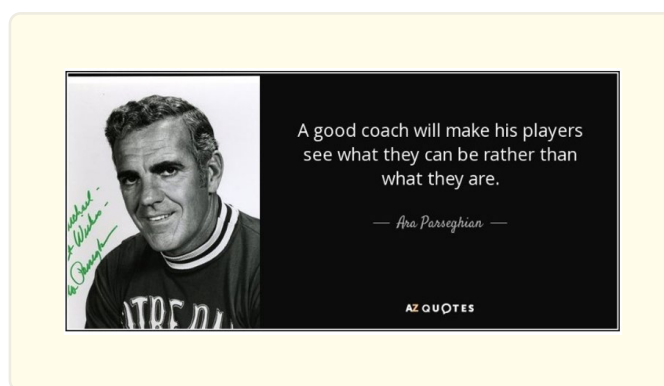


had been receiving lots of information about CoViD 19 that I would send him. He responded that was not the reason for his call. He was considering the creation of a “side hustle” (i.e., Generation Z speak for an entrepreneurial activity to earn money outside of day job) and wanted to run a few ideas by me. Oooops! I’d missed the purpose of his call due to the fog of the CoViD-19 recency bias (not virus).

Effective coaching thrives not on quick fixes and ready answers, but on questioning and listening

My anecdote underscores that, as educators, we all love giving advice (solicited or not) and offering our opinions. When we see others struggling with a problem, we want immediately to jump in with a solution. This “Pavlovian” reaction has been conditioned in most teachers and administrators, says Michael Bungay Stanier in his book, **The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way You Lead Forever** (Box of Crayons Press, 2016). But unlike advice giving, effective coaching requires “*a little more asking people questions and a little less telling people what to do.*” Listen to understand. Ask questions for clarification to help avoid making assumptions.

What is Coaching?



Coaching is an applied field and, as such, borrows from a variety of fields and theoretical frameworks. Atul Gawande, physician and surgeon has written and spoken extensively about the value of the coaching model across different professions. [His New Yorker article](#) highlights the impact of coaching as a way to fine tune and focus on specific areas for improvement. Gawande writes:

Good coaches know how to break down performance into its critical individual components. In sports, coaches focus on mechanics, conditioning, and strategy, and have ways to break each of those down, in turn.

Despite its wide application in other high-performance professions such as athletics, music, and business, coaching has only recently gained attention within medicine and medical education (Deiorio, 2016). Coaching can be distinguished from other aspects of education (e.g., didactic instruction, advising, mentoring, etc.) by its focus on a two-way interaction to help *learners to help themselves*. This difference implies changes not only in our traditional patterns of communication, but also in the way in which we organize the function of education.

“Learning results from what the student does and thinks and only from what the student does and thinks. The teacher can advance learning only by influencing what the student does to learn.” Herbert Simon



When we hear the term “coaching,” what first comes to mind is an athletic coach. However, we might also envision a different metaphor. To me, coaching is a means of conveyance like the figure above. To coach means to convey a valued learner, colleague, or friend from where he or she is right now to where he or she wants to go or be. Within the stagecoach metaphor, the coaching process itself - not the coach - is the conveyance. Or, as Coach Parseghian suggests “coaching is unlocking a person’s potential to maximize their own performance,” helping the learner or athlete to learn rather than teaching them.”

Currently, there is no one commonly accepted definition of coaching across all fields, but broadly, it includes: “...*the intention of helping people to achieve a breakthrough in their lives and then helping them beyond that breakthrough... to help people to communicate better, to help them understand other people’s perceptions, and indeed their own too, and to become much more effective in everything that they do*”(Ives, 2008).

The Coaching Model in Context

Coaching in education has been defined by van Nieuwerburgh (2019, p.17) as:

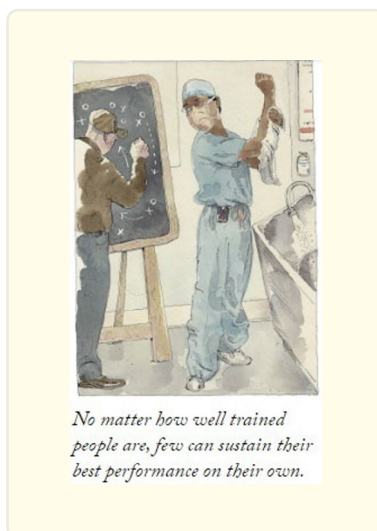
a one-to-one conversation that focuses on the enhancement of learning and development through increasing self-awareness and a sense of personal responsibility, where the coach facilitates the self-directed learning of the coachee through questioning, active listening, and appropriate challenge in a supportive and encouraging climate.

Coaching may take place for a variety of reasons and in a variety of contexts. An individual may engage a coach to support them in personal development or life coaching goals. An organization may engage a coach to work with an employee or number of employees on job performance or organizationally driven goals. Coaching might be established at the individual level for personal development, at the group/team level for team development or at the organizational level for the creation of a coaching culture. Box 1.1 provides a partial list of potential objectives for coaching.

Box 1.1 Objectives of coaching

- Acquisition of skills.
- Improved performance on a task.
- Transformation of the coachee’s life focus.
- Enhanced self-awareness.
- Enhanced self-confidence, self-esteem and/or self-efficacy.
- Competency-based personal development.
- Job transition and career development.
- Improved team performance.
- Cross-cultural awareness.

Recently, coaching in medical education has gained attention as a strategy for implementing individualized guidance, allowing faculty to provide tutelage on the performance, competency, or career progression of an individual learner - or colleague (Gawande, 2011).



As Senge has written, effective coaching is not about the answers; it's about the questions (Senge et al., 1999). Learners are often looking for answers, and teachers are primed to oblige. But offering answers to every question can lead to a dysfunctional dance that short-circuits higher-level thinking. Unless the learner or peer is committed to questioning and listening, collaborative work often remains mundane. When a mentor provides a solution or makes decisions for a mentee, the mentor unwittingly inhibits the reflection needed to identify desirable courses of action. When the mentee asks, "How can I develop a master test preparation schedule?," the mentor should let questions such as "What essential information will you need?" and "What are the steps in your process?" and "Whom should you consult?" lead the way.

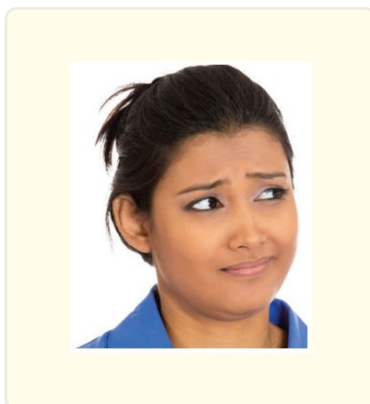
Is Coaching the Same as Mentoring?

Although there is overlap, and there is some confusion about their differences and definitions, coaching and mentoring are viewed as two different functions. Here is some information that should help you understand the important differences between these two concepts.

Mentoring is broader in scope than coaching, but it can include coaching functions at times. For example, coaching occurs within the context of mentoring when the mentor helps the mentee learn or improve an important skill or behavior.

Within the business and organizational development literature, there is broad agreement about the nature of mentoring. As Ragins and Kram (2007) note, the term "mentoring" is popularly used to denote *a relationship between an older, more experienced mentor and a younger, less experienced protégé for the purposes of supporting the career development of the protégé*. The mentor may not work in the same organization as the protégé but is likely to work in the same sector or bring a deep understanding of the issues and challenges faced by the protégé.

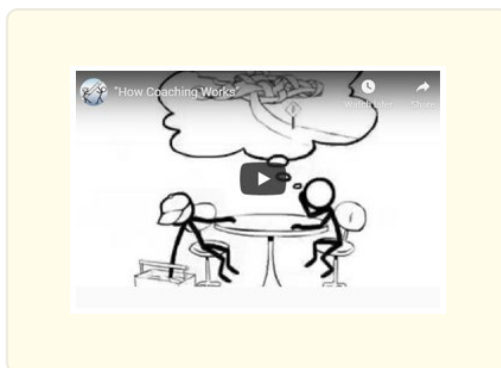
In general, mentoring's purpose is to support individual development by providing both career and psychosocial support. On the other hand, coaching is focused on the improvement or development of specific behaviors or skill set. (More similarities and differences between the two concepts by key dimensions, drawn from the literature, are summarized in Appendix 1).



What's the Evidence on Coaching Effectiveness?

Educational research on instructional coaching (Kraft, Blazer & Hogan, 2018) found that coaching has significant positive effects on both teachers' instructional practice and student achievement—comparable to the “*difference in performance between a novice teacher and an experienced veteran.*” And what makes coaching impactful was discovered to be the “*specific attention to teachers' core instructional practices*”—that is, to “*the complex and dynamic reality*” they face in their day-to-day work with learners (Leblanc & Sherbino, 2010; Lovell, 2018; Rassebach & Blankenburg, 2018).

Stanier's Simple Coaching Suggestions



Building a coaching habit calls on us to engage in conversations more mindfully—with curiosity. Drawing from his work as an executive coach, Stanier identifies five general questions to ask sequentially that should be part of our coaching skill repertoire:

1. What's on your mind?
2. What's the real challenge here for you?
3. What else?
4. What do you want?
5. How can I help?



Take Home Points

Stainer’s book is one of a large and expanding literature in several fields on coaching. Coaching’s been found to be a useful strategy to employ for teaching and learners’ development. In contrast to didactic instruction, coaching conversations have a specific focus with broader impact and benefit. They are aimed at enhancing someone’s understanding, learning, behavior, and goal-oriented-progress - but with a different mindset and more questions than immediate answers to a coachee’s expressed or implicit challenges, dilemmas, and concerns.

I hope you remain healthy in body, mind and spirit. If you can, during your hectic days ahead, or in your precious downtime, please take a few minutes to consider your thoughts about and approaches to coaching in medical practice, as part of teaching students, or with colleagues and family members.

If you have time, I’d appreciate gaining your thoughts about this “think piece.” Are you interested in learning more about coaching in medical education?

Appendix 1

Some Key Differences between Coaching and Mentoring.

	Coaching	Mentoring
<i>Key goals</i>	To develop insight into behaviors, improve performance, or to develop or enhance specifically needed skills	To support and guide career growth of the mentee
<i>Initiative for coaching/ mentoring</i>	Coaches help coachee develop new learning and skills	The mentor directs exploration and learning
<i>Volunteerism</i>	The acceptance of being coached is essential, but not necessarily voluntary	Generally, both mentor and mentee participate as volunteers
<i>Focus</i>	Immediate problems and learning opportunities; addressing gaps between actual and desired performance	Long-term personal career development; facilitates goal setting, action planning and implementation
<i>Roles</i>	Largely on developing skills/behaviors to practice, giving feedback, allowing correction, making connections, being a role model	Heavy on listening, providing directions and suggestions,

Duration	Usually short-term; administered on “as needed” basis	Long-term
Outcomes	Results measured objectively, and evident within a prescribed time frame	Results may be subjective, difficult to measure, and evolve over time

Based on Clawson, (1980); Fagan, M. (1988); Lovell, B. (2017); Ragins & Kram (2007).

Table 1

The table below is one way of thinking about the two interventions, their similarities and differences, by means of a series of key dimensions and characteristics drawn from the literature.

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