



Coaching Vs. Mentoring – Which One Is Right For You?

By: Adam Reynolds – Coaching Program Director

Coaching and Mentoring have similarities, but their differences make the difference. Which one is right for you? If you are seeking support on leadership development, a mentor or a coach from inside or outside your organization are two great possible resources. Understanding the difference between the two can help you decide which one is right for you. I recently had a conversation with Adam Reynolds, Coaching Program Director for McGhee where I asked him to describe the two approaches to leadership guidance and why they are important.

Mentors are typically chosen because they hold a senior position within a company and therefore have a unique internal or related perspective. Mentors often provide specific advice that can only come from someone who has been there before. Mentoring meetings can be brainstorming sessions that create a collaborative effort to find the best solution for the challenges the mentee is facing. They are usually informal in structure with no set agenda for each meeting. In most cases there are no clearly defined goals and no set timeframe for the relationship. This isn't always the case, however it is often a significant difference to coaching relationships which almost always have a clear set of goals to achieve in a set timeframe. As long as the mentee is getting value and the mentor has the time to contribute, these relationships can continue. Business acumen comes from experience and mentors can offer advice that few others can. Mentors can also introduce developing leaders to important people in the field that can support the mentee to move up in an organization. Mentors provide guidance that can be invaluable to a growing leader and they have been an important part of leadership development.

Coaches are usually chosen because of their neutral perspective, one that is not influenced by their position in an organization (if they are internal coaches) or by their understanding of the people and issues involved in the client's business life. This is what makes coaching so valuable. The coach is therefore free of judgment and opinion about a situation or person and can provide guidance that is specifically directed toward supporting the client to achieve their goals, while empowering the client to create their own solutions and learn from their situations. Reynolds says, "Because a coach comes from a neutral perspective, it enables the client to dig deep and uncover the limiting beliefs that stand in their way. Clients rarely feel comfortable revealing themselves at that level with someone who holds a position of seniority in the organization, and this can stifle the growth that is necessary to achieve the next level of success." Coaches are there to help evoke the potential of each client and often work on personal awareness, emotional intelligence, and shifting paradigms. Coaching is typically a more formal relationship than mentoring. The coach and client establish a clear set of measurable goals at the beginning of the contract, which provides the focus for the coaching sessions and lays out the measure for success. Coaching is still relatively new as compared with mentoring in the business community. But it is gaining momentum and providing value in ways mentoring does not.

While both mentoring and coaching can provide critical leadership support, they have different approaches. Understanding this difference can guide clients toward making the best choice for themselves. Mentoring provides content-specific feedback and advice from someone who has been there before. Coaching empowers a client to discover their own answers and solutions, building on existing strengths and creating awareness that leads to developing new competencies.