



The Difference Between Coaching and Mentoring

As a Mentor or Mentee, it is important to understand that the terms “coaching” and “mentoring” are not the same, although as part of the mentoring process, the Mentor will provide a level of coaching relevant to the nature of the goals and plans agreed between both parties. This can lead to the use of both terms interchangeably resulting in confusion.

Mentoring means helping a Mentee succeed in a set of goals through a guidance process. The Mentor/Mentee relationship is characterised by a more experienced person guiding and assisting the less experienced person (Mentee) with advice, information, and guidance about his/her career goals.

Coaching¹ focuses on improving performance and skills, whether conducted internally or externally. The Coach do not give advice – rather they provide encouragement to the Coachee using open-ended questions to strategise solutions and facilitate problem-solving. The Coach holds the Coachee accountable to try new strategies to get results.

According to Open Universities Australia², a useful table describing the primary differences between Coaching and Mentoring (Passmore (2007³)), highlights the key differences:

	Coaching	Mentoring
1. Level of formality	More formal: contract or ground rules set, often involving a third-party organisational client.	Less formal: agreement, most typically, between two parties.
2. Length of contract	Shorter term: typically, between four and twelve meetings agreed over two to twelve months.	Longer term: typically, unspecified number of meetings with relationships often running over three to five years.

¹ Palen, Valerie. (2012). *The Difference Between Mentoring and Coaching* available at www.talentmgt.com

² <https://www.open.edu.au/>

³ Passmore, Jonathan. (2007). *Coaching and mentoring - The role of experience and sector knowledge*



Table 1 Key differences between coaching and mentoring

3. Outcome focus	More performance-focused: typically, a greater focus on short-term skills and job performance.	More career-focused: typically, a concern with longer-term career issues, obtaining the right experience and longer-term thinking.
4. Level of business knowledge	More generalist: typically, coaches have a strong appreciation of business or commercial realities.	More sector knowledge: typically, mentors have detailed knowledge of organisation or business sector.
5. Training	More relationship training: typically, coaches have a background in psychology, psychotherapy or human resources; or have undertaken specialist coaching training.	More management training: typically, mentors have a background in senior management, with limited coaching/mentoring training.
6. Client	Dual client: more typically a dual focus on the needs of the individual and the needs of the organisation.	Single client: more typically a single focus on the needs of the individual.
7. Supervision or support	Formal: typically, the coach will be in (or expected to be in) supervision as part of their Continuing Professional Development (CPD).	Informal: typically, the mentor may have period discussions or briefings from HR, if based within an organisation.

Considering the abovementioned, we can state that coaching and mentoring are not the same. The Mentoring process is performed with time and includes character determination and mutual interest. Coaching, on the other hand, requires complete fulfillment of a set task, does not affect personal character of the participants, and is considered finished once the goal has been achieved. In the discussions between Mentor and Mentee, it is important to recognise these differences when setting expectations to ensure that the mentoring focuses correctly to ensure success.

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