

Member's Quarterly

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Perspective

Coaching versus Mentoring

Which is best for you?

We all need extra support at times whether we're starting a new job or we've been given that long overdue promotion. New managers can definitely use the assistance. That's where coaching or mentoring come in. Most organizations offer some version of this type of support to people moving into the management cadre, but what's the difference between coaching and mentoring?



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At first glance they appear to be quite similar, but there are some fundamental differences. Leadership or executive coaching is usually focused on helping individuals understand their role and then providing feedback to help them improve and grow.

Coaching is usually offered for a limited period of time and most often provided by an outside resource.

Mentoring, on the other hand, can be described as more of a relationship between an experienced person helping a newbie learn not just the tasks, but also the culture of the organization. Mentoring tends to be longer term and, in many cases, involves someone from inside the organization who is guiding the new manager.

There are benefits to both mentoring and coaching.

Mentoring allows people to learn on the job in an everyday setting with someone who knows how everything works. That's how most of us learned our initial jobs and many of the ones that followed. Mentoring is also low cost since it can be provided in-house and that makes it easy to implement as well. Employees who are mentored often feel more engaged and connected to the organization as that relationship grows. This in turn leads to improved performance and productivity.

Coaching has its benefits too. It offers the organization and those who are being coached specialized training and focused sessions that can often show significant and immediate improvements. Employees can be brought up to speed in specific areas very quickly and make immediate gains in knowledge and skills. We all know the value of coaching and appreciate that the organization will take the time and money to invest in them. Another benefit is that coaching can also help improve employee retention and increase employee loyalty.

Which option should your organization consider? That depends on certain factors. Who are you trying to upskill or develop? What would your organization like to gain from such a process and how much are you willing to commit financially? Some experts say that if your goal is to develop people and build strong ties across your organization, then mentoring is the best way to go. Others note that if you want to quickly upskill a select group of individuals to make changes or power growth, then coaching would be the better option. There's also the timing issue. If you're building for the long term and want stability and consistency, consider mentoring. If you need something to happen now or changes are coming soon, then coaching will help you weather the storm. It's actually not a bad decision to have to make. Everyone involved and the organization in particular will benefit from whatever choice you ultimately select.

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