

THE SKILLS YOU NEED GUIDE TO

COACHING AND MENTORING



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INTRODUCTION

Workplaces and how we work have changed hugely over the last few years or decades. We may still need qualifications, but training is increasingly ‘on the job’. We are expected to develop skills as we develop experience, and with the help of colleagues and managers.

This has also resulted in changes in the skills demanded of more experienced staff. We no longer simply need to be able to do our own jobs. We also need to be able to help others to develop their skills.

Increasingly, many of us are now finding that we need coaching and mentoring skills to help and support younger or less experienced colleagues.

Helping someone else to learn can be a hugely rewarding process. Doing so enables you to watch someone else grow and develop, and hopefully come closer to fulfilling their potential. It is not an exaggeration to say that many lives have been changed by someone else providing support for learning.

There are a variety of roles, both formal and informal, which involve helping or supporting someone else’s learning. They include teaching, coaching and mentoring, as well as counselling.

Great teachers, mentors, coaches and counsellors come from a wide variety of backgrounds. But they all share a few characteristics.

- **First, they have respect for those whose learning they support:** they treat them as individuals, and work to help them achieve their aims and objectives.
- **Second, they know that they themselves are also learning and developing all the time:** they share a growth mindset.

Helping others to learn can be a hugely rewarding process. Not only do you have the potential to help someone to change their life, but you also get to learn from the process yourself.

This does not mean that coaches or mentors need to be ‘experts’ in everything. They are not expected to provide all the answers. Instead, it means developing an approach to supporting others that enables them to develop solutions to their own problems. In other words, this is the coach or mentor as ‘enabler’ or ‘facilitator’.

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WHAT IS COACHING?

Good teachers, coaches and mentors are highly sought-after, and it is well worth taking the time to develop the skills needed to help others in this way. This chapter starts by explaining the four main ways in which we can supporting learning, teaching, mentoring, coaching and counselling, and then goes on to explain more about what we mean by 'coaching'.

FOUR MAIN WAYS TO SUPPORT LEARNING

There are four main ways in which we can support others' learning: teaching, mentoring, coaching and counselling. These four all share some key characteristics and skills, but are nonetheless quite different. It is important to be aware of the differences.

- **TEACHING is perhaps the most well-known way to help others to learn.**

A teacher generally starts from a position of 'expert', able to impart knowledge to their pupils. The best teachers will use participative and interactive techniques, like coaching. However, there is very definitely an imbalance of knowledge, with the teacher as expert knowing the 'right answer'.

That said, many teachers would recognise the importance of facilitating learning, which is more traditionally related to coaching. Some schools have also adopted a 'coaching approach' to learning, where the teachers encourage the children to experiment, without giving them the 'right' answers.

- **COACHING, in the sense of this book, describes a model of 'coach as facilitator'.**

In other words, the coach is not an expert in the subject matter, but someone who specialises in helping to unlock the potential of others. The idea is that individuals hold the key to their own success, and do not need others to tell them what to do. The focus of coaching is usually on the here and now and solving immediate problems or issues.

Coaching is not only for formal teaching and learning situations. A coaching approach can be successfully used at home and in informal situations too, both for adults and children.

- **MENTORING is often considered as somewhere between coaching and teaching.**

Mentors are often experts in their area, but do not have a formal teaching role.

The original ‘Mentor’, in Homer’s Odyssey, was tutor to Odysseus’ son Telemachus. The goddess Athene appeared to Telemachus in disguise as Mentor, hence the idea of a mentor as a wise guide.

Mentoring is similar to coaching. There is general agreement that a mentor is a guide who helps someone to learn or develop faster than they might do alone. In the workplace, mentors are often formally designated as such by mutual agreement, and outside of an individual’s line management chain. They usually have considerable experience and expertise in the individual’s line of business.

One key difference with coaching is that a mentoring relationship usually focuses on the future, career development, and broadening an individual’s horizons.

- **COUNSELLING is closer to a therapeutic intervention.**

Counselling focuses on the past, helping the individual to overcome barriers and issues from their past and move on. The focus may be either internal or external.

Counselling is perhaps more intense than coaching or mentoring, and often considered therapeutic rather than supportive. However, it shares some characteristics with the other three approaches: in particular, the position that the learner holds the answer to their own problem, and the desire to help them take responsibility for that.

The differences between these various ‘learning methods’ can be summarised as:

LEARNING METHOD	COACHING	MENTORING	COUNSELLING
THE QUESTION	How?	What?	Why?
THE FOCUS	The present	The future	The past
AIM	Improving skills	Developing and delivering learning goals	Overcoming psychological barriers
OBJECTIVE	Raising competence	Opening horizons	Building self-understanding

Based on the work of Clutterbuck & Schneider (1998)

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