



**Kristin:** Hi everyone, this is Kristin from MsHouser.com and I'm so super excited to be joined today by Amanda Meachem. Amanda has really I think some special experiences to share. She has just transitioned into her very first year as a coach after 20 years in the classroom as a high school math teacher and I know she has told me she is kind of really looking forward to sharing with you guys some of her experiences, tips and strategies for what she has learned as a brand new coach, so welcome Amanda!

**Amanda:** Thank you Kristin.

**Kristin:** I am so glad you are here with us today.

**Amanda:** Glad to be here.

**Kristin:** Amanda how about you just start telling us a bit about yourself, your background; you know I shared a bit about you being a teacher before but kind of how you got started with instructional coaching. What made you want to take that jump after being in the classroom for so long?

**Amanda:** Okay, so well like you said I spent 20 years in a high school classroom and I taught everything from honors algebra 2, on down to whatever the most remedial level math class was at the time. I have my Masters in administration and I had taken a break because I had started a family and so last year I decided I would go back. I had five more classes to go to be eligible to take that state license exam. So I started on the five courses and I got two of them done but this job came up and I thought you know I knew I was ready for a change and it really had never dawned on me to be an instructional coach. We only had two math coaches for core buildings and I guess I thought they would stay in that job forever so when it came open I thought I am going to apply for this and interview and sure enough that is why I am in this role today.

**Kristin:** Oooh, congratulations!

**Amanda:** Thank you, thanks.

**Kristin:** So, I mean, I know there are a lot of coaches who email me particularly who are just starting out and they are brand new and they feel like they are on their own. I guess what has been your biggest challenge that you've faced as a brand new coach and what strategies have you used to overcome that?

**Amanda:** Okay, so I think one of the biggest challenges is figuring out how to set my priorities. Because I am accountable to so many people there are so many priorities floating out there and so trying to identify which ones should be priorities for my work has been a little bit of a challenge.



**Kristin:** Yeah.

**Amanda:** You know I work very closely with the other math coach and all the coaches for that matter but I get a lot of support from the math coach because he is very well experienced so he can help me sometimes he helps me figure out how to identify those priorities; sometimes I just have to ask people like is this my responsibility too and sometimes just asking myself is it important to the work I am doing; is it in line with the building improvement plan just to help me figure out what should be my priorities.

**Kristin:** Yeah, so is there somebody you work with in your building.

**Amanda:** Yes, so we have two high schools in our district and two junior highs and the other coach and I both have a junior high and the high school the junior high feeds into and so he has been doing it for quite a while so he is my go to person whenever I'm really stumped on something and need some guidance. So he was very good about that. Like I said, the other coaches are great and our curriculum teaching and learning there are two women in that department that help us a lot so I've got great people to go to if I have questions or need some help.

**Kristin:** So cool because I know lots of us like myself included are in a building and it is just me or actually I have one other coach who I work with but we don't collaborate super regularly.

**Amanda:** Right.

**Kristin:** How do you collaborate with those other coaches in your building? How many are there? Do you guys get together every week? What does that look like?

**Amanda:** Okay so there are... Okay so we are all in a variety of buildings; like our science coach is in all four buildings. I am in two buildings; the other math coach is on the other side of the district in the junior high and high school as well and \_00:04:18\_ coaches. So I see some of them naturally just being in my own building; the other coaches that are there.

**Kristin:** Okay.

**Amanda:** The math coach and I really have to work to get together. So sometimes we do it through Google Hangout. Sometimes we just have to carve out time to say hey we really need to meet up and talk about what is happening in our buildings and kind of make sure we are on the same page and plan you know because we are really trying to do things similarly on both sides of our district. We have to carve out time for that but in addition to that every week we do have a coaches meeting for



all those secondary coaches; yes so that is really a nice chance; if you are not aware of something you kind of get filled in quickly at the end of the week and kind of debrief about what has happened in the week and generally one of the two women that work in our teaching and learning department they are there as well so that is good for us to be able to check in with them. We are very fortunate because once a month we also have a trainer from the educational service center come in and do some training with us and a technology person from our district comes and does like a half-day training once a month with us too, so that has been really helpful.

**Kristin:** That's great. So you receive professional development.

**Amanda:** Yes, yes we do.

**Kristin:** Specifically around coaching it sounds like.

**Amanda:** Right, we do, yes.

**Kristin:** That's great!

**Amanda:** Yep, I don't know what I would do without it since I haven't gone through a coaching program, I think you know if I didn't have at least that boy I'd be pretty ill-equipped to do the job I think. Kristin: Yeah, I love to hear that because some people ask me all the time where did you get your training from? How do you learn about being a coach? I want to be a coach so what should I do? For me it can be kind of a struggle to answer that question because I didn't receive any formal training and I had a bit of professional development my first year of coaching but nothing since so what I really do on my end is I just read a lot of coaching books, just kind of dive in there and learn through experience but is there anything else you do Amanda to support your professional growth and learning as a coach outside of that PD that is delivered once a month.

**Amanda:** Well I think what you said was important about the professional readings. I am finding out I need to do a lot more of that so you know they have been really good about giving us some looks; like I said the other math coach and I we have intentions of doing a book study using the book that he used when he went through his program,.

**Kristin:** Okay.



**Amanda:** That I think is going to be something I am going to have to take on over the summer you know juggling a new job and my family. I am going to push that back just a little bit this summer so professional readings I think I really need to; I want to do more of that because there is a lot to learn; there is a lot of information out there.

**Kristin:** I know.

**Amanda:** Browsing the internet, coming across you has been a great resource, all of those little things you find along the way when you are looking for something, you are like oh here's another resource that I didn't know was out there and it is just one more thing that I can tap into to try to learn something new.

**Kristin:** Great and you mentioned a book. What is that book?

**Amanda:** Yeah, it was Agent of Change or Agent for Change. It is Lucy West.

**Kristin:** Ooh, okay!

**Amanda:** And I think that was on the coaching mile that Jim Night.

**Kristin:** Yeah, because you went through Jim Night too for some of your training.

**Amanda:** I did not.

**Kristin:** Oh, you did not?

**Amanda:** No, I did not but the coach, the other math coach on the other side of the district they use that book for their official program. He went through a program like eight years ago so he has recommended that book to me which I will take on this summer I think.

**Kristin:** Okay, well I will be sure to put that in our show notes because I never read Agents of Change so I got to add that one to my list for sure.

**Amanda:** Yes, yes.



**Kristin:** So I do want to get into kind of you mentioned like juggling your family in your coaching which I think; I do want to get into that but I just wanted to back up and ask you a little about your schedule as a coach. So what is your....like a day in the life of Amanda look like?

**Amanda:** Okay, I feel like even that has changed from the beginning of the school year. So the beginning of the school year I had great intentions of splitting my time 50/50 between the two buildings, not necessarily on a set schedule like I would always be at one building on Monday and always another one on Tuesday but really deciding on a weekly basis where I am needed on what day and deciding on that day I would stay at that particular building.

**Kristin:** Okay.

**Amanda:** However, I feel like now about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of my time is being spent at the junior high level because right now they have more needs as a whole so a lot of my time is spent there. So you know that is where I'm needed the most and that is where I go and then when things are better under control and kind of heading in the right direction, I can certainly step back and reevaluate and kind of reset those priorities again and try to get more contact with the other building; the staff at the other building.

**Kristin:** Great, that makes perfect sense so it is kind of needs based it sounds like. Do you work with a certain number of teachers or through coaching cycles or it is just hey Amanda can you help me out with this or how does that get set up at your school.

**Amanda:** Sometimes I ask. You know we have a new curriculum framework, we are in the second year of that so I have some people who are interested in learning more and are trying to....it is our second year so we have a little bit under our belt but we are really trying to fine tune that, so I've tried to reach out to some of those people who might be interested in that work. Sometimes it is just brief coaching sessions like embedded...job embedded PD or resource training; not resource gathering so much but trying to help teachers use some of our new resources to collect maybe analyze and organize data you know making sure that they are on track with their instructional practices; nothing right now is super long term and there is really not the time for that right now it seems like but if someone had the need for it, it certainly would find the way to make the time.

**Kristin:** Yeah.

**Amanda:** It is just that most things are lending themselves to shorter bursts of time.



**Kristin:** Great, so you are doing some inviting of teachers to come work with you right?

**Amanda:** Certainly some teachers ask as well.

**Kristin:** That's great. As a first-year coach how have you find the process of building relationships and getting teachers to work with you. Has that been an easy process for you? Has that been challenging because I know that can be kind of sometimes a little sticky for coaches?

**Amanda:** Right, well okay, so the junior high and the high school that I am in; the high school is the school I taught in for the past 20 years.

**Kristin:** Oh...okay.

**Amanda:** I already have a relationship with those people although it is a different kind of relationship now. I am really new to the junior high staff that I am with so building relationships in the two buildings has been quite different. You know there is a comradery that is already there in the high school because I taught there and know these people which certainly makes a lot of things more comfortable and easier to naturally unfold but it also has its challenges too because of the existing comfort level.

**Kristin:** Right.

**Amanda:** You know so that can be a little bit of a challenge too but the junior high I am getting to know new people and you know I love that experience of getting to know new people. It is exciting, it is scaring and it is fun all at the same time and some of those relationships I am finding take off much faster than others and I imagine some of them will unfold over the years and some seem like they are you know have been there for quite a while already so I take advantage of that as well. If someone is comfortable I'm right there and if they are not ready yet, they are not ready and that is okay too.

**Kristin:** (Laughter) I love the way you put it Amanda. Some of them take off a little faster than others. That's a really positive way of looking at it, like not everyone is going to be super psyched for some coaching but they will get there right? And that is like really good just positive stance to take on it and I think as far as I was a teacher at my school before I transitioned into coaching and like you said different teachers had to see me and a little bit differently I guess because they used to see me as a peer but now it was kind of more as a coach so that just takes a little while to get used to too.

**Amanda:** Yes it does. You are right.



**Kristin:** Okay, so let's kind of talk about the juggling of the family and the coaching work and schedule, you know I'd love to know how you stay organized and manage your time as a coach and if there are any tips or strategies you can share.

**Amanda:** Okay, first of all my calendar is my best friend right now. So trying to organize being in all the different directions and all of the different meetings so I document everything.

**Kristin:** Okay.

**Amanda:** Sometimes if I am going to work and I have meetings throughout the day, I've got my timer set on my phone with 15 minutes to go just to constantly remind me to check my calendar if I get immersed in something so you know I use my calendar, I document everything, you know it is nice to be able to document a conversation because then it gives you an entry point the next time you check in with that teacher like hey the last time we talked, we were talking about how to organize this lesson and you were going to try something the next day. How did it go? You know so just following up on the notes that I take about these conversations and also using Google Drive to create folders to organize all the work we are doing for you know teacher-based teams and such. We have; there are a lot of oh like templates so like an observation form. If I am going to go into a classroom and you know do an observation I like to give you know some sort of feedback and so I had actually looked on the internet for observation forms and couldn't quite find anything that felt efficient enough for my eyes to use and definitely scan through enough so I took several forms and thought about what was important and tried to create my own observation form and the other thing I used that I think has been really helpful our trainer from the educational service center gave us a template and it is like a spreadsheet. It has all the teacher's names on it, the days of the week and there is like a key at the bottom that has just like CI stands for checking in, lesson planning so LP; I so I just write on the day by the teacher's name what I've done with that teacher or if the whole day has been taken up by meetings I write that too. Then I can reflect on a week like it feels like I didn't do much but yeah I was in five meetings that took all day or hey I really got to everybody this week and I have it documented as evidence of what I was able to do in that week, so that has really helped a lot too.

**Kristin:** Cool! Well you are just so organized, I love it! Are you a paper or digital calendar gal Amanda?

**Amanda:** You know I've tried digital but I'm still functioning with paper. I love my planner. I love pulling it out. I love to cross stuff off and so that helps me. I've tried digital and I'm just...my comfort level is not there yet so I don't want to risk losing anything so I'll stick with my paper version right now.

Amanda: (Laughter).

Kristin: But I'm kind of a hybrid. Like you said I'll use my paper calendar, I have it with me all of the time but I love Google Drive for just organizing. I have folders for each teacher I work with and I



**Amanda:** (Laughter).

**Kristin:** But I'm kind of a hybrid. Like you said I'll use my paper calendar, I have it with me all of the time but I love Google Drive for just organizing. I have folders for each teacher I work with and I document the same way as you described. Would you...your observation form Amanda, it sounds like you went through to a few trial and errors and figuring out one that really worked for you. Is that something you would be willing to share within this Houser community?

**Amanda:** Absolutely! Yes, I will share that with you as well.

**Kristin:** Awesome, thank you for that. Any other tools you could not live without in your kind of life as a coach?

**Amanda:** Um, well I think just Google in general. Hangouts when you can't meet up with someone or often times on a snow day, you know it still allows you to do a little bit of work from home with that but those are probably my favorite go to tools right now.

**Kristin:** Awesome, cool. So how...your first year of coaching Amanda, how has your principal supported you with this work and how do you collaborate with your administrator?

**Amanda:** I feel like my accountability piece to the two principals is a little bit different in the two buildings so my high school principal is new in her role as well so she and I are really getting to know... even though I was at this building for 20 years, she is new so we are getting to know each other and tapping into each other as a resource as well. I don't feel like I get the time with her as often as I would like yet because she is so busy learning her job but we certainly tap into each other when we need each other and she shared with me some of her background and her experience so I know that I can go to her for certain things you know get her take with her expertise and she can help give me some input and feedback as I'm trying to shape up things for teacher-based team or curriculum alignment. In our junior high that is a smaller building so it is easier to get with her but with both principals they are invited to meet with me when I meet with the department heads. Like I said if there is anything big that is going to be rolled out or cause a significant change I always make sure that I inform them and ask them for their ideas before it is finalized; so trying to make sure we are all touching base at some point about anything that is major and because we are all pulled in some many directions right now you know if we have to let the little things go that's okay as long as we are getting with each other for the big work. That seems to be working right now as we all ease into our roles.



**Kristin:** Great, so it sounds like you know, I mean yeah everybody is busy; everybody's got obligations, and appointments and commitments. It sounds like you need to and have done a good job at just kind of taking some initiative too as a coach and not always you know waiting to get approval or see if something is okay but just recognizing when something needs attention and getting out there and trying it. Would that be correct?

**Amanda:** I think so yes.

**Kristin:** Yeah, that's great. Okay, so Amanda something I wanted to ask you that I didn't actually share that I was going to ask you.

**Amanda:** (Laughter)

**Kristin:** I am just kind of curious about this. Is there any you know ritual, routine that you use personally to kind of take care of yourself as a coach since coaching can be really stressful and go, go, go and in and out of lots of different situations; is there anything that you do on a daily basis that kind of helps you stay grounded and not stress free but a little less stressed?

**Amanda:** Nothing consistently yet. I'm searching for that right now so if anybody has ideas I would love to hear but it does help every Friday to have those check-ins with the other coaches that really does help a lot. As far as something every day you know I feel like the stress is up and down and so right now especially being new I'm not exactly sure when the stress is really high. I'm not always sure how to manage that because when you are feeling that way everything feels so urgent and it is like you can't work fast enough to help get the work done and sometimes that means I'm coming home with things weighing heavy on my mind or working past the time I should be working and be in bed instead. I will eventually strike the right balance as far as that goes but I haven't quite found it yet.

**Kristin:** I think that is okay and I think like the Friday check in is really an important ritual and even if you know you don't have a group of other colleagues or coaches to check in with like I personally don't, I have a personal check in on Friday afternoons; just kind of a weekly review to reflect on my week and see what went well, what didn't go well, and think about what I might want to change for the following week. Then I think maybe anything thing too for me is like you said just the urgency of things and how things can pile up really quickly and just looking at your calendar as far in advance as you can and saying okay what can I do now to make that crazy time coming up a little less crazy.



**Amanda:** And you know I think when I was in the classroom I was one of those teachers that if my students took a test I wanted to try to get them graded as quickly as I could to get them back to the kids so I found; I knew what I needed to do and could organize that work and get everything done and I had a routine. So now I'm shifting it is like oh my goodness some days there is so much work you can't get it done and it feels unsettling going to bed at night knowing you didn't get done what you really wanted to get done. There just aren't enough hours in the day so. I guess it is a juggling act.

**Kristin:** It totally is! As a teacher it is like I had my set schedule and my set system and things fit into nice little buckets but...

**Amanda:** I was so comfortable!

**Kristin:** Yeah it was great but coaching is a little bit different and your schedule is not regular; it is not consistent and you know you've just got to kind of make the best of it each day with what comes up.

**Amanda:** Yes.

**Kristin:** Well Amanda this was so much fun chatting with you. I can't thank you enough for spending some time with me today and I get to meet you and know you are out there and part of this Houser community and it is just so great so thank you so much.

**Amanda:** Thank you so much Kristin. I really have enjoyed getting to meet you and I appreciate everything you put out there so thanks a lot for doing all that you do.

**Kristin:** Oh thank you. Alright everyone well thank you guys so much for joining Amanda and I for our chat today. For more interviews just like this one make sure to check out the blog at [mshouser.com](http://mshouser.com) and just search interview with a coach series and you will find us there. Until next time, bye everyone.