

Coach or mentor...

Let's not get confused!

As performance improvement consultants, we are often in positions where we have structured coaching relationships as part of our assignments. These are typically focused around specific elements of improvement such as leading transformation, Lean leadership, or targeted operational improvement activity.

An article in the September edition of the Director Magazine about the difference between coaching and mentoring, was always going to prompt a discussion in the office amongst our team of qualified Executive Performance Coaches.

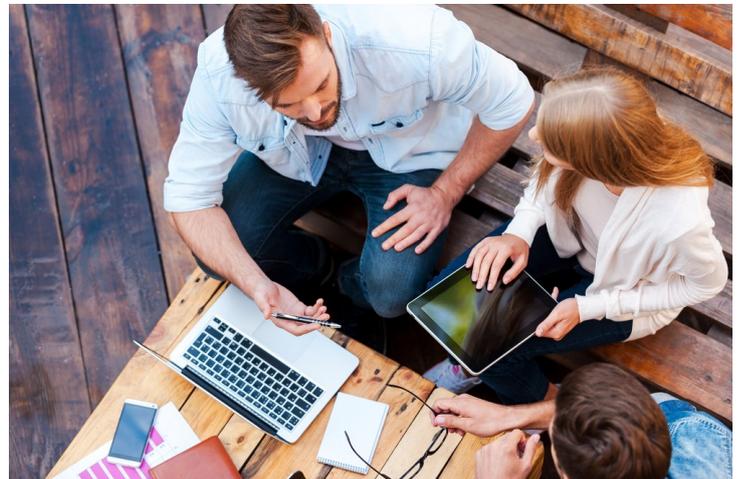
(Director - Why everyone's talking about mentoring, 19 September, Hannah Gresty)

As performance improvement consultants, we are often in positions where we have structured coaching relationships as part of our assignments. These are typically focused around specific elements of improvement such as leading transformation, Lean leadership, or targeted operational improvement activity.

Coach

The role of the coach in these instances is to structure a process of one to one discussions where a clear outcome is envisaged and clarified. A true assessment of how things are currently is agreed, and a series of possible approaches is discussed before any action is taken to try and close the gap between what is wanted versus the current reality.

Coaching is generally quite structured in nature and meetings will be scheduled on a regular basis. The agenda will be set and focused on achieving specific, immediate goals. In other words, coaching is task focused, with conversations being had around the specific elements of improvement and the practicality of their application.



In most circumstances the coach need not be an expert in the topic itself but must be highly skilled in the process of coaching so that an appropriate learning environment is created and managed. The process of coaching can only be considered completed when the specific area under question has been improved.

Mentor

Many years ago, and after I had achieved my Advanced Professional Diploma in Mentoring I had the pleasure of working with David Clutterbuck, the leading thinker in Coaching and Mentoring.

David says, "A mentor is a more experienced individual willing to share knowledge with someone less experienced in a relationship of mutual trust." So, mentoring is a partnership between two people and emphasises relationship-based learning and an ongoing relationship that can last for a long time.

Mentoring can be more informal, and meetings can take place as and when the mentee needs guidance and or support. To be successful, the mentor and mentee need to develop good rapport, and, in many instances, they often become friends. However, mentoring is sometimes confused with coaching, teaching, or counselling.

Mentoring is a different process and should not be confused with coaching as it focuses upon the relationship in the first instance and usually lasts over a longer period than coaching. Mentoring is about helping someone find their own solution to a problem guided by a 'wise, experienced and independent' person.

Crucially mentoring requires a strong two-way relationship, often with the mentor gaining as much as the mentee.

By bringing fresh ideas and new perspectives, the mentor brings their experience to bear on the overall career path, specific topic or issue, and often guide the solution. The mentor should provide perspective, guidance and a trusted sounding board. As such Mentors are often seasoned campaigners who can share their knowledge, approaches and sometimes contacts with mentees. They don't necessarily require coaching skills, but they must focus on the continuous development of the person and not just on the specific task being discussed.

Coach and Mentor... Combined.

At one time coaching and mentoring were reserved for senior managers and company directors, now it's available to most employees as a professional or personal development tool.



And, programmes where coaching and mentoring is combined, prove to be popular amongst employees because it provides both a balance between fulfilling organisational goals and objectives whilst considering the personal development needs of individual employees.

It provides much more of a two-way relationship, where both the organisation and the employee significantly benefit.

Coaching and mentoring closely linked with organisational change are particularly likely to prove successful as they are centred and provide challenge.

Such coaching and mentoring, when focused on the individual, can enhance motivation and increase productivity. And, in turn reduce staff turnover because individuals feel more valued and connected with both small and large organisational changes. This role may be provided by trained internal coaches or mentors and, increasingly, by professionally qualified and suitably experienced coaching.

As Bourton consultants we are always happy to share our experiences of supporting people to improve organisational performance.

If you have a question around Coaching or Mentoring, or if you're looking for support with a specific situation, or maybe you'd like to develop your own coaching/mentoring skills – feel free to get in touch on 01926 633333 alternatively you can email us at info@bourton.co.uk.

