



The Cambridge Perspective

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Coaching or Mentoring? What You Need to Know

The value of solid, well-rounded leadership to the success of an organization is clear, and most businesses recognize that not everyone is born with innate leadership skills. As a result, many are turning to coaching and/or mentoring as tools to develop their high quality talent, and finding out there are a number of differences between the two.

While many of the functions of the coach and mentor may be similar or even overlapping, there are some critical distinctions:

The role of a **Mentor** is to provide personal and professional support for the individual, inside or outside of the corporate framework, in the

development of general leadership skills.

The role of a **Coach** is to work objectively with both management and the individual on general and pre-defined skills and growth areas with formal reporting, data collection and measurement.

Organizations that wish to build their future leadership talent from within should fully understand the benefits and drawbacks of both approaches before investing the time and costs that are necessary to success.

Mentoring is a less formal, less expensive approach to developing leaders internally and can be very successful when the relationship is properly balanced and well managed.

There are significant benefits for both the mentor and the "mentee", in terms of knowledge transfer, personal growth and extended networking

opportunities. One of the drawbacks of a mentoring relationship, however, is the potential for conflict, which grows as the relationship matures and the balance of power gradually changes.

If you plan to invest the time and energy in a mentoring program,

it is important to choose mentors who are natural teachers and match them with "mentees" who are outside of their sphere of power. The relationship should be carefully managed to ensure that both parties are

comfortable with the fit and satisfied with the ongoing development. Careful monitoring is critical to ensure that negative issues are dealt with swiftly to avoid potential political problems.

Another consideration in the mentoring decision is the time commitment required of your managers, above and beyond their commitment to their own roles.



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Most leaders are hard-pressed to keep a work-life balance within their own scope of responsibility and are simply not prepared to take on the additional burden of a mentoring relationship.

Mentoring can work well for large, stable organizations with strong leadership, clear and open reporting channels, and strong HR support and expertise. In addition, an entrenched mentoring program will continue to pay off over the years in continuous performance enhancement and a clear focus on succession planning.

Some experts suggest that the best mentoring relationships are those that are initiated informally, by the individual, with a mentor outside of the organization.

Good resources for finding a mentor are the local Boards of Trade, Conference Boards, Human Resource Associations, Directories of Corporate Directors and Industry Associations.

An external mentoring relationship can be continued or terminated unilaterally or on the mutual agreement of both parties, and doesn't affect the resources or political structure of the organization.



For most organizations, coaching is the best way to ensure control over the direction, cost and success of their leadership development.

Coaching is a business relationship based on an agreed upon set of goals, and usually, a pre-determined timeframe.

The coach's role is to provide a comfortable, confidential atmosphere for the individual to reflect, question, explore and obtain constructive advice in order to develop the desired leadership traits and skills.

An experienced senior executive coach is able to connect personally with the individual, and provide inspiration and guidance as the individual grows, aligning

development with the needs of the organization.

The coach becomes a trusted, objective sounding board for the individual - outside of the power structure of the organization - with specific, targeted development goals and a professional stake in reaching them. There is no political involvement, no power balance, and no personal stakes or competition. The focus is on the coached individual, not the coach.

One of the unexpected results of coaching is its effect on the larger organization as peers, co-workers and subordinates reap the benefits of the coached individual's strengthened leadership capabilities.

For smaller organizations that are faced with transition, market instability, stretched resources and limited structural support, executive coaching may be a more viable approach to developing leadership and enhancing employee performance.

Whichever approach you choose, commitment and follow through are the critical determinants of success.

Cambridge Management Planning offers a full suite of services including Executive Search, Board Search, Interim Management, Career Transition and Executive Coaching services. Call us for more information:

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Outstanding leaders go out of their way to boost the self-esteem of their personnel. If people believe in themselves, it's amazing what they can accomplish.

- Sam Walton

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