

Difference Between Mentoring and Coaching

By Admin | September 19, 2008

When some business owners and corporations start looking into mentoring programs, there is some initial confusion about what mentoring is. One of the biggest confusions that they have is identifying what differentiates mentoring from coaching and why mentoring can be so much more effective.

In order to understand the differences between mentoring and coaching, the first step is to identify what a coach does. Coaching is going to be focused on the performance of an individual, it is going to help a staff member who is struggling to pick up a required job skill to overcome the mental block they have against it; in other words, coaching is about improving the way a staff member performs and is designed with a specific agenda in mind.

On the other hand, mentoring is all about personal growth. Rather than having a defined relationship between the people mentoring and the person being mentored, both parties are able to relax a bit, to develop a trusting relationship and to contribute to that relationship. While mentoring is, in part, about helping newer employees – even just those who are new to a specific department – to learn the job, mentoring is also about helping those being mentored to grow as individuals.

Coaching is specific; if you look at it with a sports analogy, the coaches are the ones who are on the sidelines telling the players how to get the job done – they are calling plays, making substitutions and are focused on the team reaching a goal. Mentors on the other hand are more like team captains. They aren't coaching from the sidelines, but they are in the game. Mentors aren't telling people what they need to do; they are working with them to get the job done.

In other words, mentors are not just focused on providing instruction; mentors are more willing to have a balanced relationship with those who they mentor. Mentors are not going to just be the one saying “you have to do it and it needs to be done this way;” mentors are going to be the ones who recognize that working with others will also help them to grow – both personally and professionally.

Mentoring creates a balanced, ongoing relationship and looks at the person being mentored as a whole person: it's about making sure that the mentee is invested, thinking about their future and getting the guidance that will help them to reach their goals. Coaching is far more short-term and more specific; it's about making sure that a task is accomplished and that a goal is met rather than setting and achieving ongoing goals.

Coaching can be effective in the workplace, however many companies that are able to put a mentoring program into place find that they increase productivity, profitability and growth – both for the company and for those who are involved in mentoring programs. Coaching can help to get new employees focused, mentoring can help them embrace their positions and to grow with the company – and that's what makes mentoring more effective over time.

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