

## COACHING AND MENTORING – DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BY BARBARA WILBY

Sometimes the words coaching and mentoring are used interchangeably. Coaching and mentoring share some common elements, and yet there are important differences. This short article outlines a way of defining these differences and using these definitions to think about which option is right for you. Of course, your needs may also vary over time and you may require a coach at one time, and a mentor at another stage of your career.

One key distinction is in the area of expertise that **mentors** have, compared with coaches. A mentor is usually an expert and experienced in a particular field, and works with those who are less expert in the field, helping them to gain knowledge, skills and experience. To mentor an executive in an organisation, a mentor must have the experience, perspective and skill base to operate at the level of complexity faced by that executive, that is to be able to understand all of the first, second and third order effects of decisions that a management team may take, for instance. The mentor may also have experience in the particular industry in which they are mentoring, although that is not essential.

Mentoring includes guidance and advice on specific business challenges, including strategy and policy. Ideally, your mentor should have broad useful experience and the ability to share that with you at a practical and pragmatic level.

*Key words: guidance and direction*

**Coaching** is about facilitating self-directed learning and development, often within a specific organisational context. The coach does not have to have specific expertise in the business or organisational area of the person they are coaching, although they must understand the context and language used, in a general way.

In working with an executive, the coach must therefore have some knowledge of the issues and context, but does not need to know in detail the issues in each area. Coaches are primarily experts in facilitated learning and achievement of goals. Coaches work with people to enhance their leadership effectiveness, performance and career progression. Their expertise is in knowing which questions to ask to help the client build solutions and improve performance.

The emphasis in coaching is on facilitating the learning and goal achievement of the client by working with them to develop new perspectives, behaviours and sometimes, skills.

*Key words: facilitating learning and development*

### **Determining your Requirements**

Step One: Define your required outcome.

Step Two: Determine which methodology is most suitable: coaching or mentoring, a combination or some other method, such as training.

Step Three: Determine what style of mentor or coach can best meet your needs. For instance, what personal qualities, approach and experience would best suit you? What must the coach/mentor not do or be?