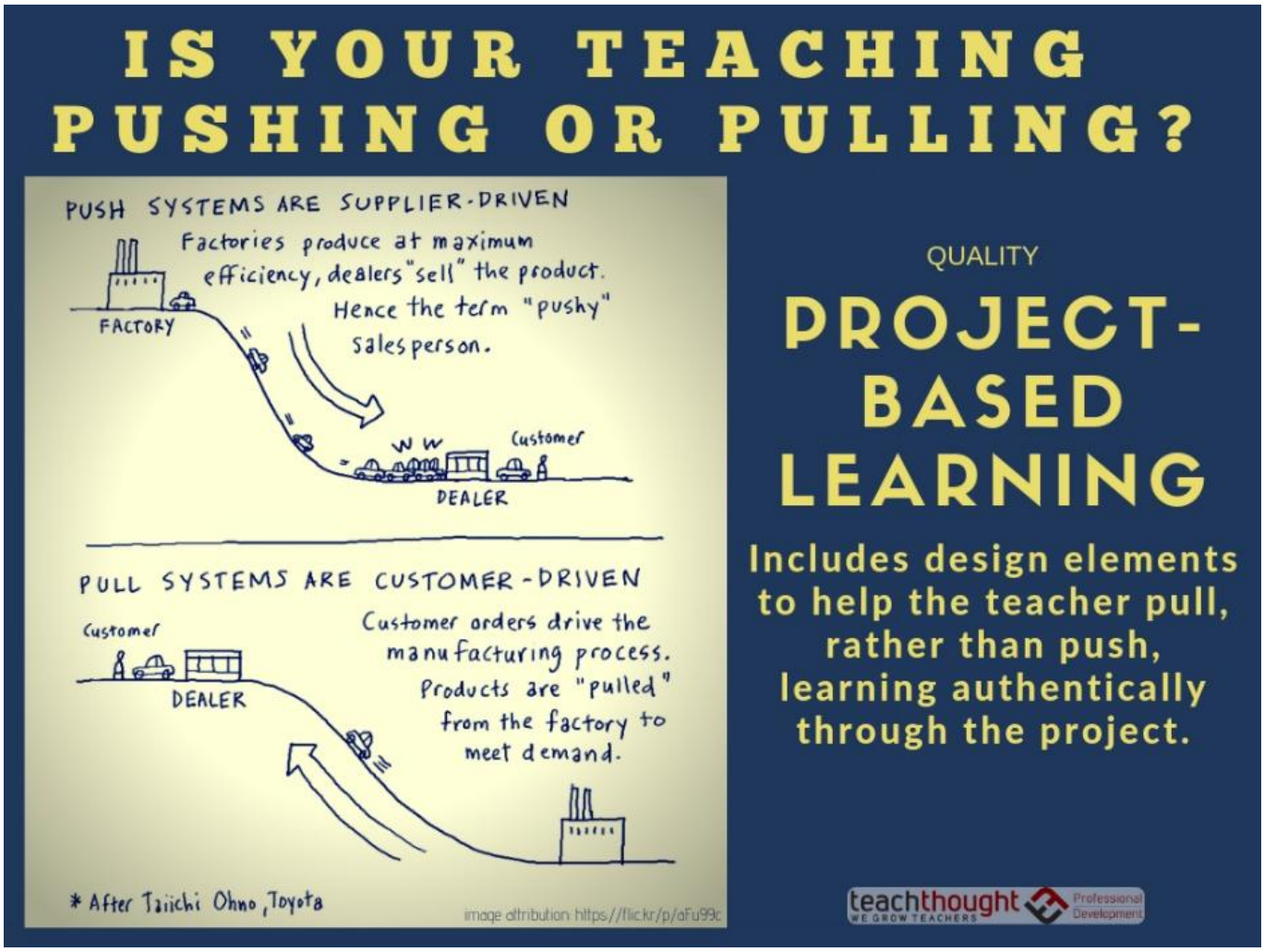
Pushing or Pulling for Learning

Drew Perkins provided this explanation of pushing or pulling for learning outcomes:

"When pushing learning, teachers can feel like a 'pushy' salesperson desperate to convince students that what they're selling is worth buying. Some of those techniques include dangling grades and using points as an incentive in learning, trying to convince students they'll need this in the future, or admonishing them for not paying attention because this will be on the test. None of these tend to resonate with students and most often feel less than genuine for teachers. Positioning learning in terms of compliance will always be an uphill battle where even the best and most passionate teachers will struggle."



"Pushing helps us change the culture and climate of our classrooms and schools away from one where adults and their learners are often inherently in conflict (adult: I want you to learn and do this – student: I don't want to and you can't make me). More importantly perhaps, is the building of a habit of mind where we're helping these future adults to make better decisions, some of which can impact their entire lives."

In marketing, "push" and "pull" describe two contrasting approaches to connecting with customers. Push marketing is outbound—companies promote products directly through strategies like email blasts, direct mail, or in-store displays, aiming to quickly capture attention and drive immediate action. Pull marketing, on the other hand, is inbound—it works by creating interest and building trust so that customers are drawn in over time through blogs, social media content, or word-of-mouth recommendations. Push tends to

be fast and broad, while pull is slower, relationship-driven, and designed to build long-term loyalty.

Push and pull approaches in training programs have different approaches for acquiring knowledge and skills.

Push training

Siloed and top-down: Traditionally, a management-driven approach where information is delivered from the top down.

Formal and scheduled: This involves sending people to formal training events or programs where they passively receive information, often delivered at a pre-determined time.

Nice-to-know information: The focus of push training tends to be on providing information that might be useful at some point, not necessarily information that is immediately applicable or needed.

Static and controlled: A static system created to control and manage learning, viewing it as a separate activity from the actual work environment.

Pull training

Learner-driven and bottom-up: Directed by the learner’s needs and interests.

On-demand and relevant: It enables individuals to actively seek and access the specific information they need, precisely when and where it is needed.

Focus on performance and collaboration: The emphasis is on improving performance, sharing knowledge with others to achieve better results, and actively engaging in communication and feedback to refine understanding.

Adaptive and informal: Pull learning encourages ongoing, self-directed learning and reference, often supported by technology

and fostering a culture of inquiry and collaboration.

Just as marketing teams balance outbound "push" campaigns and inbound "pull" strategies to reach and retain customers, instructional coaches and administrators need to support professional development with both approaches in mind. A push model of PD mirrors push marketing: it delivers information directly and quickly when leaders need rapid alignment, clarity, or compliance. The risk, however, is that teachers may experience the learning as imposed rather than owned. Pull PD, like pull marketing, works by attracting engagement through relevance and choice. Leaders create conditions where educators are drawn into professional learning that connects to their needs, strengths, and contexts driven by their students' needs.

Jim Knight described these different approaches as outside-in and inside out. (*"Real Learning happens in Real Life,"* The Learning Professional) "With the outside in model, leaders identify effective teaching practices and then provide experiences for teachers to learn those practices. With the inside-out model, teachers identify student needs and then match possible teaching strategies to address those needs. Teachers then learn the strategies and adapt them until students' needs are met."

"To do the work of the inside-out model, teachers need a partner: an instructional coach."

(Jim Knight)

PLC and coaching sessions that are asking the question, "What do our students need us to learn?" can guide the alignment of push and pull learning for educators. Instructional coaches can follow "push PD" with reflection around the connectedness to student needs and encourage experimentation with the

presented strategies. Pull PD emerges from teachers goal setting for student growth with coaches serving as thinking partners, perhaps co-constructing possible approaches. Bottomline, continuous educator learning is key to continuous student success.