



Coaching Is Not Mentoring & Mentoring is Not Coaching

Coaching and Mentoring And the 25 Differentiators That Make Them Different

In the field of employee development where companies and HR professionals seek to maximize their human capital, an area that creates the most confusion is in understanding the differences between business coaching and business mentoring. Consultants who, in an effort to be all things to all clients or to be on the latest bandwagon, market themselves as experts by using the terms interchangeable further exacerbate this. I have often had to enlighten potential clients on the differences to guide them into making the right decision as to which option to select.

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 this leads to disappointing results and often, the understandable mistake of blaming coaching or mentoring rather than realizing that they created the wrong system.

As a mentoring consultant, I often get asked to explicate the differences. It is not difficult to cite these differences because they are very distinct. In what follows, I hope to provide readers with a better understanding of these differences as well as a process for discerning which of these two fine approaches are best suited to their needs. Before I begin I would like to add one caveat. Though mentoring and coaching are distinct, they do share common elements. It is often a difference in emphasis as well as outcomes that create the distinction. Also, there are some coaches that have the ability and do act as mentors and there are mentors who, in some instances, act more as coaches. What I am seeking to accomplish in this article is to articulate general differentiators that may not apply in all cases but that apply in most.

The differentiators between business coaching and business mentoring are many and begin with the overall purpose of each.



Mentoring systems are designed to promote professional development of an employee by linking him/her with a mentor who will focus on the overall development of that mentoree. It is meant to be 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 akin to being a counselor.

Coaching systems are designed to provide an employee with a content expert who works with that individual in assuring that the skill or knowledge is acquired sufficiently to achieve success on the part of the employee. Coaching is about skills/knowledge acquisition. Although it may involve the personal, the primary focus is professional and on learning new skills/knowledge. In many ways, coaching is akin to being a teacher.

From these two definitions, further differences follow as listed in the chart below.



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, i.e. reviews, 360's etc.	Not dependent upon performance management systems but may utilize
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 investment cost	Higher investment cost
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 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



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, learning how to think strategically, etc. This requires a content expert (coach) who is capable of teaching the coachee 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 whereby the mentoree can share whatever critical issues impact their professional and personal success. Although specific learning goals or competencies may be used as a basis for creating the relationship, its focus goes beyond such areas to include such things as: work/life balance, self-confidence, self-perception, how the personal influences the professional, etc. Content expertise on the part of the mentor is not as critical for the mentor plays a 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: a few sessions over a short period of time or over a longer period of time. The coaching lasts for as long as is 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 their success. At the beginning of a mentoring relationship, pairs are likely to discuss more general and task issues rather than the issues that are critical for the mentoree until this trust is achieved. Once achieved, however, mentoring truly begins. For mentoring relationships to be successful, a mentoring program needs to last 9 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 manager of the employee 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 an amount of design is involved in order to determine the competency area expertise needed and assessment tools used but this does not necessarily require a long lead time to actually implement the coaching program.

Mentoring requires a design phase in order to determine the strategic purpose for mentoring, the focus areas of the relationship, the specific mentoring models 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. S/he often provides the coach with feedback on areas in which his/her employee is in need of coaching. This information is used by the coach to guide the approach being used by the coach as well as in the competency areas focused on. The coachee's manager and coach are partners in the process.

In mentoring, the immediate manager is indirectly involved. Although s/he may offer suggestions to the employee on how to best utilize the mentoring experience or may provide a recommendation to the matching committee on what would constitute a good match, 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. When the coachee has gained greater skill/knowledge, one can evaluate by virtue of improved performance seen or in the feedback obtained from the manager and other stakeholders.

Mentoring is more difficult to quantify. As we stated earlier, mentoring is about a relationship. 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 the softer skills. This does not mean that there can't be any measurement as evaluations are conducted at the end of formal programs; but it is far easier to measure coaching achievements than mentoring ones.



Differentiator #7:

Coaching, to be effective, relies on performance management systems: 360's, performance reviews, etc. This background information informs the coaching intervention and helps to focus it in 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 systems. They may be used to determine competency areas for the mentoring program and to determine what a mentoree needs but the looping back to these systems is less direct and, again, though competency areas are an important component to mentoring they are not the primary focus.

Differentiator #8:

Coaching involves providing feedback to the manager by the coach on the coachee's progress. 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 expertise of skill or knowledge in coaching then this can only be determined by having this feedback loop to the manager.

Mentoring prohibits this direct feedback loop to the mentoree's immediate manager. Why? All employees are reluctant to reveal some of the professional and personal challenges that prevent them from being as successful to their immediate manager. This is because the manager controls their employment status, performance reviews, raises and promotions. Mentoring seeks to provide an environment whereby the mentoree can remove this veil of privacy to share the real issues. This would not be possible to achieve if there was any direct link between the manager and the mentor.

Differentiator #9:

Coaches are paid for their services. The coach who is involved with the specific coachee is being paid by the company to provide this service. The coach has a vested interest in making sure the coachee succeeds as it is tied to his/her own compensation. This reality impacts how coaching is done. My success as a coach is based upon how well I 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 mentor is because they wish to give something back to someone else and to the company. Since they are 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:

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

Mentor acts as part of a system. There is an internal Mentoring Program Manager who serves as a resource for mentors, mentorees and immediate managers to be able to address issues, provide support and maintain ongoing contact to ensure 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 s/he is 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 both the mentor and mentoree to be trained in the dynamics of business mentoring. There are many myths and misperceptions about mentoring and a failure to clearly explain the concept of mentoring and train on mentoring techniques will often lead to failed relationships. It is important for mentoring to be successful that partners be on the same page with respect to understanding what mentoring is and what it is not.

Differentiator #12:

Coaches focus on business issues primarily. If I am coaching someone on how to use a sophisticated software system or in how to write better reports, it is not necessary to engage the coachee in understanding his/her personal world for this to be effective. Can the person use the system or write effectively is the purpose and outcome of the coaching and not whether s/he feels better or views this as a step in their career etc.

Mentors balance both the business and the personal. When they act as coaches they will also not need to understand the inner feelings of the mentoree. However, when they deal with how 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 involves a lower investment cost. 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.

Mentoring involves a higher investment cost to be initiated. A company doesn't call in a mentor for an employee but creates 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 lends itself to the use of software and online systems. Since the personal relationship is less important than content in coaching. Software systems that create opportunities to find coaches and to interact for short durations of time via email are more appropriate as tools in coaching. It is in this area that potential clients need to be careful as some software programs call themselves mentoring systems when, in fact, they are more akin to coaching.

Mentoring does not lend itself to software and online systems because it involves a personal relationship. Using software and online systems for mentoring probably achieves the same dismal results that online dating. Software however, can be useful as a tool to gather participant information, assist in determining preliminary matching of participants and helping the Mentoring Program Manager maintain ongoing contact with the pairs.

Differentiator #15:

Coaches, when the task is done, leave the organization. Their expertise is gone. A further need for that expertise means that the coach is called back in to assist.

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 most often outside experts though internal coaches also exist. Coaches bring expertise in content but do not bring expertise about the specific company and its culture.



Mentors are inside experts. They are part of the company and understand the inner workings of the company, its culture and its history. It is often this component of the mentor's expertise that is sought by mentorees and it is this expertise that is being lost by the baby boomer retirement if not captured through mentoring.

Differentiator #17:

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

Mentoring is never remedial. As mentioned earlier, mentoring does not focus on the mentoree's immediate job. That is the proper venue of the manager. For this reason, mentoring does not get involved in trying to "save" a poor performer. In addition, mentors have to give of their time without compensation and are not likely to want to invest time with someone perceived as a poor performer.

Differentiator #18:

Coaching is performance driven, as mentioned earlier. Who the coach is or his/her background are generally not affected by internal politics within the organization. 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 as to assure that any match is done for the proper reasons. This also impacts choice of mentors. When companies allow mentorees to freely opt for their mentors, this dynamic plays an important role.

Differentiator #19:

In coaching, the focus is on the individual to develop greater expertise in his/her job. It is not often focused on changing the culture of the organization, as that would require more than simply coaching one individual but a larger number of individuals. This is not to say that when a person is coached it does not affect the company's culture but that is more a byproduct as opposed to a specific focus.

In mentoring, given that mentors and mentorees are within the same organization and that the mentoring system involves more than simply one mentoree. The interaction between the mentor and mentoree leads to mutual change and thus more directly affects the culture. In fact, many mentoring programs include a component on understanding and navigating the corporate culture thus focus directly on this issue.



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 that 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 expert 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.

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 learning and trusting environment so that the mentoree can be empowered to seek his 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, most often companies bring in outside coaches as a means of providing an additional component and to provide a different perspective on the coachee and what s/he needs.

A mentor is always outside of the mentoree's own direct supervisory line and is never formally the mentor of one of their employees. This is because the focus of mentoring is not the current job and, as mentioned previously, the manager's ability to influence that 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 expected to gain anything save his compensation for services provided. Whether a coach gains insight into him/her self 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 will often articulate that what they receive are: a new perspective, a link with a mentoree from another area of the company, a renewed sense of their own abilities and expertise, the satisfaction in knowing they have assisted another person in developing.

Differentiator #24:

Coaching involves content and expertise. As such it 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 of company they work 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 one's view of the world, sense of self, ethics, and values impact one's development. For this reason, mentoring has a spiritual component. By that, I mean it is focused on the whole person and in areas that are most often felt as not the proper domain of the workplace. Mentoring seeks to integrate the business and the personal so that they form one whole individual. That is the distinct focus.

Differentiator #25:

Coaching is concerned about behavioral transformation. Getting someone to do something better and or gain added expertise so as to be better prepared to act appropriately in given situations. 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. It is concerned with assisting a mentoree in maintaining his/her genuine identity as a member of the corporation. It believes that in being an integral person both the mentoree and the company are better served and insure future success.



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, implements both strategies/systems for different reasons.

When to consider coaching:

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

When to consider mentoring:

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

In summary, coaching and mentoring are both effective strategic approaches to talent development within an organization. A company's need and purpose should be what guides the company in electing which option to choose. Making the right decision for the right reasons will ensure that the outcomes are what were sought.

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