

Online Coach or Online Mentor - Which is Right For You?

A new era in how business is conducted was unleashed on March 11, 2020, when the World Health Organisation announced a global pandemic. All of a sudden, everything changed. The good news is that we adapted, and we adapted quickly. Before you could blink, the “new normal” of teaching, learning and having meetings online was here.

But what does this mean for the coaching and mentoring industry? It just feels as though this needs to take place in person, right? Well, would it surprise you to know that these sessions have been taking place as far back as 1993! There are now numerous platforms available to this industry to help them deliver quality sessions and feedback to the clients they serve. Bring in technology such as Zoom and Google Meet, and the question changes from “I want to be coached online or offline?”, to “do I choose online coaching or online mentoring?”

Going digital has overcome distance, travel and cost constraints, and provided location flexibility, which means that you are now able to access some of the world’s top coaches and mentors. Which brings us back to the question: do you go with a coach or do you go with a mentor? And yes, there is a difference.

One is no better than the other, what they are is different. A different approach, different benefits, different outcomes. In short, coaching is about performance while mentoring is about growth.

Mentoring: The Definition

A mentor is someone who shares their knowledge, skills and/or experience, to help another to develop and grow.

Coaching: The Definition

A coach is someone who provides guidance to a client on their goals and helps them reach their full potential.

The best way to understand how coaching and mentoring are structured is to actually see it in a side-by-side comparison:

Differences Between Coaches and Mentors:

	COACH	MENTOR
Difference Summary	A coach is task and performance focused. They will evaluate and give feedback to a client based on their performance.	A mentor builds capabilities within a mentee by creating a partnership. They impart their wisdom and professional or personal experiences to the
Timeframe	Short term, set timeframe	Long term, fluid timeframe
Approach	Performance driven	Development driven
Relationship	Strictly professional	Professional and maybe personal
Structure	Highly structured with regularly scheduled meetings for the duration of the coaching	Unstructured, informal and on an as-needed basis.
Expertise	Coaches are experts in getting people to where they need to be.	Mentors are experts in your industry.
Outcome	Specific and measurable	Changes and is fluid
Compensation	Usually compensated	Usually volunteer-based

When to Choose a Mentor

Use a mentor if:

- You want to learn from a more experienced professional in your field.
- You want advice and guidance on how to grow in your career in your organisation or industry.
- You want to enhance the network of professionals you can learn from.
- You are looking for ways to successfully navigate the challenges unique to your organisation's culture.
- Your goals are not time-sensitive and you have the flexibility to cultivate a mutually beneficial, open-ended relationship with your mentor.

The right mentor must be someone who you “fit” with. It’s a bit like shopping for a pair of shoes, there are lots of styles and some are more comfortable for one person than another.

It could take a while to find a mentor that you feel comfortable with, but figuring out who you can work best with upfront is worth the time and effort in the longer term.

Ideally, a mentor is an expert in their field. While you are looking for a mentor, listen to how someone talks. Are they respectful in what and how they talk about people and situations? A great mentor needs to listen to what you are saying as well as give you good feedback in a way that's honest, helpful and constructive. If someone is going to help you successfully step out of your comfort zone - you need to understand what they are proposing and feel secure following their advice.

Having a mentoring relationship can help you develop new skills in your field. Your mentor can give you access to a larger network in your industry and you can leverage their wealth of experience to talk through problems and find solutions. In your career, having a business mentor to look up to is invaluable in preparing you to become a manager, gain new skills or accelerate your career development.

When to Choose a Coach

Use a coach if:

- You want clarity about what you truly want in life and what's getting in the way.
- Your main goals are around building a certain kind of future rather than resolving and healing from what has happened in the past.
- You are looking for someone to keep you accountable for your goals.
- You feel that you are not living up to your personal or professional potential.
- You experience the desire for a more fulfilling, purpose-driven life.

While a coach does not need to be an expert in your field, they do need to focus on you and helping you to unlock your potential. They must believe that you have the answers to your challenges and with guidance, you will be able to overcome them.

As coaching is performance-focused when choosing a coach ask them about their track record. You need someone who is results orientated and has successfully delivered with past clients. Ask them about their training and what qualifications they have - an overlap in experiences doesn't mean they are the right coach for you and someone who qualified years ago but never brushes up on things is unlikely to be in touch with the latest strategies for the best way forward.

A coach does not give solutions but shows the range of possible paths and routes, without specifying one.

They show the client the map and point them in the right direction. They don't drive you there, but they accompany you on the journey.

Coaching and mentoring both exist for the same purpose: helping others grow, develop and reach their full potential. Both methods give the opportunity for individuals to take responsibility for their own personal and career development.

The methods might differ between coaching and mentoring, but both are about helping people get where they want to go by leveraging the experience of the coach or mentor. Your unique needs will determine whether you need a mentor or coach to enhance your professional development. Whichever path you decide to embark upon, enjoy the investment in yourself as you move towards obtaining your goals.