

# Consultant, coach or mentor? What's the difference?

A Guest Article by Penny Sophocleous  
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### Three pathways to progress

Management consulting, coaching and mentoring are all highly effective ways for a company to unlock the potential of its people and at the same time improve business performance. The trick is to know when and where each discipline will produce the best results.

#### Management consulting

Management consulting is based on the expertise of the consultant – in knowledge, skill-set and technology. It allows them to import and practise their specialist activity in a company that does not have the resource in-house. The management consultant's skill-set is focused on building their own internal resources, in order to apply them for the client company's benefit.

#### Coaching

Coaching, on the other hand, assumes that the client has the necessary capability and helps them to discover it for themselves. The coach's skill-set is focused on unlocking the inherent knowledge and awareness in the client and helping them to build on that to act outside their previous comfort zones.

#### Mentoring

Like coaching, mentoring targets the personal development of people who are well versed in their fundamental technical skills but need extra assistance when advancing into leadership or management of others.

#### Role of the mentor

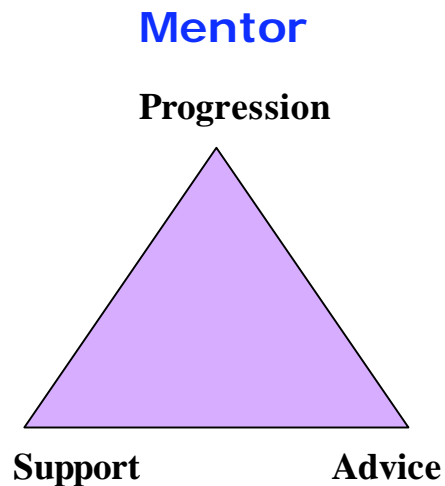
A mentor is someone who operates at a senior level inside the same profession or firm, and who models behaviours and achievements that the client wishes to attain. Their role is represented by the following model.

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Mentors leverage their know-how and experience by providing advice, counsel, network contacts, and political and cultural know-how, together with ongoing personal support. Their interest is to foster the career development of the person they mentor. They normally have broad and in-depth experience of the occupational roles that the person they are mentoring wants to achieve, but no extra special skills.

### Value to the organisation

Mentoring nurtures the growth and potential of both participants within their business roles. The purpose of mentoring is to develop the talent of both individuals and enrich the organisation's human capital, thereby benefiting the organisation.

At its best, mentoring is an assistance process that actualises the skills of the person within their current role and helps groom them for their next. Very occasionally, the relationship can extend beyond the organisation, into the whole career.

### Mentoring programmes

An internal mentoring programme formalises the system in which people wishing to be mentored and would-be mentors can get together. Such programmes can vary in quality, from being a substitute managerial system to being an invaluable personal development programme for all involved.

The quality achieved often hinges on the expertise of those establishing the programme and the training (normally coaching skills) provided for mentors to extend their skill-set. According to one senior legal counsel who received such

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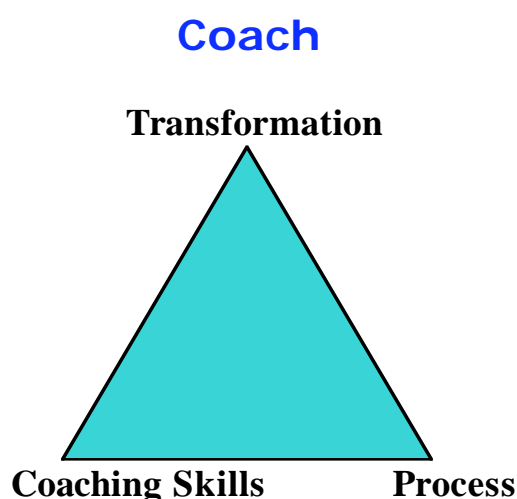
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training, "It gives you a very powerful tool for working with people in the organisation and the problems that arise."

### Role of the coach

A coach need not have any direct experience in the profession of the person whom they coach, but they do need extensive training, development and expertise in coaching competencies. A coach should be a professional, in the same way that a lawyer is a professional, and will have invested large amounts of time and effort in becoming excellent at what they do.

This role is expressed by the model below.



Coaching acts to transform, liberating the innate strengths and talents of the person being coached, overcoming blocks, and unlocking potential that may not yet have been seen.

A coach is normally an external professional, who provides unbiased listening, questions, challenge and truth-saying, and acts as a sounding board. The coach's skills unlock the coached individual's mindsets, creating greater self-awareness. The forward-thinking, action-oriented coaching process allows for clearer action planning.

Coaching is a confidential, professional and equal partnership with a reproducible self-discovery process and a premise that the person being coached is highly capable, creative and resourceful. The agenda for the one-to-one sessions is set by the coachee, and often focuses on problem-solving regular organisational and interpersonal issues.

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### Uses of coaching

Coaching can be used in many different contexts:

- for coaching individuals at a turning point in their career, readying them for promotion, or acclimatising them quickly into a new circumstance
- for very senior leaders meeting changing or challenging circumstances requiring innovative solutions
- for remedial purposes of correcting performance weakness or filling in training gaps.

Many studies have demonstrated the power of coaching in producing extraordinary performance and lasting changes in behaviour.

For senior executives in a leadership role, such a confidential relationship allows them to discuss challenging and sensitive issues with a skilled person who has an objective, external perspective. "It's been tremendously helpful – I have insights into different ways of dealing with problems and my own personal development," says one successful executive.

### Which to choose?

Consultancy, coaching and mentoring all have their value and their place.

- **Mentoring** can be a hit-and-miss affair – with results dependent on the quality of the individuals populating the organisation.
- **Coaching** is a more reliable and consistent methodology that delivers significant personal benefits.
- **Consultancy** can bring the discipline and focus that will lead a company to sustainable, profitable growth.

However, the approaches are not mutually exclusive, and many organisations find that a combination of all three is the ideal pathway to progress.

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If you would like more information on any of the points covered in this Guest Article, please contact **TCii** on **020 7099 2621**.