



6 Traits of Great Coaches and Mentors

In the last post, I wrote about a [2-Word Coaching Tool](#) that works incredibly well. That post also introduces a brief look at the differences between coaches and mentors.

In today's post, I'm listing the differences between coaches and mentors in more detail, and then cover six big-picture traits that are true of both.

As leaders, we are shaped, even "imprinted," by the model of training that impacted us the most.

For example, all five of the men who poured into me were more mentors than coaches. They were all good at coaching for sure, but they were mentors by nature. That has a lot to do with why I lean toward mentoring, even though I do a lot of coaching as well.

The same is likely true for you too. These suggested differences are helpful for you to know because they may bring to light one or two specifics you can develop in yourself.

The big idea is to help you develop others even better.

I want to begin by acknowledging that there is a significant amount of overlap between coaching and mentoring. That's good. There is no specific value to make this a mechanical or black & white comparison.

The point is to understand both to the fullest, so you can invest in those you lead and develop with the greatest impact.

With that said, here's a detailed list of the differences between coaching and mentoring.

(Each of these points mirrors the same number on the other list.)

Coaching:

1. The focus is on needed skills.

2. Is usually a regular part of the person's life.
3. The coaching process usually has a start and an end.
4. There may or may not be a personal connection or affinity with the coach.
5. The emphasis is more on immediate results.
6. Is often limited to a focused professional or skill-based endeavors such as business or athletics.
7. A coach can be a peer or older.
8. The coach's particular expertise is vital.
9. A coach usually works to make the player better, so the team/organization can win.
10. The goal of the coach is to win.

Mentoring:

1. The focus is on life principles.
2. The mentor can be near in proximity but often are at a distance.
3. The mentoring process can be as short as one lunch or last a lifetime.
4. There is nearly always a personal connection, affinity, and relationship with a mentor.
5. The emphasis is more on the big picture and long haul.
6. It often includes and embraces a fuller scope of the person's personal and professional life.
7. A mentor is nearly always older.
8. The mentor's general success in life is vital.
9. A mentor usually focuses on helping the person they're mentoring get better solely for that person's benefit and well-being.
10. The goal of a mentor is to grow.

6 traits of great coaches and mentors:

1) They find personal satisfaction in seeing others succeed.

Great coaches and mentors are not in it for themselves, but they love seeing the person they develop do well and succeed. They sense great satisfaction when the person they invest in rises above them and achieves even greater success and significance than they have.

Great coaches and mentors are generous with their time and talent and will often inconvenience themselves for the person's good.

2) They genuinely care about the person they develop.

As we all know, when you find someone who truly cares, that person is a gift. Whether the relationship takes on a personal connection or not, there is no substitute for genuine care.

Care from a mentor or coach is not something that should be judged or demanded, but without it, the process rarely has life change impact.

3) They have a recognizable competence or expertise.

Coaches and mentors are really good at *something*.

For example, if you have a golf coach, he or she needs to be a great golfer. A mentor needs to be equally gifted and successful, but they don't necessarily need to have an expertise in the specific field of the person they mentor.

The main point for both is that they have demonstrated an apparent discipline and willingness to pay the price for what they have achieved.

4) They possess a great combination of toughness and compassion

Both strength and kindness are vital and evident in all great coaches and mentors.

They have the unique ability to confront when needed and remain firm, while also demonstrating genuine compassion.

This combination of tough-minded and tender-hearted allows them to push and challenge and remain encouraging in the process.

5) They are uniquely and authentically themselves.

It's not that great coaches and mentors have "arrived," but they are self-aware and secure enough in themselves, to fully be themselves, and fully present in the moment.

This allows the process to be all about the person they are investing in, rather than, as is in some cases, more about them.

When coaches and mentors are fully and uniquely themselves, it sends a message and creates permission for the person they're developing to do the same. That in itself is a great gift.

[Great mentors are uniquely and authentically themselves. They are secure enough to be fully present in the moment.](#)

6) They believe in the person they invest in.

All six traits are vitally important and create a powerful composite when all are in play. But this last one may be the secret sauce to the list.

When someone believes in you, perhaps even more than you believe in yourself, that is truly inspiring and often transformational.

That is what all great coaches and mentors do, they believe in the person they pour into. They have a positive disposition and believe the best!

As you think about these six traits, I hope they help you become an even better coach or mentor. Remember, it's the combination of all six that makes it powerful.