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# **'Mentoring' and 'Leadership Coaching' Are Not the Same. Do You Know the Difference?**

When companies talk about leadership development, words like "coaching" and "mentoring" often get tossed around. Not only that, but the terms are used interchangeably. So, most people just assume they mean the same thing.

Certainly, at first glance, they do seem to be one and the same: Both, after all, involve an authority figure who helps guide a leader to success. And that's the same thing, right? Well, no.

In reality, there's a big difference between mentoring and leadership coaching; and both tasks are essential. What's more, when development programs combine or mis-label the two, leaders miss out. So, what’s the difference, and why should we care?

**Mentors use their own experience.**

Mentoring is more relationship-based rather than performance-based: The mentor shares his or her own personal experiences, insights and knowledge with the mentee. Mentoring isn’t focused on specific skills and actions to improve them- it’s more about overall development.

On the flip side, mentees may also share their experiences with mentors. They can ask them for advice, vent, test out new ideas and more.

**Relationships matter in development.**

While mentors don’t lead leaders to immediate action and change, they’re still an important part of leadership development. New leaders need that guiding hand and confidant, to help them grow into better professionals.

When leaders are connected to a mentor, they’re also more connected to their job. A [study](http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/191459/millennials-job-hopping-generation.aspx) conducted by Gallup in 2016 found that 44 percent of employees surveyed who said that their managers held regular meetings with them described themselves as engaged, compared with just 20 percent of those who didn't meet with their managers regularly.

Mentoring, then, is critical to keeping leaders committed to their jobs and striving to be better.

**Coaches focus on action.**

While mentoring comes from the experience of the mentor, leadership coaching does the opposite --it comes from the experience of those being coached. *Mentors* share their experiences, but *coaches*prompt leaders to reflect on their experience and draw their own conclusions.

For example, a mentor will point out what he or she thinks a mentee could have done better, while a coach will ask the individual what he or she could improve on and how to make that happen. Leadership coaching is more active and requires leaders to think not just about improving, but also how to create an action plan.

**Reflection makes better leaders.**

When leaders are told what they need to change or how they should have handled a situation, they'll typically agree to do better next time around. But coaches make sure that these aren’t just empty promises -- they’re plans for action.

Leadership coaching pushes professionals to set a specific plan for improvement so they can follow through and actually change their behaviour and improve their skills. Coaching requires leaders to draw their own conclusions and develop solutions. And that strategy apparently works: A [2015 study from the Harvard Business School](http://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=47062) found that participants who were asked to stop and reflect on a task they’d just performed improved at a greater rate than participants who merely practiced a task.

Leaders need someone to coach them to think for themselves while keeping them accountable for their actions and skills development.

**Both are needed.**

Just because they’re different, one isn’t necessarily better than the other- both mentoring, and leadership coaching are important parts of development.

Outside advice and insights from a mentor can help leaders to see new ways of proceeding and learn from the experience of others. The opportunity to reflect on their own experiences and get support and motivation from a coach setting helps leaders improve their practical leadership skills.

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