

Training – Coaching - Mentoring

Trainers ('Build competence')

Good trainers plan out in detail what they want of their learners; they convey these instructions carefully, repeating key points and encouraging note taking if appropriate; they check that the instruction has been accurately received, asking the learners to repeat back what they have been asked to do; they also check to ensure that the lesson has been put to work, and let the learners know the results.

Coaches ('Build performance')

The coach's way of helping involves exploring an opportunity or a problem together with the learner, and then enabling the learner to develop new knowledge, skills and competences in working independently on it.

The good coach will encourage the learner to play the maximum part in all these activities and will offer support and assistance when necessary. Often the support will come in the form of a question, or a tentative suggestion, rather than a specific proposal.

However, skilful coaches recognise that learners vary in their capacity to cope with ambiguity. They therefore attempt to give learners the right mix of direction and choice, so they are not oppressed by over direction or immobilised by open-endedness.

Mentors ('Build lives')

While coaching builds performance, mentoring is concerned with building a life's work. The focus is on the learner's development. While instruction is broken down into small steps, and coaching focuses on a discrete task or project, mentoring is more diffuse and concerns helping the learner through life crises or into new stages of development.

Mentors are shrewd enough to listen closely and to relate what their learner says to some wider awareness of the learner's life. Effective mentors often seem to have a well-developed philosophy of life, and to operate on a spiritual dimension, as well as intellectually and emotionally. They ask a lot of questions and, whereas coaches focus on 'How?', mentors also ask 'Why?' They are good at linking different bits of their learners' lives - home and work, success and failure, concrete and abstract, thought and feeling. They are happy to consider the long term.