

Coaching, Mentoring and Leadership or TOP TEN DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN MENTORING AND COACHING

Employers in the United States are increasingly concerned about the shortage of highly-educated professionals such as scientists and engineers. These specialized workers are needed for research and development in the corporate world and in government. There is an equally growing concern of who is going to lead our non-profit organizations in the future.

These developing professionals need role models, mentors and coaches. As they grow, they will seek guidance and inspiration in the pursuit of their important avenues of education and careers.

When managers take on a coaching or mentoring role, both they and their staff win. Managers become more relational, better at delegating, open to learning and people want to work for them.

When I get a call to provide a coaching program, I am surprised that many of my clients ask for a mentoring program and mean coaching or vice versa. This prompted me to develop the following list in the hopes that organizations can be clearer in what they are trying to achieve within their organizations and for their employees.

Mentoring is defined as “wise loyal adviser”. The first mentor was Telemachus who was depicted in Homer’s Odyssey as the person entrusted by the King to watch over and teach Odysseus’s son.

Mentors are usually older with demonstrated accomplishments who help guide the development of someone who has voluntarily entered in to the mentor/mentoree relationship.

Mentoring is used in everything from corporate settings to work with “at risk” youth.

Coaching is used most frequently in relationship to sports and is now widely used in corporations and in professions to get specific feedback of strengths and weaknesses so as to build competence and commitment to self and others.

Managers may coach all those reporting to them as part of their role but mentoring usually is done within a special program of support for employee development and is most often not someone who is in the chain of command of the employee.

Coaching most often takes place within a current job while mentoring may offer a broader view of mentoree’s possibilities for a career.

A coach focuses mostly on the actions taken by the coachee while the mentor will focus both on actions as well as relationship.

A mentor shares their experiences and knowledge with mentoree while a coach will ask their client to highlight their own experiences and draw from those experiences.

Coaches encourage self-resolution and mentors may provide advice.

Coaches may encourage self-discovery while mentors may show the way.

Mentors transfer their knowledge and information while coaches ask directed questions that will bring out the answers in the coachee.

Mentors tend to view the relationship as an apprenticeship while coaches are approaching the relationship more as a mutual exploration.

Mentors may be harder to find since many “accomplished in their field” do not have the support of their organization nor the patience to spend the needed time with a mentoree. It is in a manager’s best interest to coach their own employees and they can have the help of an outside coach to develop their skills.

A mentor may coach but a coach is not necessarily a mentor.

Most employees are looking for a manager who will coach them as part of their leadership role. It demonstrates to the employee that managers care and that the employee can grow and develop.

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