

# COACHING AND MENTORING – WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

BY ANN ROLFE

What is the difference between coaching and mentoring? It depends who you ask!

People seek distinctions between mentoring and coaching and arguments can become quite vehement between various schools of thought.

## Why the Controversy?

Career counselling materialised during the recession of the early 1990s when commercial enterprises trained career counsellors and coaches. Executive, personal and business coaches came into vogue and life coaching became popular. Coaching and counselling became an industry, without regulation, anyone could set up a business as a coach or counsellor.

Counselling has therapeutic connotations and psychologists, quite rightly, wanted to protect the integrity of that term, so there was push-back and a move toward coach accreditation and qualifications. Coaching is still way ahead of mentoring in terms of accreditation with numerous reputable training courses leading to certification available through the International Coach Federation.

It is hard to find accredited mentor training. Some TAFEs offer single semester courses based on

TAEDEL404A Mentor in the workplace. There are a few diploma courses that include mentoring, coaching and interpersonal facilitation or training, together. So mentors are usually only informally recognised.

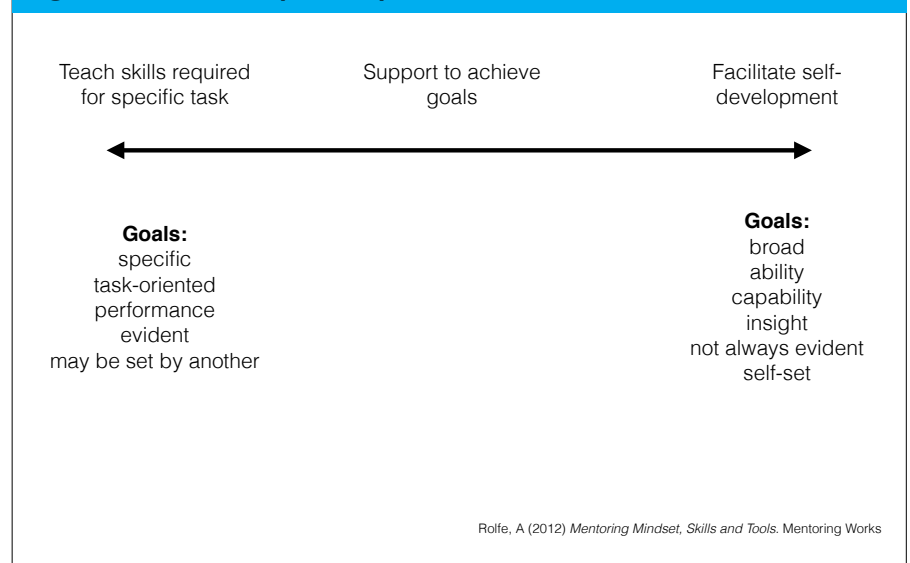
## Definitions

Today, coaching emphasises empowerment and so does mentoring. The definition of coaching has moved away from the skills and performance focus we associate with sports coaches, into the realm of personal development. Mentoring has moved away from the paternalistic pairing of an older, presumed wiser, guide into the same territory.

In the workplace, people have a whole range of needs and they may be met with assistance from a trainer, manager, coach, mentor or a career counsellor. An individual's needs are never static, they move across the development spectrum (Figure 1).

At one end of the development spectrum goals are quite specific, focussed on tasks and performance, so they are evident or absent; learning objectives are set and knowledge and skills taught. At the other, the person sets their own self-development goals; goals are broad, building capability; the

**Figure 1: The Development Spectrum**



objective is developing insight that results in actions to achieve better outcomes. Insight may not be evident to others.

### Process

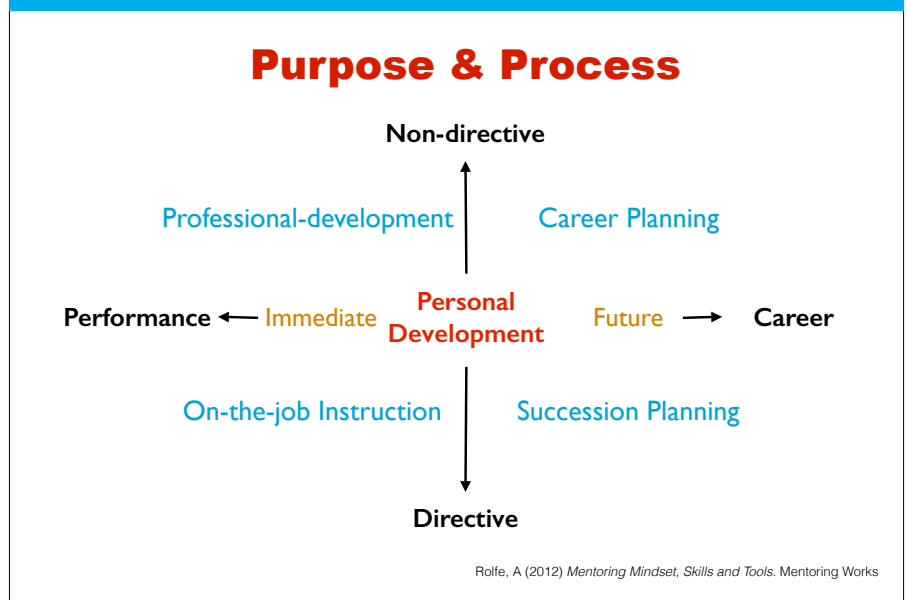
The real point of contention is whether the mentoring/coaching process is directive or non-directive (Figure 2). Mentoring has evolved from an adult-child, master-apprentice or expert-novice directive process into a relationship of empowerment that is much less directive. The mentor's knowledge and experience is offered, when appropriate but facilitating a conversation where the mentee generates insight is the heart of the process. Coaching for sport or job performance is quite directive but coaching for personal aspirations and goals is far less so.

On-the-job Instruction is about immediate performance and quite directive eg learning a new piece of software, procedures or protocols delivered by a supervisor, an on-the-job instructor, preceptor, mentor or coach. The person has expert knowledge of the topic and teaching or training skills.

Self-development, immediately applicable to work performance, eg teamwork or interpersonal skills, might be less directive because you want to empower people to choose constructive behaviours. It could be led by a trainer, manager, mentor or coach. Knowledge of the topic and expertise in process is important.

Career Planning is different. It has to be mainly non-directive – you can't tell another person what to do with their unique strengths, values and preferences. A mentor or coach guides exploration, goal setting and action planning. They have skill in a less-directive process and knowledge of career development, often aided by instruments, tools or resources. The mentor or coach does not need expertise in the person's current or future role eg someone who is not a nurse could coach/mentor a nurse for the purpose of career development

**Figure 2: Purpose and Process**



using knowledge of career planning and a non-directive process.

Succession planning where specific skills are required might be more directive, for example, an engineer moving into a General Manager role, or an Operations Manager becoming Chief Executive Officer. Such development might be facilitated by an internal mentor or an external Executive Coach.

Personal development is about performance and career. They are not mutually exclusive. The process moves between more and less directive approaches and rarely fits into a neat box however much we might crave clear-cut boundaries.

If you have a mentoring or coaching program, you need a definition that works for you, but its purpose is more important than what you call it. And, when people enter a mentoring or coaching relationship they need a clear understanding of what that purpose is, what their roles are and some skills and techniques to make it work.

It is more useful to look at similarities between mentoring and coaching rather than argue about differences:

- Provide one-to-one interaction to

achieve personalised learning and growth

- Cater to individual needs, personal styles and time constraints
- Can be conducted face to face or from remote locations
- Complement formal training and educational experiences
- Process real-life issues, problems and decisions
- Facilitate access to information and choices about new behaviours and actions
- Support the achievement of positive outcomes

Mentor and coach are just labels. How you apply them is a matter of personal preference, because the relationship is a dynamic interaction and it is not useful to apply artificial boundaries.

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