

## **The context of Coaching or Mentoring practice**

*To live is to change, and to be perfect is to  
have changed often.*

John Henry Newman

### **Coaching and Mentoring in an Organisational Context**

The concept of coaching has been around for as long as the human race itself. Right from the earliest days the older or more skilled taught the young how to hunt, cook, and paint pictures on cave walls and just how to be useful and effective members of their tribes or communities in general.

This type of practical, skill-related coaching still exists in most societies to this day. However, a more sophisticated form of coaching, aimed at inspiring greater understanding or awareness can be seen emerging in the earliest philosophies and religions, ranging from the lessons incorporated in Aesop's Fables to the lessons incorporated in the Parables.

Throughout history and literature there are examples of coaching in action but surprisingly the practice (at least in terms of executive development) appeared to fall into disuse in the late twentieth century. These were the days of the full-blooded management training programmes.

Many major management training colleges advertised general 'open programmes' to which managers and executives from all walks of life and business would come to be put through a pre-set and unalterable programme irrespective of their individual needs.

This approach to development was not without its merits and these forms of training have been seen to bring about immediate benefits to those being trained.

At the same time, organisations as well as their managers started to see the benefits of a more individualised approach to personal development. This is mirrored in society where we have gone from a situation based on the collective where the emphasis was on community and the nation, to one focussed on the individual where we all have to manage our own careers and lives.

While generic skills could be taught, there were a host of issues ranging from complex to highly personal or confidential matters that demanded something different to training. People needed something that enabled issues to be discussed in depth and solutions

arrived at by debate, reflection and discovery over a period of time. This was in stark contrast to the pre-packaged solutions so typical of most training programmes.

As the idea of coaching developed, organisations started employing psychologists to understand employee motivation and development needs, as well as for recruitment, selection and assessment. Sport also had a strong influence on the rise of coaching. Tim Gallwey's book "The Inner Game of Tennis" in 1974 related to a more psychological approach to peak performance. He stated that the opponent in one's head was greater than the one on the other side of the net.

In 1992, Sir John Whitmore, a motor racing champion, published "Coaching for performance" where he developed the most influential model of coaching - the GROW model (goal, reality, options, will). Others such as Stephen Covey and Anthony Robbins also fuelled the appetite for personal development and awareness.

In the 1990's, the US went into recession and corporate downsizing became the rage. It may have seemed good in theory, but did not take account of human needs. This left managers and leaders in highly stressed environments without support, which in turn added to the need for individuals and organisations to continuously develop.

This need for performance maximisation has also contributed to the upsurge in coaching. The industry has also changed from one where coaches were brought in as often for poor performers as for high performers (often dealing with performance issues where the manager did not want to hassle or conflict) to today, where the vast majority of coaching is aimed at high level performers rather than remedial cases. Coaching today is for the high performer, top talent and those leading an organisation.

Many large private, public and voluntary sector organisations (as well as small and medium sized businesses) use executive coaching as a standalone development solution or dovetail coaching with other organisational development programmes.

### **Coaching and Mentoring: Similarities and Differences**

Over the past decade, the pedagogical model has increasingly focused on coaching and mentoring. Mentoring to address barriers to motivation and learning - coaching to generate and develop skills.

High-performance, contemporary organizations know that a company is only as good as its employees. They place strong emphasis on personal attributes in selecting and

developing staff. However, this does not come without challenges, not least of which may be (significant) gaps in the experience, knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, behaviours, or leadership required to perform demanding jobs.

Employees however, will not likely stretch to their full potential without dedicated guidance that inspires, energizes, and facilitates. In the new millennium, good coaching and mentoring approaches are deemed a highly effective way to help people, through talking, increase self-direction, self-esteem, efficacy, and accomplishments.

Mentoring and coaching are being used increasingly across a variety of sectors and countries, but there is still much debate over what the terms mean.

The concept of mentoring began with the writings of Homer's *Odysseus* (written about 1200 BC), when "the mentor" (Athene in disguise) accompanied Telemachus in his search for news of his father. The text highlights a number of similarities between coaching and mentoring:

- The mentor/coach assesses and helps develop the individual's potential
- The relationship has a clear sense of purpose and direction
- Trust is present at all times
- Challenge and support is provided
- The mentor/coach enables the individual to make his or her own decisions by fostering and encouraging independence.

Both coaching and mentoring are an approach to management and a set of skills to nurture staff and deliver results. They are, fundamentally, learning and development activities that share similar roots despite lively debate among academics and practitioners as to the meaning (and implications) of each word. A good coach will also mentor and a good mentor will coach too, as appropriate to the situation and the relationship.

Hence, these terms and approaches as they relate to individuals often treat the two terms interchangeably: both are related processes for analysis, reflection, and action, intended to enable employees achieve their full potential with a focus on skills, performance, and "life" (personal) coaching and mentoring.

Unlike conventional training, coaching and mentoring concentrate on the person, not the subject. They draw out rather than put in; they develop rather than impose; they reflect rather than direct; they are continuous—not one-time—events. In brief, they are a form of change facilitation.

Coaching and mentoring can be used whenever performance or motivation levels must be increased.

Connor and colleagues suggest that mentors provide a safe place for reflection; listen and support; explore strengths and blind spots; enable self-challenge; generate insight; and focus on goals. Essentially, mentoring focuses on the individual as a whole. The mentor is a facilitator without an agenda, and although improvement in performance may be one outcome, the focus is more holistic and includes personal growth and learning. The mentor is traditionally older and more experienced; therefore, within medicine he or she would usually be a consultant or senior trainee.

Ideally the mentor should be independent from the mentee's assessment and routine work, although successful mentoring relationships have been achieved by a mentees' immediate seniors. Some definitions suggest that the mentor offers advice, but modern mentoring models emphasize the importance of the mentor as a facilitator, supporting the mentee through change and discussing options that the mentee has identified. So a mentee decides, with their mentor's help, what his or her options are, makes a decision right for them, and goes through the period of change with ongoing support from the mentor.

Mentoring therefore, can be said to be about one person helping another to achieve something. More specifically, something that is important to them. It is about giving help and support in a non-threatening way, in a manner that the recipient will appreciate and value and that will empower them to move forward with confidence towards what they want to achieve.

Mentoring is also concerned with creating an informal environment in which one person can feel encouraged to discuss their needs and circumstances openly and in confidence with another person who is in a position to be of positive help to them.

The need, or even the necessity to achieve, is present in all stages of life. At school and higher education there are standards to attain and examinations to be passed. If we have a hobby or a spare time interest, it is likely that we will be keen to get to grips with it as quickly as possible. When we start work we need to know the ins and outs of our job and what we are expected to do. In time, we may wish to consider the career prospects that exist in our current job and what we might aspire to. On a personal level, we may have set goals for achievement in the medium and long term. Clearly, we need help; advice and support in many aspects of life.

There are many sources of help that are linked to the attainment of goals. The formal structures within education, for instance, are designed to help students to complete their studies successfully. In the world of work, most organizations have systems of training and in-service development. Frequently, these are linked, and rightly so, to formal strategies for training and development, supported by processes of appraisal and performance review. Many of these approaches, however, have a common element - they take place in-house within the line management structure.

Formal training and development structures are intended to be supportive and helpful. It is a fact of life, however, that some people do find it difficult, and possibly embarrassing, to discuss matters of a personal nature and their true career development intentions with those with whom they are in a line management relationship. In such cases, some other type of help and support is desirable.

Formal training courses may vaunt wholesale transfer of these; but employees will not likely stretch to their full potential without dedicated guidance that inspires, energizes, and facilitates. In the new millennium, good coaching and mentoring schemes are deemed a highly effective way to help people, through talking, increase self-direction, self-esteem, efficacy, and accomplishments.

There are many perspectives on the definition of mentoring, especially since the relatively recent popularity of personal and professional coaching. Previously, mentoring might have been described as the activities conducted by a person (the mentor) for another person (the mentee) in order to help that other person to do a job more effectively and/or to progress in their career. The mentor was probably someone who had "been there, done that" before. A mentor might use a variety of approaches, e.g, coaching, training, discussion, counselling, etc. Today, there seems to be much ongoing discussion and debate about the definitions and differences regarding coaching and mentoring.

Coaching, with its origins in sport, frequently has a performance focus and a specific agenda and is, therefore, often task oriented within the workplace. It is also linked increasingly to leadership development, transition, and change, and focuses on the future. Some definitions suggest that the coach need not be a specialist in the field but should be skilled in questioning and listening to enable the individual to find answers themselves.

The blockages that restrict people from fulfilling their potential are often caused by long held assumptions or beliefs which may appear at different stages of their lives. Without tackling these issues, the desired outcome or an individual's full potential may not be

realized. Performance improvement, therefore, is not just about superficial or short term outcomes; it may involve exciting and challenging changes in process, beliefs, and attitudes of the mentee.

Coaching has proven to be very powerful means to guiding and supporting people to solve difficult problems and achieve complex goals. It's one of the most powerful means for people to learn how to learn and to be able to learn a great deal from their own experiences. That's why coaching has become almost a standard activity in leadership development. Usually it's done in a one-to-one format. However, that format can be quite expensive and time consuming for organizations wanting to provide coaching for many of its leaders, managers and individual contributors.

In the coaching relationship the individual being coached is the expert in defining what they want and what works best for them. The coach is the objective observer, helping the individual understand where they may have blind spots, habits, or bias that get in the way of achieving their goals. The coach is also the catalyst supporting the individual in taking action, trying new strategies, finding new tools, and holding them to the plan they established.

Coaching is the support for technical, skills-related learning and growth which is provided by another person who uses observation, data collection and descriptive, nonjudgmental reporting on specific requested behaviors and techniques. Coaches must use open-ended questions to help the other person more objectively see their own patterns of behavior and to prompt reflection, goal-setting, planning and action to increase the desired results. Although not always the case, often the coaching is focused on learning job-related skills and the coaching is provided by a professional colleague.

Essentially then, coaching is technical support focused on development of the techniques effective employees must know and be able to do, while mentoring is the larger context and developmentally appropriate process for learning of technique and all of the other professional and personal skills and understandings needed for success.

People often confuse coaching and mentoring. Though related, they are not the same. A mentor may coach, but a coach does not mentor. Mentoring is "relational," while coaching is "functional." There are other significant differences.

*Coaching characteristics:*

- Managers coach their staff as a required part of the job.

- Coaching takes place within the confines of a formal manager-employee relationship.
- The focus is to develop individuals within their current job.
- The interest of the relationship is functional, arising out of the need for individuals to perform the tasks required to the best of their ability.
- Managers tend to initiate and drive the relationship.
- The relationship is finite, ending when an individual has learned what the coach is teaching.

*Mentoring characteristics:*

- It occurs outside of a line manager-employee relationship, at the mutual consent of a mentor and mentee.
- It is career-focused or focused on professional development that may be outside a mentee's area of work.
- Relationships are personal-a mentor provides both professional and personal support.
- Relationships may be initiated by mentors or created through matches initiated by the organization.
- Relationships cross job boundaries.
- Relationships last for a specific period of time in a formal program, at which point the pair may continue in an informal mentoring relationship.

**Differences between Mentoring and Coaching**

	<u><b>Mentor</b></u>	<u><b>Coach</b></u>
<b>Focus</b>	Individual	Performance
<b>Role</b>	Facilitator with no agenda	Specific agenda
<b>Relationship</b>	Self-selecting	Comes with the job
<b>Source of influence</b>	Perceived value	Position
<b>Personal returns</b>	Affirmation/learning	Teamwork/performance
<b>Arena</b>	Life	Task related

**Focus**

Mentoring can take place in either a formal mentoring program or informal relationship focusing on the **person**, their **career** and support for **individual growth and maturity**.

**Coaching** is **job-focused** and **performance** oriented.

"A mentor is like a sounding board, they can give advice but the protégé is free to pick and choose what they do. The context does not have specific performance objectives.

A coach is trying to direct a person to some end result, the person may choose how to get there, but the coach is strategically assessing and monitoring the progress and giving advice for effectiveness and efficiency."

**"Mentoring is biased in your favour. Coaching is impartial, focused on improvement in behavior."**

In summary, the mentor has a deep personal interest, personally involved -a friend who cares about you and your long term development. The coach develops specific skills for the task, challenges and performance expectations at work.

## **Role**

Mentoring is a power free, two-way mutually beneficial relationship. Mentors are facilitators and teachers allowing the protégé to discover their own direction.

*"They let me struggle so I could learn."*

*"Never provided solutions—always asking questions to surface my own thinking and let me find my own solutions."*

A coach has a set agenda to reinforce or change skills and behaviors. The coach has an objective/goal for each discussion. Four top words to best describe a mentor's dominant style - friend/confidant, direct, logical, questioner.

## **Relationship**

Even in formal mentoring programs the protégé and mentor have choices - to continue, how long, how often, and the focus? Self-selection is the rule in informal mentoring relationships with the protégé initiating and actively maintaining the relationship.



If I'm your mentor, you probably picked me. In an organization your coach hired you. Coaching comes with the job, a job expectation, in some organizations a defined competency for managers and leaders.

### **Source of influence**

The interpersonal skills will determine the effectiveness of influence for both coach and mentor. The coach also has an implied or actual level of authority by nature of their position, ultimately they can insist on compliance. A mentor's influence is proportionate to the perceived value they can bring to the relationship. It is a power free relationship based on mutual respect and value for both mentor and protégé. Your job description might contain "coach" or you might even have that job title - it's just a label or expectation. "Mentor" is a reputation that has to be personally earned - you are not a mentor until the protégé says you are.

### **Return**

The coach's returns are in the form of more team harmony, and job performance. The mentoring relationship is reciprocal. There is a learning process for the mentor from the feedback and insights of the protégé.

*"The ability to look at situations from a different perspective, I am a Generation X and he is in his 60's."*

The relationship is a vehicle to affirm the value of and satisfaction from fulfilling a role as helper and developer of others. Mentors need not be an all-knowing expert - such a position could be detrimental. The most significant thing the mentor does is "listen and understand" and, "built my confidence and trust in myself, empowering me to see what I can/could do."

### **Arena**

A great deal of informal mentoring is occurring, with at-risk youth, in our schools, as well as in volunteer, not for profit and for profit organizations. If I am your mentor, chances are you have chosen me to be of help with some aspect of your life.

Coaching, even in the sporting arena, is task related - improvement of knowledge, skills or abilities to better perform a given task. Mentors are sought for broader life and career issues. The protégé is proactive in seeking out mentors and keeping the relationship productive. The coach creates the need for discussion and is responsible for follow up and holding others accountable.

## **Conclusion**

Coaching and Mentoring are not the same thing. Mentoring seems to be, or is, a power free, two-way mutually beneficial learning situation where the mentor provides advice, shares knowledge and experiences, and teaches using a low pressure, self-discovery approach. Teaching, using an adult-learning versus teacher-to-student model and, being willing to not just question for self-discovery but also freely sharing their own experiences and skills with the protégé. The mentor is both a source of information/knowledge and a Socratic questioner.

If I am your coach you probably work for me and my concern is your performance, ability to adapt to change, and enrolling your support in the vision/direction for our work unit.

If there is still doubt in your mind, visualize how the conversation and relationship would be different if your manager scheduled a coaching discussion at 2:00pm this afternoon to discuss your roles, responsibilities and expectations, versus if you called your mentor to discuss some things that you have been thinking about.

In terms of personal development, both coaching and mentoring are "helping activities," but they have different origins, outcomes, and ideals. Coaching is an important growth area, particularly in business, and it seems to be becoming increasingly commercialized and branded. Mentoring exists in many public sectors but has yet to become commercialized. Within medicine, mentoring is now recommended as part of the foundation training programme in addition to educational supervision, but it is not yet widely adopted.

Coaching and mentoring require trust, empathy, and encouragement. Both offer support and endeavour to remove the fear of failure, encourage a sense of inner personal strength, and draw positives from negative experiences. The mentor or coach also endeavours to be an inspirational role model. So despite their different focuses, timescales, and brandings, both coaching and mentoring can be of great support to individuals throughout their career.

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