

COACHING VS. MENTORING

25 WAYS THEY'RE DIFFERENT



A THOUGHT PAPER BY MANAGEMENT MENTORS

WINTER 2013

Introduction

In the field of employee development, an area that creates much confusion is the differences between business coaching and business mentoring.

This confusion often causes companies to opt for mentoring or coaching without understanding that they serve a different purpose and follow different paths to employee development. A failure to understand these differences often leads to disappointing results and the (understandable) mistake of blaming coaching (or mentoring) rather than realizing that the company created the wrong system.

At [Management Mentors](#), we're often asked to explain the differences. This brings us to the purpose of this white paper. We hope to provide you with a better understanding of coaching and mentoring and a process for determining which approach is best suited for your organization's specific needs.

Before we begin, we'd like to offer one caveat. Though mentoring and coaching are distinct, they do share common elements. It is often a difference in emphasis and outcomes that creates the distinction. Also, there are some coaches who have the ability to act as mentors. Likewise, there are mentors who, in some instances, act more like coaches. What we're seeking to accomplish in this white paper is to articulate general differentiators that may not apply in all cases but that apply in most.

Mentoring and Coaching Defined

Mentoring systems are designed to promote professional development by linking an employee with a mentor who will focus on the overall development of that mentoree. ***Mentoring is transformational*** and involves much more than simply acquiring a specific skill or knowledge. Mentoring is about a relationship and involves both the professional and the personal. In many ways, mentoring is like counseling.

"Coaching is about skills and knowledge acquisition. Mentoring is transformational and involves much more than simply acquiring a specific skill or knowledge."

Coaching systems are designed to provide an employee with a content expert who works with that individual in assuring that employee learns a particular skill or piece of knowledge. ***Coaching is about skills and knowledge acquisition.*** Although it may involve the personal, the primary focus is professional. In many ways, coaching is akin to teaching.

Coaching vs. Mentoring: 25 Ways They're Different

Differentiator #1:

Coaching is task oriented. It seeks to bring the coachee to a different level of competency in terms of learning new skills or knowledge. The focus is on concrete issues, such as managing more effectively, speaking more articulately, or learning how to think strategically. This requires a content expert (coach) who is capable of teaching the coachee how to develop these skills. What is necessary for this to be successful is for the coach to have credibility as an expert and be able to communicate effectively with the coachee. Developing an ongoing personal relationship is not a critical factor for success.

Mentoring is relationship oriented. It seeks to provide a safe environment where the mentoree can share whatever critical issues affect his or her professional and personal success. Although specific learning goals or competencies may be used as a basis for creating the relationship, mentoring's focus goes beyond these areas to include things like work/life balance, self-confidence, self-perception, and how the personal influences the professional. Content expertise is not as critical for the mentor since he or she plays the role of facilitator rather than coach.

Differentiator #2:

Coaching is short term. A coach can successfully be involved with a coachee for a short period of time. The coaching lasts for as long as needed depending on the purpose of the coaching relationship.

Mentoring is always long term. Mentoring, to be successful, requires time in which both partners can learn about one another and build a climate of trust that creates an environment in which the mentoree can feel secure in sharing the real issues that impact his or her success. At the beginning of a mentoring relationship, pairs are likely to discuss more general and task issues rather than “hot button” issues—that is until the mentor and mentoree achieve a certain level of trust. Once achieved, however, mentoring truly begins. For mentoring relationships to be successful, a mentoring program needs to last nine months to a year.

Differentiator #3:

Coaching is performance driven. The purpose of coaching is to improve the individual's performance on the job. This involves either enhancing current skills or acquiring new skills. Once skills are acquired successfully, the coaching is no longer needed.

Mentoring is development driven. Its purpose is to develop the individual not on the current job but for the future. This distinction helps to differentiate the role of the immediate manager and that of the mentor. It also reduces the possibility of creating conflict between the employee's manager and the mentor.

Differentiator #4:

Coaching does not require design. Coaching can be conducted almost immediately on any given topic. If a company is seeking to provide coaching to a large group of individuals, then certainly some sort of coaching program “design” is involved in order to determine the expertise needed and assessment tools that will be used. But this doesn't usually require a long lead time to implement.

Mentoring requires a design phase. This phase helps determine the mentoring program's strategic purpose, the relationship's focus areas, the [mentoring model](#), and the specific components that will guide the relationship, especially the matching process.

Differentiator # 5:

The coachee's immediate manager is a critical partner in coaching. The manager often provides the coach with feedback on areas in which his/her employee is in need of coaching. The coach uses this information to determine an approach and competency areas to focus on. The coachee's manager and coach are partners in the process.

In mentoring, the immediate manager is indirectly involved. While the manager may offer suggestions to the employee on how to best use the mentoring experience or provide recommendations to the matching committee, the manager has no link to the mentor and they do not communicate at all during the mentoring relationship. This is for the purpose of maintaining the integrity of the mentoring relationship.

Differentiator #6:

Coaching is more easily evaluated as a return on investment (ROI). When the coachee has gained greater skill/knowledge, the employee's manager (as well as other stakeholders) will see the results in the form of improved performance (e.g. increased output, completing tasks faster/more efficiently, resolving more customer calls).

Mentoring is more difficult to quantify. As we stated earlier, mentoring is about relationships. Although goals will be a focus, some goals are personal and cannot be measured. Even when goals can be measured, it is often difficult to obtain objective data given the limited role of the immediate manager and the fact that mentoring tends to focus more on softer skills (e.g. leadership, critical thinking, active listening, and so forth). This does not mean that there can't be any measurement. While evaluations are conducted at the end of formal mentoring programs, it's far easier to measure coaching achievements than mentoring ones.



Differentiator #7:

Coaching, to be effective, relies on performance management systems, such as 360s and performance reviews. This background information informs the coaching intervention and helps to focus it on the areas most needed by the coachee. Often the ROI in coaching is tied back to these systems to form a loop, if you will.

Mentoring, to be effective, does not have to use such performance management systems. These systems might be used to determine competency areas for the mentoring program and to determine what a mentoree needs, but the "looping back" is less direct. Though competency areas are an important component to mentoring, they are not the primary focus.

Differentiator #8:

The coach provides feedback to the coachee's manager. Since coaching relies on performance management systems and is looped to them, this is a logical and necessary component. If the goal is to develop the coachee's knowledge/skill expertise, then this feedback loop to the manager is necessary.

Mentoring prohibits this direct feedback loop to the mentoree's immediate manager. Why?

Most employees are reluctant to tell their immediate managers some of the professional and personal challenges that prevent them from being as successful as they'd like. This is because the manager controls their employment status, performance reviews, raises, and promotions. Mentoring seeks to provide an environment where the mentoree can feel "safe" to share the real issues. If a direct link existed between the manager and the mentor, this would not be possible.

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Differentiator #9:

Coaches are paid for their services. The coach is paid by the company to provide this service. The coach has a vested interest in making sure the coachee succeeds since it is tied to the coach's own compensation. This reality impacts how coaching is done—a coach's success is based upon how well he or she can get coachees to achieve greater success.

Mentors never receive compensation for their services. They provide this service out of a generosity of spirit. The most common reason mentors decide to mentor is because they wish to give something back to someone else and to the company. Since they're not compensated for mentoring, their performance is not tied to the mentoree's. This brings a certain objectivity that is missing in coaching.

Differentiator #10:

A coach operates independently. A coach provides coaching and feedback to the coachee and to the coachee's immediate manager. If the coach needs assistance in how to coach more effectively, she or he will go outside the company for that assistance. There is not a third party that oversees the coach, the coachee, and the immediate manager.

A mentor acts as part of a system. There is an internal [Mentoring Program Manager](#) (MPM) who serves as a resource for mentors, mentorees, and immediate managers. The MPM addresses issues, offers support, and maintains ongoing contact to make sure that the mentoring relationship is working effectively.

Differentiator #11:

In coaching, a coachee doesn't need to be trained on understanding the coaching relationship. Certainly, the coachee should be informed about the purpose and how the program will operate, but there is no training per se on understanding coaching dynamics. Likewise, the coach is presumed to come already trained and ready to coach.

Mentoring requires training for both the mentor and mentoree so that they understand the dynamics of business mentoring. There are many myths and misperceptions about mentoring. A failure to clearly explain the concept of mentoring and [train participants on mentoring techniques](#) will often lead to failed relationships. For mentoring to be successful, both partners need to understand what mentoring is and what it is not.

Differentiator #12:

Coaches primarily focus on business issues. If I am coaching someone on how to use a sophisticated software system or how to write better reports, it's not necessary to engage the coachee in understanding his or her personal world view for this to be effective. So, once the coaching is over, people will ask questions like, "Can the person use the system?" or "Can the person now write effectively?" These are the purposes and outcomes of coaching, not whether the coachee feels better or views this as a step in his or her career.

Mentors balance both the business and the personal. When mentors act as coaches, they won't need to understand the mentoree's inner feelings. However, when the mentor deals with, say, how the mentoree's personal effectiveness is impacted by the business environment, then the focus is more personal. Mentoring seeks to create inner change as well as behavioral change.

Differentiator #13:

Coaching usually involves a smaller monetary investment. A coach can be brought in for one individual and that may be the only outlay the company needs to provide to achieve results. If a larger component of coaching were needed, then the investment cost would be greater.

Formal mentoring involves a larger monetary investment up front, but costs less over time. A company doesn't simply "call in" a mentor for an employee. Instead, the company develops a mentoring system for more than one individual. Normally, the pilot group consists of 10-20 pairs. Although the investment cost may be higher initially, over time, the mentoring investment will be smaller than coaching.

Differentiator #14:

Coaching often relies on software and online systems. Since the personal relationship is less important than content in coaching, software systems that create opportunities to find and interact with coaches can be helpful. It is in this area that potential clients need to be careful since some software programs call themselves mentoring systems when, in fact, they are more akin to coaching.

Mentoring itself usually happens face-to-face, but some of the tasks involved in creating a program and setting up matches can benefit from online systems. As we become more global, mentoring is also embracing technology, like Skype, which allows pairs to see one another and connect. In addition, [mentoring software](#) can be useful as a tool to gather participant information, assist in determining preliminary matching, and help the Mentoring Program Manager maintain ongoing contact with the pairs. (Learn more about our mentoring software, [MentoringComplete](#).)

Differentiator #15:

Coaches leave the organization once the task is done. If the company needs the coach's expertise again, the company will call the person back in.

Mentors reside within the organization and are part of the company's ongoing talent pool. Mentors can continue to mentor for years and impart their wisdom and knowledge.

Differentiator #16:

Coaches are mostly "outside experts." Coaches bring expertise in a specific content area. They typically do not bring expertise about the specific company and its culture.

Mentors are inside experts. They are part of the company and understand its inner workings, its culture, and its history. Mentorees benefit from their mentors because of this experience.

Differentiator #17:

Coaching can be done for remedial purposes. An employee on the verge of losing his or her job can often be salvaged through the intervention of an effective coach.

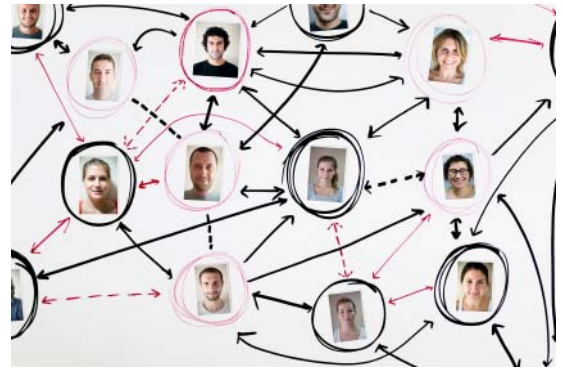
Mentoring is never remedial. As we mentioned earlier, mentoring does not focus on the mentoree's immediate job. (That's the job of the mentoree's immediate manager.) For this reason, mentoring does not get involved in trying to "save" a poor performer.

Differentiator #18:

Coaches aren't connected to the organization's upper echelons.

In other words, the internal politics within the organization rarely affect the coach. In addition, the coach's own personal power or reputation may not be much of a factor in the coaching experience.

Mentors are part of the organization and often are from the managerial ranks. They have perceived power within the company. Some mentors are desired more than others for that simple reason. It is important to understand how power impacts mentoring so you can make sure that any match is done for the proper reasons.



Differentiator #19:

In coaching, the focus is on the individual to develop greater expertise in his or her job. The goal isn't to change the culture of the organization since that would require more than simply coaching one individual. This is not to say that when a person is coached it doesn't affect the company's culture. But this is more of a byproduct as opposed to a specific focus.

In mentoring, the interaction between the mentor and mentoree leads to mutual change and, thus, more directly affects the culture. Why? Remember, mentors and mentorees are within the same organization and the mentoring system involves more than simply one mentoree.

Differentiator #20:

Coaching may include a component on how to address issues of diversity. Indeed, many training programs on diversity include a coaching component to attempt to change people's behavior as it pertains to diversity. This is an important and valuable intervention but may not be sustained or fully developed unless the coachee has frequent and ongoing contact with diversity. Thus, the effect of such coaching may be limited.

Mentoring always involves diversity because part of the dialogue that takes place between the mentor and mentoree is on their differences. In addition, nothing is more powerful in changing the culture on diversity than when a majority mentor is paired with a non-majority mentoree and gains an experiential insight into the real issues being faced by that mentoree. In such circumstances, it is often the mentor who is changed. And, since the mentor is frequently within the power structure of the company, real change can occur and be sustained.

Differentiator #21:

Coaches are experts in specific areas. Therefore, content expertise is a requirement for effective coaching. The coach is the one who guides and directs the coachee in learning the expertise the coach has to offer.

A mentor is a developmental facilitator. The mentor may have content expertise, but what is more important is to have the interpersonal skills to create a safe learning environment. In this environment, the mentoree can be empowered to seek his or her own solutions and to find expertise when needed if it does not reside with the mentor.

Differentiator #22:

A coach can also be the manager of the coachee. In fact, all managers are expected to coach their employees as part of their regular responsibilities. However, companies will also bring in outside coaches as a way to provide an additional component and a different perspective on what the coachee needs.

A mentor is always outside of the mentoree's own direct supervisory line, and a mentor never formally mentors one of his or her own employees. This is because the focus of mentoring is not the current job. And, as we mentioned earlier, the manager's ability to influence the mentoree's future does not allow for as much freedom and openness to occur.

Differentiator #23:

Coaching is one-directional. It is focused on the coachee's needs, and the coach is not expecting to gain anything except compensation for services provided. Whether a coach gains insight into himself or herself as a coach or learns anything new from the coachee is irrelevant to effective coaching.



Mentoring is bi-directional. Both mentors and mentorees gain through the relationship. Mentors often articulate that they gain new perspective, a link with a person from another area of the company, a renewed sense of their own abilities and expertise, and the satisfaction in knowing they have assisted another person in developing professionally and personally.



Differentiator #24:

Coaching involves content and expertise. As such, coaching does not focus on the inner dynamics of a person's personality or history. It is focused on the businessperson as an effective member of the particular department he or she works for.

Mentoring is concerned with both business and personal. It believes that the business and the personal infuse and affect one another. Mentoring discussions focus on interpersonal dynamics on how the mentoree's view of the world, sense of self, ethics, and values impact the mentoree's development. For this reason, mentoring has a spiritual component. By that, we mean it is focused on the whole person and in areas that don't typically come up in the workplace. Mentoring seeks to integrate the business and the personal so that they form one whole individual.

Differentiator #25:

Coaching is concerned about behavioral transformation. In other words, coaching focuses on getting someone to do something better and gain new expertise. Whether that behavior translates itself into actually changing the inner personal dynamics of the coachee is not the prime concern.

Mentoring is concerned about personal transformation. This may or may not link to a specific business competency or area of expertise. Mentoring is concerned with assisting a mentoree in maintaining his or her genuine identity as a member of the organization.

Here's a helpful chart that summarizes the differentiators:

Coaching	Mentoring
Task Oriented	Relationship Oriented
Short Term	Long Term
Performance Driven	Development Driven
Can be done as needed; no design necessary	Program design needed to create effective program
Manager directly involved	Manager involved only indirectly
More easily evaluated and measured for ROI	Less easy to measure for ROI
Reliance on performance management systems, e.g. reviews, 360's etc.	Not dependent upon performance management systems
Feedback by coach to manager about progress in development	No feedback by mentor to manager
Coach paid for services	Mentor receives no compensation
Coach operates independently	Mentors operate with assistance from the Mentoring Program Manager
No training of coachee needed	Mentors and mentorees trained
Focus is more on business issues than personal	Focus is on personal and professional development
Lower initial investment cost	Higher initial investment cost (lower over time)
Lends itself to online software	Management of the mentoring program lends itself to software but not the relationship itself
Coaches leave organization when done	Mentors and mentorees remain in the organization and can provide ongoing mentoring to others
Done by inside or outside content expert	Mentors are normally within the company
Can be done for remedial purposes	Never remedial
Internal politics not usually affected	Internal politics a consideration in program design
Cultural change may/may not occur	Mentoring is transformational and affects the culture
Diversity may or may not be included	Diversity is a component of mentoring
Coaching done 1-on-1	Mentoring most often is done 1-on-1 but other models may be used as well
Content expertise more important in coaching	Interpersonal skills more important in mentoring
Manager can be coach of own employee	Mentor is outside mentoree's direct supervisory line
Coaching is one-directional	Mentoring is bi-directional
Coaching is focused on the business person	Mentoring involves the whole person
Behavioral transformation	Personal transformation

Choosing Mentoring or Coaching

In articulating the differentiators above, it becomes clearer as to why and when a company would opt for coaching versus mentoring or, in some cases, implement both strategies for different reasons.

Consider coaching when:

- A company is seeking to develop its employees in specific competencies using performance management tools and involving the immediate manager
- A company has a number of talented employees who are not meeting expectations
- A company is introducing a new system or program and employees need to become proficient
- A company has a small group of individuals (5-8) in need of increased competency in specific areas
- A leader or executive needs assistance in acquiring a new skill as an additional responsibility

Consider mentoring when:

- A company is seeking to develop its leaders or talent pool as part of succession planning
- A company seeks to develop its diverse employees to remove barriers that hinder their success
- A company seeks to more completely develop its employees in ways that are additional to the acquisition of specific skills/competencies
- A company seeks to retain its internal expertise and experience residing in its baby boomer employees for future generations
- A company wants to create a workforce that balances the professional and the personal

Remember, coaching and mentoring are both effective approaches to talent development within an organization. A company's specific needs should provide guidance on which option to choose. Making the right decision for the right reasons will help lead to more positive outcomes.

Need help deciding?
Click here to contact us.
We offer a no-obligation consultation.

About Management Mentors:

For over two decades, [Management Mentors](http://www.management-mentors.com) has been designing and implementing world-class business mentoring programs and helping companies attract and retain high potential employees. Based outside of Boston, Mass., Management Mentors' corporate mentoring programs develop future leaders and create a more diverse workforce by removing the barriers to equal opportunity. Management Mentors has achieved a 90% success rate with pairs it matches using a thoughtful, proven process. Current and past clients include Enterprise Rent-A-Car, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, The New York Times Corporation, The City of Tallahassee, Cooper Tire, FedEx Kinkos, Quaker Oats, Schering Plough, TJX Corporation, and Sony Music Corporation. For more information on how your firm can enjoy greater success through mentoring, contact us at 617.789.4622 or visit us at www.management-mentors.com.



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