



Resources

The 411 on all things mentoring related.

The Differences Between Coaching & Mentoring

It's understandable that you might think mentoring and coaching are similar or even the same thing. But they're not. Both warrant consideration in the workplace. Here are five differentiators that we think are important.

[But be sure to download our FREE white paper that discusses the complete list of differences \(all 25 of them!\) between coaching and mentoring.](#)

Differentiator #1:

Coaching is task oriented. The focus is on concrete issues, such as managing more effectively, speaking more articulately, and learning how to think strategically. This requires a content expert (coach) who is capable of teaching the coachee how to develop these skills.

Mentoring is relationship oriented. It seeks to provide a safe environment where the mentoree shares whatever issues affect his or her professional and personal success. Although specific learning goals or competencies may be used as a basis for creating the relationship, its focus goes beyond these areas to include things, such as work/life balance, self-confidence, self-perception, and how the personal influences the professional.

Differentiator #2:

Coaching is short term. A coach can successfully be involved with a coachee for a short period of time, maybe even just a few sessions. 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 his or her success. Successful mentoring relationships last nine 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 the coachee successfully acquires the skills, the coach is no longer needed.

Mentoring is development driven. Its purpose is to develop the individual not only for the current job, but also for the future. This distinction differentiates the role of the immediate manager and that of the mentor. It also reduces the possibility of creating conflict between the employee's manager and the mentor.

Differentiator #4:

Coaching does not require design. Coaching can be conducted almost immediately on any given topic. If a company seeks 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. She or he often provides the coach with feedback on areas in which his or her employee is in need of coaching. This coach uses this information to guide the coaching process

In mentoring, the immediate manager is indirectly involved. Although she or he may offer suggestions to the employee on how to best use 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 helps maintain the mentoring relationship's integrity.

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
- 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

Remember, [download our FREE white paper on coaching vs. mentoring](#), which has the complete list.

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