

## **Mentorship and Coaching:**

Mentors combine the typical competencies of both coaches and mentors - typically:

- A coach helps you ask yourself the right questions.
- A mentor points you toward the possible answers.

Or put another way:

- A coach helps you clarify what you want.
- A mentor helps you do the things you want to do.

Typically, mentors are usually people who have previously done what you're doing. Sometimes they have useful advice, and sometimes their advice only applied to their circumstances; they may not know which is which, and it's up to you to sort it out.

Coaches are professional critics. Their skillset is observing someone undertaking a pursuit, and delivering effective questioning targeted toward improvement. They may never have had the same pursuit, and that doesn't really matter in most cases: it's entirely possible to be an excellent critic of a discipline while being poor at performing the same discipline. Coaching is a discipline in and of itself.

Very effective mentors combine coaching and mentorship skills to elevate and support their mentees.

## **To be a great mentor:**

### **1. Build a trusted relationship.**

Mentoring cannot work without trust, and trust takes time to build. Be patient, humble, and act with empathy.

### **2. Create clear agreements.**

At the very beginning, deliberately and explicitly discuss expectations and logistics:

- what do the mentee and mentor expect from this process?
- how often will you meet, and how, for how long, etc?
- establish communication norms - is the mentee looking for advice, a sounding board, coaching to distill and find their own answers?
- agree confidentiality - contract with your mentee that what is discussed in sessions is confidential, and won't be shared with anyone else (unless it's admitting to plotting a murder or something)
- what does communications look like between sessions? For example, will the mentor be available if there is an urgent issue the mentee needs help with?

The more things you will leave implicit the higher degree that people will hold different expectations about them and something will go wrong.

### **3. Balance support and challenge.**

If as a mentor you only support them, they may not have enough opportunities to practice things new to them. If you only challenge them, stress, imposter syndrome and a lack of confidence could arise.

### **4. Create safety to discuss things that are not working.**

It won't work perfectly from the start. Build in discussion time and mechanisms to improve, change or end the process. Make it a norm to ask "How am i doing as your mentor? How can I improve?" Focus not on "feedback, but "advice".

### **5. Mentor: serve your mentee.**

The mentor is not there to show off how smart and knowledgeable he or she is. The mentor is there to help the mentee. Hold it as a clear intention.

Both mentee and mentor should draw value from the relationship, but recognise that the mentor is more “servant” than “leader”.

#### **6. Be aware of what you as a mentor model for mentees.**

I.e, mentors are not perfect. They don't know everything. Acknowledging not knowing something will teach the mentee an important lesson: one doesn't need to know everything and be perfect to succeed. Model curiosity. Treat everything as a learning task, not a doing task.

#### **7. Use existing models and frameworks as “training wheels” whilst building the unique relationship between mentor and mentee.**

Use models such as GROW, OSKAR, and CLEAR to help you make progress. Once these processes become more comfortable and habitual, experiment with new ways.

Try to stick to “what”, “why”, and “how” questions - not binary “yes/no” questions.

Remember the most important thing is to listen. Aim for around a 75% listening, 25% speaking balance (or even 80/20).

#### **8. Be aware of the difference between “coaching”, “teaching” and “consulting”.**

If switching roles from “coach” (where you are helping the mentee think through problems or goals) to “teacher” - be explicit that you are doing so, and even ask for permission. As a mentee, I may simply wish to talk through a challenge, not have my thoughts clouded by someone else's ideas or advice.

#### **9. Recognise individuality. Allow yourself to fit to the needs of your mentee.**

Everyone is different and we are all unique. What works for one mentee will not necessarily work for another, and don't assume that your preferences are the same as theirs. (*Do not treat others how you would like to be treated, instead, treat them how they want to be treated*).

Some mentees will benefit from much more explicit support and guidance, whilst others prefer more open coaching. Some may want to discuss their personal lives, others may not.

Some prefer regular short sessions, some prefer more occasional, longer sessions.

Recognise that this changes over time. When questioning, probe, but do not pry.

**10. Ask for advice from your mentee and self-reflect and evaluate too.**

Ask your mentee for advice regarding how you may improve as a mentor and coach.

Ideally, do this in every session, so that it becomes a norm, and both you and your mentee become comfortable discussing improvements.

Use the template in item 10 - Self Coaching and Reflection, to carry out a self-reflection and improvement cycle.