Conversations of Significance

While at the recent Near East South Asia Council of Overseas Schools (NESA) conference in Dubai, I attended a workshop session concerning change agency leadership presented by Pat Bassett, the president of the National Association of Independent Schools.

At one point the participants were discussing the conversations that leaders have or avoid, and Dr Brent Mutsch, the superintendent of the American School in Dubai, shared the following which he attributed to Bill Gillenwater:

There are three types of conversations that leaders have which all play important roles:

Conversations of Self – *These revolve around the person and their life away from school. What did you do this weekend? How's that grandchild?*

Conversations of Structure – *These are work related. What do we need to schedule, plan, execute? Who will cover the class during the assembly? What is the schedule for testing?*

Conversations of Significance – *These are belief and value focused.*

Dr Mutsch explained that leaders should be consciously looking to increase the number of conversations of significance that take place.

That resonated with me and I made the connection to Heavy Coaching as a leadership skill set.

When the workshop ended, I conducted a one hour presentation on **Instructional Coaching With the End in Mind**. My session ended with a model of a coaching pre-conference that I believe included a conversation of significance.

Cheryl introduced herself as a second grade teacher with six years of experience including a focus on early literacy and PYP (Primary Years Program).

Steve: What is special about teaching grade two?

Cheryl: They are Risk-Takers.

Steve: What do you do to promote risk-taking?

Cheryl: I create an environment of trust.

Steve: What does trust look like and/or sound like?

Cheryl: Students feel free to ask for support or push me away when they don't need it.

Cheryl described the lesson I'd see as a beginning study of

descriptive writing.
Steve: What's the most important thing you need students to do in this lesson?
Cheryl: Visualize and imagine.
Steve: On a scale of 1-10, one easy and 10 very difficult, where would you place this lesson for students?
Cheryl: About 6 on average, but two students will be near 10.
Steve: What will you need to do in this lesson?
Cheryl: Energize, excite, involve… give think time.
Steve: Where would you like me to focus my attention in the observation and feedback?
Cheryl: On student behavior… especially conversations.
Steve: Whole group or particular students?
Cheryl: That's a good question.
Steve: Thank you.
Cheryl: Focus on the two students who will struggle. Now that I am thinking about it, there is a third student you should add.
We closed the conference deciding the specifics of how I'd collect the information.
Cheryl and I spoke after the workshop ended and she told me how much she enjoyed the coaching session and that she felt she was driving the whole process. I shared that I was quite sure she would focus me on the struggling students. She asked how I knew.
After Cheryl talked about the importance (significance) of trust and students requesting support or pushing her away, I was sure having identified a possible struggle, she'd want to examine the struggling students' learning.
Cheryl shared her pleasure at realizing there was a third student. I enjoyed our conversation of significance. The observation and post conference would continue in a significant vein.