



What is the Difference between Coaching and Mentoring?

When it comes to the question of "What is the difference between mentoring and coaching?" it appears that much confusion exists, and many different definitions abound. According to Coaching and Mentoring by Eric Parsloe and Melville Leedham, there are indeed many areas of overlap between mentoring and coaching as essentially both involve having purposeful, skilful conversations that effectively support performance, growth and development.

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is to support and encourage people to manage their own learning in order to maximise their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be – Eric Parsloe, The OCM.

Mentoring tends to describe the relationship in which a more experienced colleague shares their greater knowledge to support the development of those who are inexperienced in their role. One thing that differentiates mentoring from coaching is the timescale. Mentoring relationships tend to be longer term.

With a mentor, you're getting someone who's already walked in your shoes. They are experienced in your field and can help fast-track you along your growth path. They can offer guidance and support, and there is usually a level of personal connection. They can save you from having to go through a steep learning curve and making unnecessary mistakes by using their hindsight to provide you with foresight.

What is coaching?

Coaching is the art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of another – John Whitmore (2002)

The objective of coaching typically has emphasis on producing performance and improvement at work. It focuses on specific skills and goals, although it may also have an impact on an individual's personal attributes such as social interaction or confidence. The process typically lasts for a defined period of time.¹

A coach takes a slightly different approach. He or she serves as an expert guiding you in a very specific area of performance such as marketing, financial support, sales, business growth, social media etc.

¹ CIPD Coaching and Mentoring Factsheet June 2021

A coach is trained to help you work out your roadblocks, hold you accountable for your business or career success and shares their tried-and-tested processes to help you get ahead.

Similarities between Coaching and Mentoring

There are many areas of overlap between coaching and mentoring. The following are suggested by Parsloe and Leedham:

- Both involve conversations which raise performance and unlock potential
- Both rely on the coach-mentor’s skills of listening, questioning and feedback.
- Both require the coach-mentor to have a good understanding of people, organisations and the principles of learning
- Both require confidentiality and clear contracting
- Both require good governance, supervision, and effective processes to have the most impact.

Differences between coaching and mentoring

The following are general principles rather than hard and fast rules.

Coaching	Mentoring
Focus is usually on specific development areas/issues at work	Focus is on career and personal development
Relationship usually has a set duration	Ongoing relationship can last a long time
Generally more structured	More informal
Short term and focusses on specific development issues	More long term and takes a broader view of the person
Coaches generally don’t need to have direct experience of their coachees occupational role	Mentor is usually more experienced and qualified than the mentee and passes on knowledge and experience.
Coaching can be performed by a line manager	Mentoring is not performed by a line manager
Agenda is set by the coach	Agenda is set by the mentee

Although it is helpful to look at the similarities and differences between coaching and mentoring there is a lot of overlap and often the most effective approach uses a blend of coaching and mentoring.

Benefits of mentoring and coaching - how can it support you and your colleagues?

Whether you opt for coaching or mentoring, both can in their own ways have the following benefits. Coaching and mentoring is great for helping to learn new skills or enhance current skills, maximising personal and professional potential while also contributing to increased confidence, heightened self-awareness, greater wellbeing and improvements in productivity:

Getting an outside perspective.

Often, we are too close to our business or career to see what's truly happening. It can be beneficial to get an external view of your situation in order to probe and uncover some problems and issues that may not be instantly apparent to you.

Enabling you to reach higher.

Sometimes we do things for other people that we wouldn't do for ourselves. When you have the accountability of a mentor or coach, you may push harder to reach your goals and are more likely to stay focused.

Achieve greater success.

A mentor-coach can help you stay positive and motivated, so you can keep your career moving forward. This is achieved through open, impartial discussions and feedback within a trusted and confidential relationship.

Seeing the bigger picture

It's often hard to see something for what it is when you're too close to it. A mentor-coach helps you step back and see the bigger picture of your business or career. They'll encourage you to view it from alternative angles and perspectives. While helping you identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats you might have missed.

A safe space to discuss ideas and problems

A mentoring or coaching process will stimulate and challenge your thinking while listening to your ideas and explanations. Through this, they encourage you to formulate your own ideas and solutions to problems and challenges. Coming to a well-informed decision at a faster rate than you would alone.

Continually challenged

People can become complacent in their career. Coaches and mentors challenge you to think bigger and better. They'll encourage you to go the extra mile to better yourself and reap the rewards. You will be continually motivated to do more and do it better.

Personal Development

Of course, the main benefit of coaching and mentoring is the personal development of employees. It can help to bring those who are less experienced on a topic up to speed, resulting in improved efficiency across the organisation when bringing a new member on to your team.

Team Efficiency

Bringing individuals up to speed with your company's processes will allow them to work efficiently within their team. They will be able support their other colleagues when needed. Additionally, managers will be able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each team member and work towards these when setting their responsibilities.

Resolve any issues

Coaching and mentoring provides the opportunity for both parties to bring up any concerns they may have. Ironing these out can reduce any stress or frustrations and improve the job performance early on.

Employee Satisfaction

Job satisfaction generally increases when employees understand their role and the company values better. Making the time to develop your team members will enhance the morale and loyalty to the company. Your employees will feel more valued within the company.

Employee Retention

Increasing your team's morale and loyalty will mean that you are improving your employee retention. High levels of employee turnover can be very costly. It lowers internal morale and could potentially harm your reputation. With a lack of training and development opportunities being one of the main reasons for employees leaving, taking the time to develop your team could avoid this.