

Coaching: Definition and Best Practices

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Definition: In reviewing the literature we did not find an agreed upon definition of coaching. For the purpose of the Academy Mentoring/Advising/Coaching Committee, we have focused our definition on coaching that helps a coachee improve a desired performance or skill. It does not encompass career coaching, which comes under our definition of mentoring, or professionalism coaching, which more often focuses on behaviors that require remediation, is prescribed and multidimensional (e.g. involving attitudes, knowledge, skill).

Accordingly, we define *coaching* as a focused relationship with the goal of improving a desired skill (e.g. clinical, leadership, speaking, teaching) or performance of the person being coached (coachee). This often involves goal clarification and reflection on the part of the coachee, observation and provision of feedback by the coach, and bi-directional discussion by both. Coaching may involve a one-time observation, or a longitudinal observational relationship.

Coaching versus Mentoring Relationships: Great coaching and mentoring relationships differ, but also have similarities:

<i>Differences</i>		<i>Similarities*</i>
Coaching Relationships	Mentoring Relationships	Both
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More likely to focus on helping coachee develop a specific skill or improve in a specific performance area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More likely to focus on helping mentee achieve their potential, often in more than one area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve mutually clarifying expectations, goals, and process (including what is confidential and what is shared)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often involves observations of actual performance, or promotion of reflection on and understanding of performance/behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often does not involve observations of actual performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rely on coachee/mentee setting meeting agendas and their goals, though coach/mentor may contribute based upon observation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More standardized in its approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less structured in its approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefit from listening, being truly present, and artful/curious/clarifying questioning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More likely to be time-limited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More likely to be long-term 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize mentee’s/coachee’s needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually includes specific measurable performance goals or outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less focused on specific outcome measures, although may address outcomes such as completion of a grant, publication of a manuscript, or promotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster mutual respect and trust, e.g. through honesty, sharing, reliability
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor more likely to serve as sponsor or assist mentee in networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set the stage for discovery: where the mentee/coachee is, how they got there, what motivates them, what blocks them. Promote awareness behind emotions. Empower the mentee/coachee to discover answers individualized for their needs.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are nonjudgmental, although mentor/coach may share their intuition/hunch/interpretation and ask coachee if it is accurate or applicable.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate a safe, supportive relationship that accommodates and values challenge
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share and deliver bi-directional and constructive feedback
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The coach / mentor strives to be a role model

Procedural Guidelines:

- 1) Introduce each other in some depth to help contextualize skill/performance on which coachee would like to focus.
- 2) Clarify roles.
- 3) Clarify with coachee expectations and specific skill or performance area in which coachee seeks assistance.
- 4) Clarify measurable performance goal(s), what coachee would like outcome of coaching sessions to be.
- 5) Mutually develop plan for first meeting / observation if part of plan. Observation may be in person, of recording, or be based on description/story by mentee.
- 6) Observe and debrief performance: Start with self-assessment and reflection by coachee, before coach provides specific feedback (for skills: effective behaviors that were observed, potential areas for improvement; for described problems or challenges, deepening questions that promote reflection and understanding by coachee). Demonstrate if appropriate. Have coachee reflect upon feedback, questions. Discuss / reflect on session/learnings, provide bi-directional feedback, and decide whether performance goal has been achieved.
- 7) Decide on next steps. Plan for next meeting/observation, if appropriate, redefining goals as necessary.
- 8) Repeat 6) and 7) until desired outcome has been achieved.
- 9) All meetings/communications should include above best practices applicable to both mentoring and coaching.*

* See also *Recommended Advising/Mentoring and Coaching Practices* at <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/the-academy/resources.html#mentoring> .

Selected, Annotated References:

Articles

Atkinson A, Watling CJ, Brand PLP. Feedback and coaching. *Eur J Pediatr.* 2022;181(2):441-6.

Uses a broad definition of coaching, reviews useful principles for feedback and coaching.

Augustad KM, Butt K, Ignjatovic D, et. al. Video-based coaching in surgical education: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Surg Endosc.* 2020;34:521-35.

Review of 24 RCTs, provides evidence of improvement in surgical skills performance.

Lovell B. What do we know about coaching in medical education? A literature review. *Med Educ.* 2018;52:376-90.

Using a definition of coaching close to ours, stringent inclusion and exclusion criteria, found modest evidence of effectiveness in 6 studies of non-technical skills coaching, and strong evidence of effectiveness in 7 studies of technical surgical skills coaching.

Wolff M, Deiorio NM, Juve AM. Beyond advising and mentoring: competencies for coaching in medical education. *Med Teach* 2021.

Identifies 15 competencies in 5 domains based upon literature review, then consensus among 15 experts in coaching using modified Delphi technique.

Books

Franklin M. *The HeART of Laser-Focused Coaching: A Revolutionary Approach to Masterful Coaching.* Thomas Noble Books. 2019.

Focuses more on deep transformational coaching that helps coachee make decisions / improve performance / deepen understanding, rather than on observation and improving specific skills. Emphasizes: the importance of building rapport/trust/safety; clarifying process and logistics upfront; focusing on client's needs (of which they may or may not be aware); deep listening (80:20 rule client/coach talk) and maintaining presence; selective questioning that moves client to greater awareness/understanding and may be challenging; fostering movement and ensuring ongoing support as needed. Short examples throughout, as well as sample 30 min session. 294 pp.

Kimsey-House H, Kimsey-House K, Sandahl P, Whitworth L. *Co-Active Coaching: The Proven Framework for Transformative Conversations at Work and in Life*, 4th ed. Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2018.

Presents a model of coaching that focuses on relationship and process. Advocates focusing on the whole person, flexibility (dancing in the moment), promoting transformation and self-management in the coachee in the context of a safe, but challenging, honest relationship that includes authentically curious and deepening questions, attention to emotions as well as behavior. Examples throughout. 218 pp.

Star J. *The Coaching Manual: Your Step by Step Guide to Becoming a Great Coach*, 5th ed. Pearson Business. 2021.

Practical, readable, wise book on coaching. Emphasizes importance of building relationship/rapport, emotional maturity (self-awareness, awareness of others, relationship management), helping coachee discover rather than telling to promote growth in coachee, listening at different levels, using intuition appropriately, asking effective questions. Filled with questions, exercises, and examples. 320 pp.

Whitmore J. *Coaching for performance: the Principles and Practice of Coaching and Leadership*, 5th ed. Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2010.

Focused on business and leadership coaching, but elucidates some useful general principles: the importance of active listening, believing in/challenging/trusting/respecting, promoting awareness then responsibility and self-management in your coachee. Discusses building a collaborative partnership, clarifying goals and process, generating options for action, and the art of powerful questions (vs. telling). Examples throughout of powerful questioning. 269 pp.