

The Main Idea's Professional Development Suggestions for More Trusting Observations

Based on the ideas in the book *Trust-Based Observations* by Craig Randall

These activities are for the school leader and other leaders who conduct observations at your school. The first section will help you reflect on the teacher-observation process you *already have* in place. After that, there are activities to help your leadership team think about the role of *trust* in this process. Finally, the final section will help your leadership team *grow their skills* in teacher observation.

I. Where do we stand with our teacher-observation process?

A. Discuss the goal of your teacher observation and feedback process.

1. Gather your leaders (anyone who does observations at your school) to discuss the following:

What is the goal (or goals) of teacher observations at our school?

2. After participants share their ideas, briefly review Randall's perspective (if it doesn't come out in discussion).

The primary goal of teacher observations should be to improve teaching and learning. He believes the key to improvement is to ensure teachers feel safe and supported to try new strategies and take new risks.

Respond to Randall's ideas and discuss: *In your mind, how effective is our current model in reaching these goals?*

B. Compare the components of your teacher observation approach and the trust-based approach.

1. Share the chart below electronically or by making paper copies. Ask leaders to work in pairs or as one larger group to examine the components of the trust-based observation approach (middle column) and compare it to your approach (third column).

Components of teacher observations	In trust-based observations...	In our current observation system...
Frequency: How often do leaders observe teachers?	Leaders engage in twelve, 20-minute observations each week.	
Follow-Up: How do leaders provide feedback to teachers?	Leaders follow up each observation with an in-person (never an email!) reflective conversation either the same day or the next day that is strengths-based and truly meaningful. These are discussions, not the principal talking at the teacher.	
Consistency: How regular are teacher observations?	There is a continuous cycle of observation and reflection.	
Priority: Is time set aside to make observations a priority?	Leaders spend an hour a day observing and discussing what they see with teachers.	
Goal: Are observations for growth or evaluation?	Observations are primarily for growth and leaders should avoid "rating" or "grading" teachers' pedagogy as part of the observation.	
Length: How long are observations?	Observations are kept short (no more than 20 minutes) so they can be frequent.	
Trust and safety: Is this a foundation of the observation process?	Trust and relationship-building are the foundation for teacher observations. This takes time. Leaders only share positive feedback the first few observations.	
Equality: Are all teachers observed equally?	Every teacher is observed equally several times throughout the year (with an exception for serious performance issues).	
Planned vs Unannounced: How are visits conducted?	All visits are unannounced.	

2. Once the team has reviewed both approaches and completed the comparison chart, ask them:

- *Which elements in both models do you think most help teachers feel supported? Are there elements that might hinder growth?*
- *What are your biggest concerns regarding our current system?*
- *Which aspects of the trust-based approach would you most like to see integrated into our approach?*

C. Determine how well your leadership team knows your teachers' strengths and growth areas.

The goal of this activity is to get a sense of how often leaders have been observing teachers and how well they know their strengths.

1. *Before* you meet with them, ask leaders to fill out a shared Google Sheet that looks like this for the previous semester:

Teacher Name	Leader 1: # of observations?	Leader 2: # of observations?	Leader 3: # of observations?	This teacher's teaching strengths	This teacher's areas for growth
E.g., John Cho	3	2	0	Ldr 1: Clear objectives Ldr 2: Formative assessment Ldr 3: ???	Ldr 1: Relationships Ldr 2: Pace Ldr 3: ???
Maya...					

2. Discuss the following with the leaders after they've filled out this shared chart.

- *Based on the chart, are all teachers in our school observed equally?*
- *Is there any correlation between the number of observations you've conducted and how well you know a teacher's strengths?*
- *Is there any correlation between the number of observations and the trust or rapport you have with that teacher?*
- *What else does this chart reveal?*

II. Building Trust Between Teachers and Leaders

A. Discuss the connection between an effective teacher observation process, trust, and teacher growth.

1. Discuss: *What do you think is the connection between trust and a successful teacher observation process?*

Look at the connections Randall makes and comment:

Frequent visits ⇒ *familiarity and connection*

A focus on strengths, not ratings ⇒ *teachers feel more confident and appreciated*

Reflective conversations in familiar surroundings (i.e. the teacher's classroom) ⇒ *a sense of equality and collegiality*

Thoughtful, well-timed feedback ⇒ *teachers see principals as partners in professional growth*

B. Think about the role of vulnerability in building trust.

1. Discuss the connection between vulnerability and building trust

Principals can build trust by openly acknowledging the *vulnerability* inherent in teacher observations. Share this with the leaders:

There is no other job where the boss comes into an employee's office, watches her work, and then leaves (and leaves the employee to worry and wait until the boss has time to share their thoughts on her performance).

When principals acknowledge how stressful this situation can be – and actually empathize with their teachers – they build a culture of safety. Think about it, even asking teachers to reflect on how they might have taught a lesson differently is asking them to admit they could have been better which requires a certain amount of vulnerability. Discuss.

2. Have leaders watch this [Brené Brown video](#) (click link) on vulnerability and discuss it.

You might want to start by sharing this quote from the video and asking how it applies to teacher observations: "Vulnerability is the birth place of innovation, creativity, and change."

3. Have leaders share mistakes they've made.

Remind the leadership team that leaders who show their own vulnerability by admitting mistakes or asking for help are perceived as more trustworthy and courageous, too. Bring their attention to this quote from the Brene Brown video:

"If you're not in the arena also getting your a— kicked, I'm not interested in your feedback."

Have leaders discuss how they might show teachers that they, too, they are "in the arena" (on the receiving end of receiving feedback) or ask them to experience a bit of vulnerability by sharing with the team a time they made a significant professional mistake.

C. Examine whether the leaders' actions are building or inhibiting trust.

1. Have leaders look at the chart below (excerpted from pp.107-110 in the book) and self-assess their own trust-building actions.

Ask leaders to individually reflect on (and perhaps write about) this question:

- *Which of the following actions (in the chart below) do you engage in with teachers (make a mental or written note for how frequently – rarely, sometimes, often)?*
- *Are there other trust-building actions that you also take with teachers?*

Observers' Actions that Build Trust	Observers' Actions that Undermine Trust
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be patient rather than immediately offering suggestions to fix things. • Understand that each teacher is unique – differentiate conversations accordingly. • Walk the talk. If you say you're going to do something, do it. • Don't use your official authority other than as a last resort. • Express concern about issues affecting teachers' lives outside of school. • Look for the potential in your teachers, even when that's hard. • Demonstrate your own vulnerability in front of teachers – even if that's just admitting a mistake. • Suspend judgment. You catch more flies with honey. • Always make sure your actions are driven by the ultimate goal – to improve teaching and learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relying on your formal authority – positional power. • Demanding rather than offering a suggestion. • Making judgments – particularly quick ones. • Playing favorites. • Being impatient and offering quick fixes. Trust takes time. • Perfectionism and the mindset that expects this from others. • Rigid mindsets, particularly when it comes to what good teaching is. • Shaming, belittling, or ridiculing. • External pressures that lead to negative actions – like pressure from the district or school board to increase scores or get ahead. Focusing on the product rather than the process hurts relationships.

2. Have leaders share and commit to one new trust-building action.

Ask if any of the leaders want to share their general reactions to this chart. Finally, go around the group and ask each person to commit to one new trust-building action they would like to work on.

III. Growing Our Observation and Pedagogical Skills as a Leadership Team

A. Explore the pedagogical strategies embedded in the TBO Observation Form.

Give leaders time to explore the [TBO Observation Form](#) (hyperlinked here) to see if the team might want to use it, or elements of it, in your school's teacher observations.

To examine the form more closely, divide up some of the *Toolbox Possibilities* topics (like Teacher/Student Rapport, Formative Assessment, and Differentiation) and give leaders time to click on links and learn *one* new strategy online that is listed on the form.

Bring everyone back together and ask each leader to share the new pedagogical strategy they learned and whether they think the school should adopt all or some of this form for teacher observations.

B. Grow your observation skills as a team by watching videos of teaching clips.

Whether you use the observation form or not, it is useful for all leaders who observe teachers to come together regularly to watch teaching clips (from your school or outside) and share observations.

1. Record some short videos of your teachers teaching or find some clips online.

Watch a short teaching clip together. Because this book emphasizes trust as an essential element of feedback conversations, imagine this is one of the leader's first three observations in which *only positive comments* are shared. As a group, brainstorm as many positive comments as you can that you might make to this teacher.

2. Then, imagine this is a visit later in the year. Have leaders share *one* suggestion they might make to this teacher to improve. To generate ideas, have the leaders look at the [TBO Observation Form](#) and consider sharing a strategy from the *Toolbox Possibilities* sections that might help this teacher improve.

C. Commit to a schedule and get started on those observations!

Many leaders don't get into classrooms and have follow-up conversations because they don't prioritize these actions. Whether you decide to use the teacher-observation form or not, make a plan for *next week* (or create a recurring schedule where you observe and debrief at the same times each week with exceptions) to get into classrooms by using the schedule below. Choose **12** teachers to start with. Look at your master schedule and schedule a 20-minute block of time to observe each teacher and a 20-minute block of time to debrief with them during a prep or other available time. Be sure to ask the teacher to save this time for a chat even if you are keeping the classroom visit the precedes it unannounced.

Monday	Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday
3 Observations	3 Obs & 3 Convos		3 Obs & 3 Convos		3 Obs & 3 Convos		3 Conversations
Obs 1:	Obs 1:	C1:	Obs 1:	C1:	Obs 1:	C1:	C1:
Obs 2:	Obs 2:	C2:	Obs 2:	C2:	Obs 2:	C2:	C2:
Obs 3:	Obs 3:	C3:	Obs 3:	C3:	Obs 3:	C3:	C3: