

## COACHING AND MENTORING

Coaching and mentoring are both forms of one to one development which focus upon the growth of individual leadership capacity. Literature on adult learning distinguishes between the acquisition of technical skills and knowledge which are largely supportive of the status quo (training) and those which encourage reflection and relate to an understanding of ideas (learning). It is this form of learning and development, often called experiential learning, which underpins coaching and mentoring, helping individuals to:

- achieve self-direction
- develop critical reflection
- increase personal insight
- capitalise on experiences and promote learning for action
- provide exposure to risk, challenge and support
- become aware of the need to integrate learning into the individual's own working environment
- acknowledge and build on the wisdom of the individual's profession.

The terms coaching and mentoring are often used interchangeably; while the functions invariably overlap, they are two distinct types of developmental relationship. It is important to understand this distinction, in order to help the potential user to decide which is relevant for them at any time.

### ***Mentoring***

The Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines a mentor as 'an experienced and trusted counsellor'. While mentors exist in all walks of life, in an organisational setting, mentoring typically refers to a developmental, off-line (i.e. not line management ) relationship between an older, more senior member of an organisation and a younger member of staff, where the prime expertise is that of competence and experience in the area of activity or expertise. Mentoring can valuably be used between peers where one individual is new to a position (eg that of a COO), while the other has been in post for a significant time and may even have experienced a number of such roles in different settings. The role is unpaid.

Few of those who have experienced good quality mentoring during their careers, particularly those who have chosen their own mentor will argue with the importance of a wise guide who gives their advice impartially. However, it is important to be aware of some of the pitfalls of mentoring:

- Because it is unpaid, it is often difficult to create a contract which works for the mentee unless the mentor is part of a scheme of which training and contracting form a part;
- Where mentoring is not between peers, any imbalance in power created by the difference in seniority can be problematic;
- Unless the mentee is in a position to choose their mentor, the match of requirements may be pretty hit and miss;

- Mentoring can get mixed up with organisational sponsorship and on occasion becomes perverted into political games playing;
- Unless part of a scheme, it is extremely difficult to quality assure.

David Clutterbuck, a respected author and practitioner in the field of mentoring, defines the activity as 'off-line help from one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking'. To achieve this successfully, demands not only self-awareness and high level skills but also good development for the mentor. It is this which is often neglected in setting up mentoring schemes with the resulting risk of failure in the establishment of productive relationships and disappointment on both sides. Not everyone makes a good mentor.

### ***Coaching***

Coaching can be described most simply as a one-to-one helping relationship provided by an individual who is usually external to the organisation or type of organisation of the individual being coached. It focuses upon the improvement of the individual's work performance and, at its best, it aims to achieve client self determination and autonomy. It is typically, but not always, a paid service.

There are many forms of coaching and increasingly coaches aim to differentiate their services by the use of descriptive terminology, such as:

Executive coaching: Usually offered by those who have a track record in professional and executive roles, 'executive' coaching focuses upon 'high flyers' and those working at the most senior levels in organisations. It is centred on developing high performing leaders and focuses on both technical issues and psychological considerations. Kilburg (1996) defined executive coaching as: 'a helping relationship between a client who has managerial authority... in an organisation and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals... within a formally defined coaching agreement'.

Performance coaching: Specifically geared to performance enhancement, this form of coaching derives in part from business and sports psychology.

Skills coaching: This focuses on the specific skills required to perform effectively in a role.

Personal or 'life' coaching: This approach involves working with individuals to achieve their personal aspirations.

In practice, the highly skilled coach will not observe these somewhat simplistic distinctions rigorously, but will move across the boundaries which the above descriptions imply. A helpful way of distinguishing between different types of coaching is to consider the activity in terms of its focus and approach:

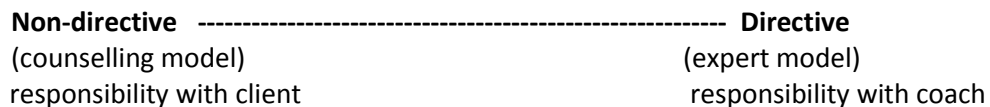
### *Focus*

The prime objective of work based coaching is that of helping the individual to be effective in their role and in the performance of task. To achieve this, it is essential that coaching focuses both on the individual him or herself, as well as the individual within the wider contexts of group, organisation and operating environment.

Coaches will vary considerably in their competence and willingness to focus upon the individual, from those who do not see it as any part of their responsibility to include the individual's wider pre-occupations and experiences, to those (often with a therapeutic background) who regard such knowledge and its use as essential. The boundaries of the coaching intervention need to be clearly defined, in order to protect clients who may have no prior experience of coaching or other form of helping relationship and who are, therefore, potentially vulnerable to inappropriately therapeutic interventions.

### *Approach*

The above has described the areas of focus for coaching, all of which are important, although the balance of focus will differ according to the client's particular needs. What is more likely to vary according to the coach's own preference and expertise is the approach adopted for the coaching intervention itself. It can be described along a simple continuum from the directive at one end to the non-directive at the other:



There are situations when it is entirely appropriate for a coach to be directive, for example where one skilled individual is rehearsing another less skilled individual (the client) in a particular activity (e.g. making presentations), or when the coach's own experience of a set of circumstances is clearly helpful in guiding the other. However, if coaching is concerned with helping an individual towards greater self determination, a non-directive approach is likely to be more effective and appropriate.

### *Telephone and on-line coaching*

These forms of coaching have become increasingly popular over recent years. They should only be used in exceptional circumstances, where the relationship is very well established and where it can also be sustained by face to face contact.

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