

Coaching or Mentoring?

The difference between a coach and mentor matters.

Have you ever met two (human) siblings and thought, *How can those two be related? They are really, really different.* Of course, we see that all the time in cattle full-sibs. One is national champion material, and the other is bound for the feedlot. For people, at least, the answer is because while they are genetically similar or were raised in the same house, they are still completely unique and different individuals. Coaching and mentoring are this way, too; words that seem similar enough to be synonyms yet different when you take a closer look.

Most of us have benefitted from a mentor at one point in life or another. Often our first mentors are teachers who believe in us, an older peer who gives us a leg up or a special grandparent. That mentoring relationship can be organic, or it can be created specifically, matching the mentor and mentee. But sometimes a young person or a new hire (of any age) really needs more — they need to be coached. Coaching is about performance, change or course correction. If you are not sure whether you have people on board that could benefit from being coached or if they just need a mentor that believes in them, take a read.

Coaching vs. mentoring

Coaching and mentoring have five key differences.

No. 1: Coaching is short-term.

Coaching works when the coachee agrees to receive it. Coaching is also for a certain amount of time and often for a specific result, while mentoring may be ongoing for years or even off-and-on throughout an entire lifetime or career. While the length of the coaching engagement doesn't necessarily matter, different lengths can be used to accomplish different objectives. The point is that there is a defined starting and stopping point.

No. 2: Coaching is performance-based.

With time frame in mind, coaching must also be performance-based. The idea is that the coach works to help the coachee improve a specific set of skills, such as I do when helping clients with speaking and presentations. At the farm or ranch, that can be very tactile, such as teaching a person to run a tractor, or it could be conceptual, such as working with someone to become a better communicator.

No. 3: Coaching uses formal process.

To achieve results, good coaches have a process that allows them to set up proven steps for success. Mentoring is often a less structured arrangement that includes conversation and maybe feedback but may also be set up as someone to talk to about problems or aspirations. Coaches do not provide motivation; they provide a pathway and accountability to achieving the objectives.

No. 4: Coaching can be used as an incentive or as a requirement.

While mentoring is likely an unpaid relationship, coaching is not. A coach is often a professional hired to help an employee. However, if you or someone else on the farm is doing the coaching, there is still a cost. This cost is your time, certainly, but don't forget that it's also a cost for the employee. If you are coaching an employee to improve a behavior — say the individual is having trouble getting along with others — then the cost to the employee could be the job at your operation if he/she doesn't take a change in behavior seriously.

No. 5: Coaching relationships are intentional.

Working with a coach includes being intentional about what you would like to accomplish. The relationship isn't based on friendship or an interest in networking or learning more about an industry in the way that a mentoring relationship might work. This is also a challenge on the farm when many of our people are family, friends or neighbors. Strive to put some distance between that relationship and the job role by setting goals for the coaching.

This list isn't exhaustive, but I hope it gives you enough information to start thinking through how coaching and mentoring make important development tools for you or your team. **HW**

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