

Definition of Mentoring

Mentoring is most often defined as a professional relationship based on mutual trust in which an experienced, respected and enthusiastic person (the mentor), shares his/her knowledge and experience with a less experienced colleague (the mentee) in developing his/her knowledge, learning, work-based skills, well-being, personal and professional development.

Mentoring is valuable during the time of:

- development
- transition
- change
- difficulties (e.g. communication, relationship problems and stress)

The table below summarises what is Mentoring and what is not.

| Mentoring IS | Mentoring IS NOT |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Supporting others to problem solve | Imposing your ideas and values |
| Confidential | Getting a new best friend |
| Using knowledge and experience | Counselling, buddying, coaching |
| Reflective | A quick fix solution |
| Building confidence | Teaching |
| Being honest | Giving all the answers |
| Motivating the mentee | Having power over someone |
| Encouraging independence | Judging |

Mentoring is also not to be confused with Coaching, Counselling, Buddying, etc. Although there are many similarities, mentoring enables the mentee to follow in the path of an older and wiser colleague - "who has been there, done that" - and who can pass on knowledge, experience and open doors to otherwise out-of-reach opportunities.

The table below summarises the main differences between Mentoring and Coaching.

| Mentoring | Coaching |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Longer term, on-going relationship | Relationship generally has a set duration and addresses a short-term need |
| Emphasises feedback and reflection by the mentee | Emphasises feedback to the mentee |
| Focuses on capability and potential | Focuses on skills and performance |
| Concerned with implications beyond the task | Task focused |
| Can be more informal and meetings can take place as and when the mentee needs some advice, guidance or support | Generally more structured in nature and meetings are scheduled on a regular basis |
| More long-term and takes a broader view of the person | Short-term (sometimes time-bounded) and focused on specific development areas/issues |
| Mentor is usually more experienced and qualified than the 'mentee', who can pass on knowledge, experience and open doors to otherwise out-of-reach opportunities | Coaching is generally not performed on the basis that the coach needs to have direct experience of their client's formal occupational role, unless the coaching is specific and skills-focused. |
| Focus is on professional and personal development | Focus is generally on career development/issues at work |
| Agenda is set by the mentee, with the mentor providing support and guidance to prepare them for future roles | The agenda is focused on achieving specific, immediate goals |
| Mentoring revolves more around developing the mentee professionally | Coaching revolves more around specific development areas/issues |
| Feedback and discussion primarily about implicit, intuitive issues and behaviours | Feedback and discussion primarily explicit |
| Outside line management relationship | Primarily a line manager role |

Summary of Different Development Processes and Their Differences

Individual and management development can take place in many forms, some delivered by managers and some by internal or external coaches, or mentors. A short description of the different activities are: -

| Process Name | Process Description |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mentoring | Helping to shape an individual's beliefs and values in a positive way. Often this is a longer term professional relationship from someone who has 'done it before'. |
| Coaching | Helping another person to improve awareness, to set and achieve goals in order to improve a particular behavioural performance. |
| Counselling | Helping an individual to improve performance by resolving situations from the past. Explore personal issues and problems through discussion in order to increase understanding to develop greater self-awareness. The aim of counselling is to lead the client toward self-directed actions to achieve their goals. |
| Buddying | Helping new employees adjust to jobs during their first few months of employment. Buddies are most often peers in the same department, who assist new employees for short periods of time and require no specialised training - unlike mentoring - as a buddy. |
| Guiding | This is the process of directing an individual or a group along the path leading from present state to a desired state. |
| Teaching | Helping an individual or group develop cognitive skills and capabilities. |