



Mentoring or coaching?

Tell the difference!



Mentoring and coaching serve different purposes and follow different paths. Yet, many people ignore this reality, and end up picking an inappropriate program which thereby leads to ineffective results.

« I am looking for greater professional opportunities. I need a new job within the same company, more responsibilities, an international mobility, or perhaps to change function. In order to help me, I need the help of someone more experienced, who can listen, guide and advise me on the best way to go about it. »

« I am feeling stuck and a bit lost. My competencies are not being fully used in my current job; yet, I am struggling to grasp the extent of my new and bigger responsibilities, and I do not know how to change the situation. I want to be able to get a different perspective, reflect a bit on what I do best, improve my skillsets... before I can perform satisfactorily and aspire to more responsibility. »

Who do you call upon in the above instances? A mentor or a coach?

In order to help avoid such confusion, here are three surefire ways to help you choose the right development program.

1. Identify the nature of your professional and personal objectives

Before you decide whether you need coaching

or mentoring, identify the professional and personal objectives that you wish to fulfil.

Then, clarify the *nature* of those objectives. If you want to improve your *specific competencies in a domain*, for example, you want to learn how to improve your personal branding, speak with greater confidence, or have better impact as a leader, then you need a coach. If you want *high-level, more general* guidance and support to anticipate and prepare your next career steps in the same or a different organization (when the mentoring program is part of an inter-company professional networking organization for example), then go for a mentor.

If you are looking for advice on how to achieve better work-life balance at an executive level, you can enlist the help of a mentor who would inspire you to achieve it, and share tips on how they themselves manage it. But, if, in order to achieve that work-life balance, you need concrete tools and methods to perfect your time management skills, or work on your ability to be more assertive, then you need a coach. While a mentor will take a holistic view of your life and career, a coach, especially if commissioned by an organization, will focus on *specific* issues and areas for development.

2. Understand the relationship dynamics involved in mentoring and coaching

In mentoring, there is mutual interaction and exchange of best practices between the mentor and the mentee. The mentor shares their life and work experiences, and the discussions will

focus on the future personal and professional development of the mentee. The mentor listens and actively offers advice, support and guidance, and may even share their professional network with the mentee. Learning is bidirectional: mentee can learn from the mentor, but the mentor may also open up their mind, expand their horizons and discover new functions or cultures through their interactions with the mentee. Consequently, the personal relationship between the mentor and the mentee will be a key determinant of the success of the program.

A coach focuses on short-term development, with emphasis on enhancing current skills or on acquiring new skills. A coach does not share their personal concerns or experience, but rather proposes methods to enhance the employee's understanding of their own selves so that appropriate behaviors and actions can be instilled. Coaching is therefore unidirectional, in that it is the employee that is learning and benefitting from the process.

3. Clarify the time and resources at your disposal

Mentoring is a more informal arrangement than coaching, and its agenda is determined by the mentee's needs and urgency. The frequency and nature of the mentor-mentee meetings can be freely determined by the two; it can be once a week, once a month or less often. The relationship is of a longer duration, and it can last from several months to several years. Aside from meeting face-to-face, a mentor is also usually accessible by phone or email, as and when necessary.

Coaching is a formal, structured process that often follows a specific, pre-determined schedule (for instance: two hours a week for a total of 24 hours, with individual work in between sessions). Coaching is for a limited duration, simply because it has a cost. A coach is a professional, who has been trained and, most often, certified to coach, unlike a mentor who has a specific skillset, knowledge and expertise of a function, company or sector arising out of their work and personal experience, which they are willing to share.

Mentoring and coaching are two popular employee development programs in modern organizations, and a key element in talent retention and engagement. Keeping the above differentiators in mind when deciding between mentoring or coaching would ensure that the right program is chosen for the right reasons, leading to positive outcomes for both the organization and the employee. ↗

BIO

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