



Mentoring and Coaching: Two Distinct Disciplines

The 21st century came ashore on a wave of unprecedented interest in business and personal growth. People all over the world are looking for ways to find clarity, focus, balance, and fulfillment at a time in our history that is characterized by outrageously long “*To Do*” lists and unrelenting demands on our time. To get their lives *and* their businesses back on track, more and more savvy professionals are using the services of people trained to help them do just that. I’m talking about business and personal success coaches.

It is sometimes easy to confuse coaching with mentoring; they are two distinct disciples. Mentors are people who possess experience in a certain field. They share pearls of wisdom and offer advice to the mentee who aspires to travel the same road and emulate the success of the mentor. The mentor is the master; the mentee is the student. By its very nature, mentoring is a hierarchical relationship.

Coaching, on the other hand, is an ongoing *partnership* designed to help clients make substantial changes in their personal and professional lives. Unlike a mentor, the coach does not need to be an expert in the coachee’s field of endeavour. Indeed, such expertise often interferes with powerful coaching. Rather than being directive, as is the case in mentoring, coaching assumes that the client is a creative and resourceful individual who has solutions within him or herself for even the toughest problems.

A skilled coach asks questions aimed at deepening the client’s learning around various situations. This learning propels the client to take action which, in turn, facilitates change. The coaching process is revolving—the more change, the more learning, the more action, the more success, the more growth, the more learning, and so on.

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Among many things, coaching helps professionals to accomplish the following.

- Raise the bar
- Master collaborative skills
- Increase confidence
- Improve performance
- Attract more and better clients
- Identify and eliminate current and potential roadblocks
- Live up to their potential
- Overcome weaknesses and build on strengths
- Make better choices
- Develop strong interpersonal skills
- Strategize fresh approaches
- Understand and embrace differing perspectives

- Maintain balance between personal and professional lives
- Reduce stress
- Clarify and achieve meaningful goals faster and with less effort
- Work through tough decisions
- Devise action plans and strategies to get results
- Become more focused, productive, and on-track
- Understand and embrace differing perspectives

In short, coaching provides a safe and courageous place for professionals to explore new ways of doing things, state their truths, share experiences, and grow. With an experienced coach, you have a skilled listener with whom to share the ups and downs of working in stressful environments—to champion and encourage you as you soar to new heights; and to challenge you to go even further.

The coaching relationship is one of unconditional support for the goals the client wishes to reach and for the future the client wants to create. Unlike the mentor, who takes the lead, the coach is a partner who dances with the client, going wherever the client leads. Everything the coach does and says is totally in service to the client; it is the client’s agenda, beliefs, and values that drive the relationship.

Both the mentor and the coach have something the client wants.

- The mentor has the expertise in the client's area of interest.
- The coach has the ability to help the client create and reach a future of his or her own making.

Both act as role models of sorts, with one interesting distinction. In most cases, because of the many years it takes to build the knowledge base and the expertise necessary to become a mentor, the mentor's learning is complete. A coach, on the other hand, continues to walk his or her own path; most coaches also "walk the talk" by working with a coach of their own.

If you are committed to leading the life you deserve and to taking your business to the next level, there are a number of things to consider when choosing the right coach for you. First and foremost, ask about the individual's training and experience.

1. Is he or she a member of the International Coach Federation (ICF), the professional association

for coaches, which has a strict code of ethics?

2. Did the individual receive training through an ICF-accredited coaching school or just a weekend course somewhere? (For a list of accredited schools, visit the ICF Website at www.coachfederation.org.)
3. Has the person completed coach training or is the individual still a student?
4. Is the coach *certified*, a sign of advanced training and always a good indicator that the person is serious about excelling in the profession?

The answers to these questions will prove helpful.

- How long has the coach been practising?
- With what type of client does the coach prefer to work?
- Does the coach have a specialty, e.g., business, spiritual, lifestyle executive, corporate, or relationship coaching?

If you're having trouble determining whether you've found the right coach, ask for a sample session. Most coaches will gladly give you one. At the end of the session, both you and the coach will be able to determine if you're a good match. If you are, be prepared to roll up your sleeves and get to work. There's a whole new world full of possibilities out there just waiting for you to stake your claim. Your coach will guide you there and cheer you on as you and your career begin to SOAR. ▲

Leni Chauvin, CPCC, is a business and personal success coach and an expert in the field of client attraction. She provides customized coaching to professionals who want outrageously successful careers and equally phenomenal lives.

Voice: 604 736-1840

www.superstarnetworking.com