

Effective Mentoring

“The only real possession you’ll ever have is your own character.” Thomas Wolfe

What character we possess is not a late stage invention. Rather, it’s the sum of what we’ve learned on our own and what we’ve learned from important others in our lifetime. The acquiring of this knowledge and wisdom is achieved over many decades of personal and professional life. Passing on this knowledge and character to future generations can be a richly rewarding experience.

Mentors provide a listening ear, valuable insights, encouragement, and guidance in a non-threatening, supportive environment. But in order to share these learned truths and behaviors through effective mentoring, we must first decide the best way to accomplish that. Our learning needs to be repackaged in a deliverable, user-friendly way. Let’s look at several traditional methods of fostering the personal and professional growth of someone else.

Historically, there have been three basic methods used: coaching, counseling, and mentoring. Let’s take a closer look at these specific avenues to determine how they differ and how to choose the best method for a particular situation.

In Florence M. Stone’s excellent text, *Coaching, Counseling & Mentoring*, she argues that each of these methods is oriented toward a different outcome.

- **Counseling** is the preferred method of working with people who are performing poorly or ineffectively and need to make specific performance improvements.
- **Coaching** is the preferred with capable people who need to master certain skills as they advance their careers.
- **Mentoring** is described as a process reserved for the very best performers so they can reach their maximum professional and personal performance.

While it’s useful to understand these distinctions among the coaching, counseling and mentoring models, we believe all three can come into play in an effective coaching, counseling or mentoring opportunity. The three models are highly interactive and mutually supportive, depending on the individual, the objective, and the situation in which they are applied.

The following differentiation grid illustrates the varied and complementary distinctions among counseling, coaching and mentoring. Effective mentors should first understand these as specific and discrete processes, and second, know how to move among them fluidly and intentionally as the situation requires.

Differentiation Grid for Situational Coaching			
© 2009 Robert T. Vavrina			
	Counseling	Coaching	Mentoring
Goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staying in the game • Improving job performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leveling the playing field • Achieving skill mastery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortening the playing field • Accelerating personal growth
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correcting skill deficiencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing skill gaps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orchestrating top-talent succession or development
Target Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees who are working ineffectively or underperforming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capable performers who may be challenged or blocked in current roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top talent who have been identified as succession/development candidates
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present • Future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telling • Directive • Remedial • Active 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking • Non-directive • Self-discovery • Reflective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advising • Directive • Navigational • Active
Duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term • Pass/Fail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intermediate • Situational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term • Succeed and move on
Ethics & Boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear • Rigid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex • Flexible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex • Flexible

Mentoring is a one-of-a-kind opportunity for collaboration, problem-solving and goal achievement. It's never a "one-size fits all" endeavor. A skilled mentor will use every one of these approaches depending on the situation and the desired outcomes. Sometimes counselors coach and mentor; sometimes coaches counsel and mentor; and sometimes mentors counsel and coach. The key here is balancing the mix.

Too much talking and not enough listening can be ineffective counseling. But too much listening without clear direction and advising can be ineffective coaching. And finally, too much "parenting" can be a complete turn-off to the mentoree. The most effective mentors are flexible and able to shift from one method to another, depending upon the individual, the situation, and the desired outcome.

"The only real possession you'll ever have is your own character." Your legacy, share it wisely.

ABOUT vFORMATION COACHING

Bob Vavrina, President of vFormation Coaching, is a veteran business executive with 30 years of human resources and operations experience, including senior executive leadership positions. He is also an academically trained master coach, holding a Master of Arts Degree in Executive Coaching, with distinction, from Middlesex University in London.

Combining extensive business-world experience with advanced study, Bob is uniquely positioned to lead managers and executives through a tested and proven coaching process that uses a leader's strengths to significantly enhance personal and organizational performance.

Visit Bob's website at www.vformationcoaching.net to learn more about how Bob can help you and your company improve bottom-line performance through increased management excellence. vFormation Coaching is an ELINVAR Alliance Partner.

