

Are you a coach or a mentor?

There's a lot of confusion about the coaching and mentoring roles – mainly because they employ similar skills. But what do these two activities actually involve? And what are the differences and similarities between them?

This questionnaire will help you to work out whether you are – or want to be – a coach or a mentor. Choose answer a) or answer b) for each of the following questions.

1. What is the expected lifespan of your relationship with the person you are coaching or mentoring?

- a) This is an ongoing relationship that may last for a long period of time-at least a year.
- b) This is a short-term relationship with a set duration.

2. What is the focus of the relationship which you have with the person whom you are coaching or mentoring?

- a) The focus of my role is to take a broader view of the whole person in a developing career. My main aim is to help them reflect, build their confidence and to make decisions for themselves. I may also provide job or career advice and support for personal development, based on my own experience.
- b) The focus of my role is to deal with specific personal development areas which are impeding performance improvement. My main task is to make sure that the person is provided with the specific skills or knowledge they need to achieve something.

3. What are your skills and experience in relation to the person you are supporting?

- a) I may be more senior or better qualified than the person I am supporting. I will be in a position to use my knowledge and experience to offer advice or guidance. I may also open doors to otherwise out-of-reach opportunities.
- b) I may be an expert or specialist in the specific skills that the person wants to learn. However, I don't always need direct experience of the person's occupational role.

4. What is the nature of meetings with the person you are coaching or mentoring?

- a) Meetings are quite informal and tend to take place as and when the person needs some advice.
- b) Meetings are quite structured in nature and are scheduled on a regular basis.

5. Who sets the agenda for your meetings?

- a) The agenda is set by the person I am supporting. My role is simply to provide support and guidance for whatever they want to achieve.
- b) I tend to take control of the agenda which is focused on achieving specific, immediate short or medium term goals.

Assessing your responses

Now count up the number of a's and the number of b's that you have scored in this quiz. If you have three or more a's then you are more likely to be a mentor than a coach. On the other hand, if you have three or more b's you are more likely to be a coach than a mentor.

The two roles

The main reason why there is so much confusion between the two roles is that there are actually many similarities between them. For example:

- A coach can also be a mentor and a mentor can be a coach, or the role can be rolled into one
- Mentors and coaches use the same skills to help people reach significant decisions and take appropriate action
- Successful mentors and coaches both depend on building a relationship based on trust and openness
- Neither are there to solve problems but rather to help identify issues and plan ways through them.
- Today, coaches can be full time professional coaches. Mentors are usually 'volunteers', doing it as an additional part of their organisational role.

The key point is that whatever role you play, it's vital to give the person being coached or mentored unbiased support and guidance. The overall aim of good coaching and mentoring is to take someone beyond the boundaries of what they ever believed was possible – sometimes beyond the limitations of the coach or mentor's own skills. Instead of telling people how to do things, coaches and mentors help them come up with their own ideas.

Becoming a better coach or mentor

To be a good coach or mentor, you need to be skilled at listening, asking effective questions and giving constructive feedback. You need to be flexible and open minded, patient and challenging, stimulating and interesting. Above all you need to understand how different people learn and to adapt your approach to meet individual needs.



One of the best and easiest methods for you to become a better coach or mentor- is to work with the Word Smiths OCR- endorsed audio learning package ***Coaching and Mentoring for Success.***

This highly-regarded and popular resource is exceptional value; it includes two audio CDs, a booklet and a large number of online resources.

For more information and to listen to a sample, go to:

<http://www.word-smiths.co.uk/cm-about.html>