



# The Important Difference Between Mentoring And Coaching

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Coaching and mentoring are basically the same thing, right?

Wrong!

We often use these two terms interchangeably. But in reality, they refer to two different processes.

Coaching is an invaluable tool for any leader or manager. It's a key process for inspiring employees to perform discretionary effort, which is the amount of effort someone is capable of delivering beyond the bare minimum.

All too often, we manage our employees in a way that encourages them to put in just enough effort to avoid negative consequences. This leads to lackluster business results, harms our profits and discourages high performers. It makes good employees wonder why they go above and beyond when unengaged employees can coast by with minimum effort.

Coaching is how we inspire our employees to put in greater effort and truly excel in their roles. To borrow from Jim Collins, it's a key differentiator between good companies and great companies. When employees are going above and beyond, we are able to achieve truly remarkable results.

However, in order for us to get the most out of coaching, we have to understand what coaching is — and why it's different than mentoring.

What is coaching?

We've established that the goal of coaching is to unlock a person's potential and get the most of their performance. It's about inspiring action that drives better results. And since excellence arises from good habits, coaching also involves inspiring people to quit negative habits and form positive ones.

Effective coaching revolves around inspiring someone to solve their own problems. It starts with understanding how someone is wired, what drives their behavior and what they're capable of doing with their skills. Once we have an understanding of these aspects of an employee's character, we can create situations that encourage them to motivate themselves.

Furthermore, coaching must be a continual process. Just like the habits we wish to create, we must make coaching a regular process. If we only have coaching sessions when there's a problem, the employee will likely associate it with criticism, which is the opposite of feeling inspired.

True coaching occurs regardless of whether the individual is crushing their goals or falling behind. In doing so, we show we're invested in their performance and want to see them grow no matter what.

OK, how is that different from mentoring? They're both about teaching and guiding others ...

Sure, mentoring is similar to coaching. But there are some important differences.

Mentoring is often about communicating your own experiences. Mentors use personal context to help mentees learn what to do — how to solve a problem, how to change their habits, etc. This is useful in some situations, but it's not necessarily going to empower an individual to solve their own problems using their own solutions.

Consider sales coaching. We could mentor someone on sales, using our own experiences as a guide. But anyone in sales can tell you that the best salespeople develop their own personal styles. If you mentor someone, they may use your experiences as a lodestar and never find their own path. Even worse, it risks creating a situation where micromanagement is required every time the situation changes.

Coaching inspires someone to develop their own effective sales process — which is far more successful than pushing them to follow in your footsteps. Better yet, it inspires employees to act as leaders for themselves, delivering amazing performance without guidance.

We need to inspire our employees, not instruct them.

In short, mentoring can translate to showing someone what to do and how to do it. Conversely, coaching emphasizes showing someone why they should do something. It inspires them to take matters into their own hands to make a difference.

Understanding the true nature of coaching allows us to empower and inspire our employees. It allows us to create leaders at all levels who drive next-level performance. It may sound simple, but it's the backbone of every truly great organization.

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