



Coach vs mentor

No-one is perfect. No-one knows everything. And there are times when even Google doesn't have the answer! Understanding what a good coach and mentor can do to bring your 'A game' to the fore is important. This short guide provides a reminder of the basics and also introduces the concept of leaders as coaches for their teams.

Coach vs Mentor

It is easy to confuse these two roles; they share many of the same characteristics of listening, questioning, goal setting, building trust, providing feedback and creating plans, yet have very different purposes and outcomes.

Coaching is about self-exploration and discovery to find a solution, a coach provides the process or framework (the how) to do this and the coachee brings the expert knowledge of the subject matter (the what). This can be a relatively short-term relationship ending once the skill or goal is achieved.

Mentoring is about working together to find a solution and also offering ideas as a mentor brings expertise of the what and the how unlike a coach. This is often a long-term relationship that develops with the needs of the mentee over time.

A common saying that sums up the differences is that **'a coach has some great questions for your answers; a mentor has some great answers for your questions'**.

Think about the roles you have adopted with others. Did you offer solutions as a coach? Were you coaching when the person really needed a mentor?

Time for change

Identifying the need for a coach and/or mentor generally comes from change, either the necessity to change or the desire for change.

Necessity may be organisational such as a transformation programme, delivering stakeholder expectations, mergers and acquisitions activity, new responsibilities or moving into a new sector. Adaptive, transactional change of this nature can be relatively straightforward utilising the experiences and knowledge of others.

The desire for change is often more personal, examples include handling conflict situations, developing emotional intelligence, building effective relationships, demonstrating worth at interview and improving confidence. Fundamental change of this nature has to come from within and be supported. Coaching in these situations creates lasting change.

It is important that the coachee/mentee makes a commitment to change. How can leaders help colleagues and themselves maximise the return on the investment? In our [coaching vs mentoring podcast](#), two coaches

share their tips on preparing for the first session.

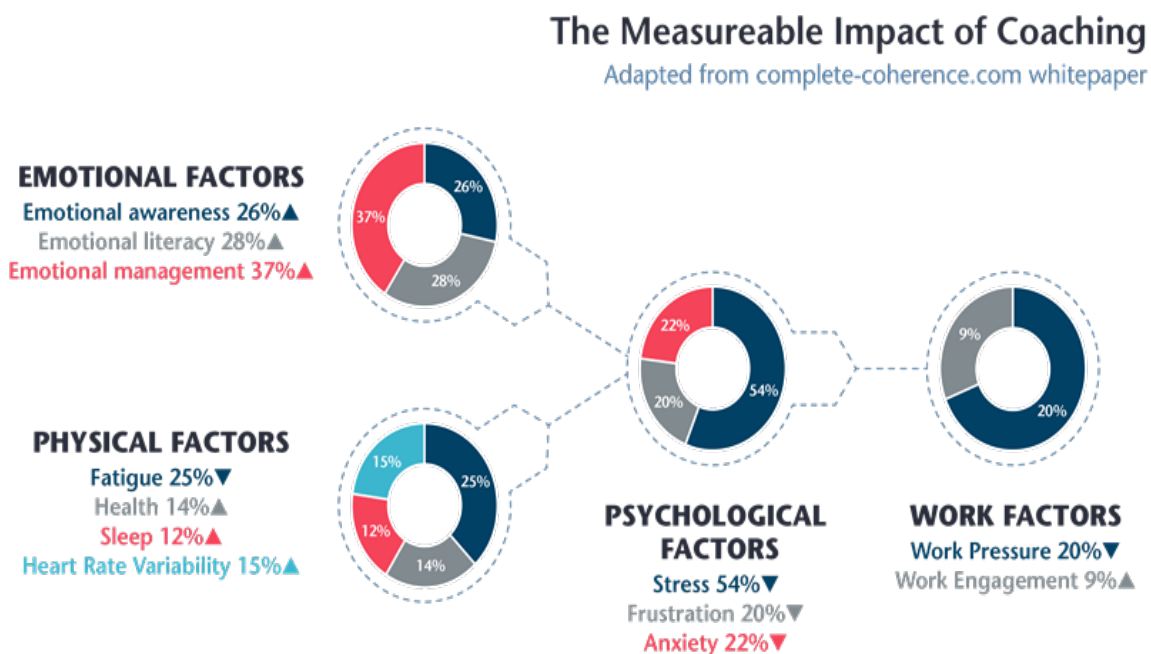
Coaching and mentoring lead to positive change for individuals and their organisations. They are not counselling sessions. Counselling is an entirely separate discipline often including psychotherapy to identify and explore issues including those related to mental health.

Audit leaders as coaches

Being a coach is about unlocking the potential of others.

What leader doesn't want to achieve that for their team?!!

Hiring an external coach can be expensive though, which is why coaching should be one of the management options in the leader's toolkit. Yet it is often **underplayed** by organisations.



One school of thought is that leaders who have benefited from coaching themselves are more likely to provide coaching support to their teams. Obviously there will be occasions when it doesn't suit people, although as leaders, we should give individuals the opportunity to try for themselves. If we consider some of the key traits for 'leaders as coaches' there is a direct synergy with the traits of audit leaders. Could audit leaders be great coaches?

- Trusted advisor – when others improve because of your advice, they trust you
- Open to feedback – empower others to share with you, respectful communication
- Good listener – being curious asking questions, be objective without judgement
- Role model – powerful coaching takes place as much through what you do as what you say

A common approach to think about when coaching others is the GROW model; goal, reality, options and way forward. By working through these stages, taking enough time for the coachee to be confident in the decisions they are making, leaders can be effective coaches.



An alternative approach is the OSKAR model; outcome, scale, know-how, affirm and action, review. Whilst very similar to the GROW model, there is a focus on broader insights to create corporate knowledge and review to formalise commitment.

They are complementary models, with the subtle difference that OSKAR is solutions focused steering the coachee away from discussing obstacles and problems in favour of thinking about positive actions. Perhaps these would be beneficial tools during a performance appraisal or audit supervision meeting?

You will have noticed that there is no 'leaders as mentor' section. This is intentional. The power play of authority throughout the conversations (regardless of management style) impedes line managers from being effective mentors for those they have line responsibility for.

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Coach	Mentor	Line Manager
Voluntary participation, can end at any time	Voluntary participation, can end at any time	Compulsory, ends with the role
Generally set timeframe	Ongoing relationship, long-term	Relationship for time in role
Agenda led by individual	Agenda led by individual	Agenda led by manager
Structured, scheduled meetings	Informal meetings, mutually agreeable, flexible as needed	Formal arrangements, power balance, information exchange
Support across range of issues No performance assessment	Personal & career development No performance assessment	Focus on performance enhancement
No need for direct experience of individuals role or organisation	Usually more experienced & can facilitate opportunities	Has influence & power over individual, priority is for team

Next generation

Within a few years almost half the workforce will be millennials (born 1982-2004). They have grown up in a world shaped by uncertainty, anxiety and attentive parenting, consequently their expectations of managers and the work environment are different to those of previous generations.

Millennials generally prefer to work things out for themselves rather than be given advice. They have been educated to be innovative, curious, intelligent and comfortable questioning authority. They also value relevance. Consequently, they are far more likely to appreciate the leader as coach concept than today's leaders.

Unfortunately, this is a very different perspective to the baby boomers and generation X that came before them who are the vast majority of senior leaders today. Leaders need to adapt and work with the next generation to harness their potential and ensure sustainable organisations.

What techniques work well with the millennials in your team? Have you explored coaching? Maybe ask them if they prefer to find their own way or take advice...is that really generational or just the confidence of youth!?

Genuine interest in their development and tailored investment of time in their future will probably reap greater benefits than generic training programmes.

Finding a coach

If your organisation does not offer it internally, we would suggest asking peers for recommendations and using independent websites such as [International Coach Federation](#) or the [Trusted Coach Directory](#).

Closing Thoughts

One of the basic elements of modern internal auditing could be described as coaching; facilitating the auditee to find the solution/course of action to an audit observation rather than simply presenting them with a recommendation. As auditors you instinctively know the value in relation to the profession but what about your own performance, skills and career and that of colleagues? A coach can help to unlock the potential that you have yet to experience...which you can then share with others. Why wait?

Minds are like parachutes, they function better when they are open

Sir James Dewar, British scientist/inventor