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Exploring career mentoring and coaching



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Introduction and guidance

Introduction and guidance

Exploring career mentoring and coaching is a free badged course which lasts 8 weeks with approximately 3 hours' study time each week. You can work through the course at your own pace, so if you have more time one week there is no problem with pushing on to complete another week's study.

You'll start this course by considering the differences and similarities between mentoring and coaching. Then, you'll focus on developing your own self-awareness, an important skill for those wishing to gain the most from mentoring or coaching interactions. As you progress, you'll understand how these approaches can enhance career development. You'll explore the key skills and attributes of a good mentor or coach and learn how choosing the right individual can maximise the relationship. Along the way, you'll consider whether you could become a mentor or coach yourself and reflect on how that might benefit your own career.

After completing this course, you should be able to:

- recognise the difference between mentoring and career coaching, and analyse how each can enhance your career development
- understand the importance of self-awareness and how to develop your own
- choose a mentor or coach with confidence
- get the most from your relationships with mentors or coaches
- reflect on your own experience and consider whether you could become a mentor or coach yourself.

Moving around the course

In the 'Summary' at the end of each week, you can find a link to the next week. If at any time you want to return to the start of the course, click on 'Full course description'. From here you can navigate to any part of the course. Alternatively, use the week links at the top of every page of the course.

It's also good practice, if you access a link from within a course page (including links to the quizzes), to open it in a new window or tab. That way you can easily return to where you've come from without having to use the back button on your browser.

The Open University would really appreciate a few minutes of your time to tell us about yourself and your expectations for the course before you begin, in our optional start-of-course survey. Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

Get careers guidance

This course has been included in the National Careers Service to help you develop new skills.

What is a badged course?

While studying *Exploring career mentoring and coaching* you have the option to work towards gaining a digital badge.

Badged courses are a key part of The Open University's mission *to promote the educational well-being of the community*. The courses also provide another way of helping you to progress from informal to formal learning.

To complete a course you need to be able to find about 24 hours of study time, over a period of about 8 weeks. However, it is possible to study them at any time, and at a pace to suit you.

Badged courses are all available on The Open University's OpenLearn website and do not cost anything to study. They differ from Open University courses because you do not receive support from a tutor. But you do get useful feedback from the interactive quizzes.

What is a badge?

Digital badges are a new way of demonstrating online that you have gained a skill. Schools, colleges and universities are working with employers and other organisations to develop open badges that help learners gain recognition for their skills, and support employers to identify the right candidate for a job.

Badges demonstrate your work and achievement on the course. You can share your achievement with friends, family and employers, and on social media. Badges are a great motivation, helping you to reach the end of the course. Gaining a badge often boosts confidence in the skills and abilities that underpin successful study. So, completing this course should encourage you to think about taking other courses.



How to get a badge

Getting a badge is straightforward! Here's what you have to do:

- read each week of the course
- score 50% or more in the two badge quizzes in Week 4 and Week 8.

For all the quizzes, you can have three attempts at most of the questions (for true or false type questions you usually only get one attempt). If you get the answer right first time you will get more marks than for a correct answer the second or third time. Therefore, please be aware that for the two badge quizzes it is possible to get all the questions right but not score 50% and be eligible for the badge on that attempt. If one of your answers is incorrect you will often receive helpful feedback and suggestions about how to work out the correct answer.

For the badge quizzes, if you're not successful in getting 50% the first time, after 24 hours you can attempt the whole quiz, and come back as many times as you like.

We hope that as many people as possible will gain an Open University badge – so you should see getting a badge as an opportunity to reflect on what you have learned rather than as a test.

If you need more guidance on getting a badge and what you can do with it, take a look at the OpenLearn FAQs. When you gain your badge you will receive an email to notify you and you will be able to view and manage all your badges in My OpenLearn within 24 hours of completing the criteria to gain a badge.

Get started with Week 1.

Week 1: Where am I starting from?

Introduction

Welcome to Week 1 of this free badged course, *Exploring career mentoring and coaching*. Congratulations! Choosing to understand more about these activities and the impact they can have could really make a difference to your career.

Mentoring and coaching are undertaken in many different settings, but this course will focus on their use in the context of your work and career. It aims to give you a broad introduction to relevant theory and research, combined with practical advice and a range of activities. The intention is for this course to be useful whether you wish to have a mentor or coach yourself, or to enhance your own mentoring and coaching skills.

The terms mentor and mentee are used throughout this course to describe the two individuals involved in a mentoring relationship. In other sources, you might see a mentee described as a protégé, mentoree or client.

Throughout this course, the person on the receiving end of the coaching may be referred to as the coachee or client. There is a growing view that coachee, although still a widely used term, might soon become outdated as it implies that the client is passive in the coaching process. As you progress through the course, and through your experience of coaching, you can decide for yourself which terminology you prefer.

If you want to cover any of the topics discussed in greater depth, references are given to support further reading, and there are other OpenLearn courses available.

The purpose of this first week is to introduce you to what mentoring and coaching are, and to allow you to reflect on how you might already have encountered mentors and coaches in your career. This will give you a firm starting point for your learning over the coming weeks.

Watch the following video which introduces this week.

Video content is not available in this format.



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- recognise definitions of mentoring and coaching
- describe the differences and similarities between mentoring and coaching
- review and reflect on any mentoring and/or coaching you have experienced.

1 Definitions

Mentoring and coaching are widely used terms, both within the workplace and outside it. But what do they really mean and how might they help you in your own career?



Figure 1 Dictionary definitions

1.1 Defining mentoring

Before you look at some academic and business definitions of what mentoring is, use Activity 1 to consider your own perception of mentoring.

Activity 1 Brain, ear or push?

Allow about 5 minutes



Figure 2 John C. Crosby, a US politician in the nineteenth century, said: 'Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction'.

Consider the following questions:

a. Think about people you've come across in the past, either in the workplace or during leisure, voluntary or educational activities, who have provided a brain to pick, an ear to listen or a push in the right direction. Did you think of them as mentors at the time? Make a note of them in the box below.
b. With those people and experiences in mind, use the box to write a sentence or paragraph that describes your own definition of mentoring.

Provide your answer...

Comment

Mentors come in all shapes and sizes. The relationship might be deliberately set up or develop organically. Usually, a mentor will have more experience than you in a relevant area, whether that's your occupation, the organisation you work within or even a group or committee that you're about to join. Read on to explore how your own definition fits with those of academics and business professionals.

There are many definitions of mentoring, which vary depending on context, culture and the purpose of the mentoring relationship being described. Notable examples include:

- 'Mentoring is to support and encourage people to manage their own learning in order that they may maximise their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be.' (Eric Parsloe, quoted in University of Glasgow document, no date).
- 'Mentoring is a learning and developmental relationship between two people. It depends on essential human qualities such as commitment, authenticity, trust, integrity and honesty. It involves the skills of listening, questioning, challenge and support.' (Garvey & Garrett-Harris, 2008).

In his book *Everyone Needs a Mentor*, David Clutterbuck (2014) provides the following summary of what he calls 'the holistic nature of the mentoring role':

> 'In practice, mentors provide a spectrum of learning and supporting behaviours; from challenging and being a critical friend, to being a role model; from helping build networks and develop personal resourcefulness, to simply being there to listen; from helping someone work out what they want to achieve and why, to planning how they will bring change about.'

While the nuances may be different, the emphasis of all these definitions is on help and support, and the relationship between two people – common themes in almost all definitions of mentoring. Maybe you also highlighted those aspects in the sentence or paragraph that you wrote in Activity 1.

1.2 Defining coaching

As coaching has become such a dominant theme in recent years, there are numerous definitions to choose from:

1. 'Coaching is unlocking people's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.' (Whitmore, 2017).
2. 'Coaching is a human development process that involves structured, focused interaction and the use of appropriate strategies, tools and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the client and potentially for other stakeholders.' (Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck, 2024, p. 1).
3. 'The art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of another.' (Downey, 2003, p. 21).
4. In his book, *An introduction to coaching skills*, Christian van Nieuwerburgh (2020, p. 6) reviews a range of definitions, and concludes that coaching:
   a. is a managed conversation that takes place between two people

b. aims to support sustainable change to behaviours or ways of thinking
c. focuses on learning and development.

As he goes on to discuss the context of coaching, van Nieuwerburgh (2020, p. 14) lists seven different areas in which coaching is currently flourishing. You may have come across some of them:

1. Executive coaching – working in organisations with middle and senior leaders, often addressing specific skills-based issues.
2. Life coaching – working with individuals on topics relating to their personal lives.
3. Health coaching – working with patients and health professionals.
4. Coaching in education – working with students, educators and parents.
5. Career coaching – working with professionals on their career development.
6. Leadership coaching – working with leaders in any profession or field.
7. Positive psychology coaching – integrating coaching and positive psychology to enhance performance and wellbeing.

Throughout this course, you'll be focusing mainly on career coaching, although executive and leadership coaching also relate directly to the workplace.

1.3 Defining career coaching

Dr Julia Yates, Deputy Head of Psychology at City, University of London, defines career coaching as:

> …one or a series of collaborative conversations with a trained professional who operates within an ethical code. The process is grounded in evidence-based coaching approaches and aims to lead to a positive outcome for the client regarding their career decision, work and/or personal fulfilment.
>
> (Yates, 2022, p. 2)

Watch this video to see her explain the differences and similarities between coaching and career coaching.

Video content is not available in this format.



Activity 2 How could career coaching help me?

Allow about 10 minutes

Now watch the next video in which Dr Yates talks about what career coaches can do.

Video content is not available in this format.



Reflecting on what you've just heard from Dr Yates, consider how career coaching could help you. Use the box below to make a list of the issues you might discuss with a career coach.

Provide your answer...

Comment

There are many ways in which career coaching can help you, whether you are making career decisions, looking for greater fulfilment in your current role or planning a significant change. Throughout this course, you'll learn more about the impact that coaching, from the right individual at the right time, can have. You'll be able to refer to this list later, when you start to look in more detail at what coaching can do.

From these definitions of mentoring and coaching, you can already see that there isn't always a clear distinction between them. In the next section, you'll explore the differences and similarities in more detail.

2 Are mentoring and coaching different or the same?

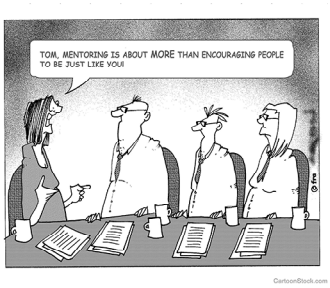


Figure 3 Mentor and mentees

The differences and similarities between mentoring and coaching are extensively discussed in the academic literature and online, but this widely shared, unattributed quote seems to encapsulate the key difference neatly:

> A coach has some great questions for your answers. A mentor has some great answers for your questions.

Activity 3 The same or different?

Allow about 5 minutes

From the list of words given below, choose the ones that you think best relate to mentoring and/or coaching. Type the words mentoring, coaching or both into the table.

Table 1 Mentoring or coaching?

Term	Mentoring and/or coaching?
Fixed-term relationship	*Provide your answer...*
Ongoing relationship	*Provide your answer...*
Informal	*Provide your answer...*
Structured	*Provide your answer...*
Long term	*Provide your answer...*

Short term	*Provide your answer...*
Experience	*Provide your answer...*
Questions	*Provide your answer...*
Specific goals	*Provide your answer...*
Career development	*Provide your answer...*

Comment

There are no consistently right or wrong answers to this question. For example, while a coaching relationship tends to have a fixed term and more structure than a mentoring one, that isn't always the case. Some mentoring relationships will be informal and ad hoc, whereas others will have more structure, depending on the preferences and availability of the individuals involved, and the culture of the organisations they work in. The debate will continue, with different professionals explaining coaching and mentoring in subtly different ways. Watch this video to see some views from practitioners.

Video content is not available in this format.



2.1 Differences and similarities

You'll now look in more detail at the differences and similarities between mentoring and coaching.

Differences

Mundey (2023) highlights several key differences between coaching and mentoring, including:

- Voluntary vs paid – typically a coach is paid while a mentor is a volunteer.
- Long-term vs short-term – generally, mentoring relationships last much longer than coaching ones, sometimes for a lifetime.
- Personal experience vs general advice – a mentor will share more of their personal experience in order to support and develop their mentee, whereas a coach uses a more generalised approach based on their training and knowledge of the coaching process.

Clutterbuck (2014, p.11) describes some of the key differences between traditional coaching and mentoring in a useful table:

Table 2 Differences between traditional coaching and mentoring

Traditional coaching	Mentoring
Concerned with task	Concerned with implications beyond the task
Focuses on skills and performance	Focuses on capability and potential
Agenda set by, or with, the coach	Agenda set by the learner
Typically addresses a short-term need	Typically a longer-term relationship

(Adapted from Clutterbuck, 2014)

Similarities

While there are clearly differences in the nature of the relationship, there are many similarities in the skills, tools and approaches a mentor or coach uses.

Drawing from the research of Zeus and Skiffington, Connor and Pokora (2007, Figure 1.2, p. 12) present a table that summarises the similarities between coaching and mentoring in a work context. They conclude that both:

- require well-developed interpersonal skills
- require the ability to generate trust, support commitment, and generate new actions through listening and speaking skills
- shorten the learning curve
- aim for the individual to improve his or her performance and be more productive
- encourage the individual to stretch, but can provide support if the person falters or gets out of his or her depth
- provide support without removing responsibility

- require a degree of organisational know-how
- focus on learning and development to enhance skills and competencies
- stimulate personal growth to develop new expertise
- can function as a career guide to review career goals and identify values, vision and career strengths
- are role models.

Van Nieuwerburgh (2020, p. 7) argues that ‘the terminology is unimportant as long as it is recognised that both approaches can support people to develop their skills and performance’.

In future weeks, you’ll consider some of the practical ways in which mentoring and coaching can support your career development, but first you’ll reflect on your own experience of either receiving or providing mentoring and/or coaching.

3 Reviewing my own experience



Figure 4 Being mentored

Before you consider mentoring and coaching in more detail, this is a good time to reflect on your own experience of these processes. It will give you a useful starting point for the course and inform your decisions about how to progress after completing it.

While you might not have experienced a formally identified mentoring or coaching relationship, you may well have encountered informal mentoring or coaching from someone, for example, a teacher or a colleague. In Activity 1 you considered who some of those individuals might be. Include those experiences when you are reflecting in Activity 4.

Activity 4 Where am I now?

Allow about 20 minutes

Ask yourself the following questions given in Tables 3 and 4.

Remember that an informal example could be something as simple as a colleague asking for your help to come up with a solution to a problem or to help them see a situation differently.

Table 3 Have I ever been mentored or coached?

YES	NO
• Was it a formal or informal interaction? • Was it with the right mentor or coach? • How has the relationship helped me? Think of an example when it made a difference. • What could have gone better? Think of an example when it didn't help. • Did/do I want to continue that relationship? • Do I need something different now?	• What could a mentor/coach help me with? • Can I think of an example/situation when it could have been useful? • Do I have informal mentoring/coaching support from colleagues I trust? Could that be formalised?

Table 4 Have I ever been a mentor or coach?

YES	NO
• Was it a formal or informal experience? • If informal – would I like to formalise my role? • What did I gain personally and professionally from the experience? • How did my mentee/coachee respond? • Is it something I would like to continue? • Do I need some training?	• Would I like to be a mentor/coach? • If yes – what would I enjoy about it? • If no – why not? • Who would I mentor/coach? • Do I need some training?

Record your answers in the box below.

Provide your answer...

Comment

Assessing and noting your own experience of mentoring and/or coaching at the beginning of the course will give you a starting point for your learning and help you to get the most from each week as you come to it.

Reflection is an important element of coaching and mentoring, and the more you do it the better you will get! Completing this exercise will help you to practise your reflective skills. In Week 2, you'll focus on self-reflection in more detail.

In this section, you've considered your starting point, recognising your own level of experience in the mentoring or coaching context. In the next section, you'll focus on ensuring that you have the time you need to make the most from this course.

4 Making time for this course



Figure 5 Making time

While you will no doubt have signed up for this course with every intention of completing it – we all experience time pressure in our lives and it is often the additional activities that we take on for our own development or enjoyment that fall away.

Spending a small amount of time identifying when you can work on the course each week, and deliberately setting aside that time, can make all the difference.

To complete the course, it is recommended that you allow a minimum of three hours each week. If possible, you should choose times when you can bring energy and attention to the task. For example, if you function better in the mornings, you might want to set your alarm earlier and complete a section or two before you start your daily routine. Alternatively, a person who is more energetic and motivated in the evening might find allocating time towards the end of each day more productive.

Activity 5 provides a tool that will help you to identify the time you have available for this course. If you've completed other courses on OpenLearn, you may have undertaken this activity before.

Activity 5 How do I spend my time?

Allow about 15 minutes

The schedule below lists 90-minute blocks of time between 8 a.m. and 11 p.m. on the seven days of the week. It assumes that most people sleep sometime between 11 p.m. and 8 a.m., but you can adapt this for your own circumstances. Complete the boxes, showing how you spend the hours within each block of time.

Table 5 How do I spend my time?

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
08:00–09:30	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answe*
09:30–11:00	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answe*
11:00–12:30	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answe*
12:30–14:00	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answe*
14:00–15:30	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answe*
15:30–17:00	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answe*
17:00–18:30	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answe*
18:30–20:00	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answe*
20:00–21:30	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answe*
21:30–23:00	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answe*

Comment

After undertaking Activity 5 you should have a clearer idea of the time available in your usual week. You can hopefully identify blocks of time that you could devote to completing this course and achieving any goals you set yourself.

If you need additional help in finding those blocks of time, you can use the Time Management tool in the Toolkit. This will help you break down large tasks and be realistic about your priorities.

If you want to explore your energy levels and productivity further, Chris Bailey has written a book on managing your time, attention and energy – *The Productivity Project* (2016). Or you can view recent articles and sign up for his monthly productivity newsletter here.

Effective use of time is also an important element of mentoring and coaching – whether you are the mentor or coach ensuring that time spent with your client is productive, or the mentee/coachee finding time to reflect or take action between appointments.

5 This week's quiz

Now that you've completed Week 1, you can take a short quiz to help you to reflect on what you've learned.

Week 1 practice quiz

Open the quiz in a new tab or window and come back here when you've finished.

6 Summary

By now, you should feel more familiar with the basic concepts of mentoring and coaching. You've started to explore the terminology and you've considered the differences and similarities between the two functions. You have practised reflection by reviewing previous mentoring or coaching experiences and planned when you are going to study each week. This preparation will be helpful as you work through the course.

You should now be able to:

- recognise definitions of mentoring and coaching
- describe the differences and similarities between mentoring and coaching
- review and reflect on any mentoring and/or coaching you have experienced.

Reflection

Use the box below to note down any actions you will take as a result of what you have learned this week. This will be useful when you come to Week 8, reflecting on what you have learned over the whole of the course and planning your next steps, but you can also use it to check on your progress at any point.

Provide your answer...

Next week, before you start to look at mentoring and coaching in more detail, you'll take some time to consider a key element of both processes – self-awareness.

You can now go to Week 2.

Week 2: Knowing myself

Introduction

Welcome to Week 2 of the course.

In Week 1, you familiarised yourself with the broad concepts of mentoring and coaching, and some of the research behind them. You also reflected on your own interest in mentoring and coaching.

This week, you'll consider self-awareness. This is a key element of both mentoring and coaching, equally relevant whether you are receiving or delivering it.

You won't be surprised to find that knowing yourself is something that a mentor or coach can help you with, but in this part of the course, you'll explore some of the exercises that can help to get you started.

Now watch the following video to introduce the week.

Video content is not available in this format.



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- recognise the value of self-awareness
- use some of the tools and exercises available to help you become more self-aware
- identify obstacles to developing self-awareness.

You'll start this week by asking 'What is self-awareness?'

1 What is self-awareness?



Figure 1 Self-awareness is important

In their detailed review, Carden *et al.* (2021) found the literature on self-awareness 'characterized by multiple definitions', rarely recognising 'the complexity of the construct', and frequently confusing self-awareness with concepts such as self-consciousness and self-knowledge. Following detailed analysis, they offer the following definition:

> Self-awareness consists of a range of components, which can be developed through focus, evaluation and feedback, and provides an individual with an awareness of their internal state (emotions, cognitions, physiological responses), that drives their behaviors (beliefs, values and motivations) and an awareness of how this impacts and influences others.

One of the primary effects of successful mentoring or coaching is to help you to enhance your self-awareness.

Dr Julia Yates explains in the following video.

Video content is not available in this format.



As Julia infers in the video clip, self-awareness can be difficult to understand and develop. Tasha Eurich's research (2017) backs this up. She found that 'while 95% of people think they are self-aware, the real figure is closer to 10–15%'. She says, 'Not only are our assessments often flawed, we are usually terrible judges of our own performance and

abilities – from leadership skills to achievements at school and work.' She also picks up on the idea of inner and outer aspects of self-awareness, describing two specific types of insight:

- Internal self-awareness – an inward understanding of our passions and aspirations, strengths and weaknesses etc.
- External self-awareness – knowing how *others* see you and understanding yourself from the outside in.

You'll start by focusing on your internal self-awareness. You'll look more externally later in the week.

2 Developing my internal self-awareness



Figure 2 Self-awareness isn't fixed

The first thing to acknowledge is that you can grow and enhance your self-awareness. It isn't a fixed ability that you are born with and even if it is already a personal strength, you always can develop it further.

The Nir and Far team (2024) describe self-awareness as involving three elements:

- **Introspection:** the process of attempting to directly access one's own internal psychological processes, judgments, perceptions, or states
- **Self-reflection:** the examination, contemplation, and analysis of one's thoughts, feelings, and actions
- **Insight:** the clear and often sudden discernment of a solution to a problem, i.e. the result of self-reflection and introspection.

In the following sections you'll focus on introspection and self-reflection.

2.1 Introspection

Retired NBA basketball player, psychologist and author, John Amaechi, has this to say about the importance of introspection on the path to success.

View at: youtube:navN8FWm-Ps

(The Open University is not responsible for the content of external websites)

Cherry (2023) makes the following suggestions to help you to become more introspective:

- **Ask yourself 'what' questions** – for example, instead of asking why you feel sad, ask what is making you feel sad. This can help provide more insight.

- **Be more mindful** – greater mindfulness can be achieved in many different ways, some of which include journaling and meditation. (You can explore mindfulness in more detail by clicking on the link. To avoid losing your place in the course, if you are studying on a desktop you should open the link in a new tab or window by holding down Ctrl (or Cmd on a Mac) when you click on it. If you are studying on a mobile device hold down the link and select to 'Open in New Tab'. Return here when you have finished.)
- **Expand your curiosity** – curiosity about your inner self can help you better understand your emotions, reflect on your past, and explore your identity and purpose.
- **Spend time alone doing nothing** – this can help create an environment in which you're able to do a deeper dive into your psychological processes.

Other prompts to help with the internal exploration of introspection include:

- Seeking out new experiences – for example, travel to somewhere you've never been before or learn a new skill. These experiences don't have to be work related. Putting yourself in new situations, outside of your comfort zone, will allow you to learn more about how you think, feel and act when things are unfamiliar (Nunez, 2023).
- Identify what triggers your negative feelings and emotions – understanding what makes you angry, sad, stressed or jealous will significantly enhance your self-awareness. A useful tip is to pay attention to what bothers you about other people. Sometimes this can be a reflection of a quality we don't like in ourselves (Nunez, 2023).

However, as Tasha Eurich explains in her book *Insight* (2017, pp . 98–109), being introspective is not the whole path to self-awareness. When you don't keep your focus on learning and growth while thinking about decisions you've made or situations you've found yourself in, you can risk falling into rumination, something Eurich refers to as the 'evil twin' of introspection.

Rumination involves getting stuck in a cycle of negative thoughts, focusing on what went wrong in a situation, your fears and insecurities, rather than considering what you might learn from it and do better next time.

Eurich goes on to suggest several 'rumination-busters' (pp. 122–126), including:

- Having a learn-well mindset – channelling your thinking to focus on learning over performance
- Hitting pause – doing something to take your mind off your repetitive thoughts, such as exercising or seeing friends
- Reality checking – asking someone you trust for a reality check.

A useful focus for introspection is the process of identifying your personal values.

2.1.1 Identifying core values

Koehler (2023) describes values as 'the guiding principles that shape our attitudes, actions and decisions'. She goes on to explain that they are 'deeply ingrained, often subconscious, and integral to our identity.'

It is widely accepted that making a more conscious effort to recognise your values not only enhances your self-awareness, but offers other benefits too. Salyasa (2023) suggests that these benefits include:

- Stress reduction – avoiding situations that do not align with who you are, and going instead with those that better serve your needs. For example, when making career choices.
- Setting priorities – with an understanding of your values, you have an innate understanding of when to compromise and when not to.

There are numerous exercises available online to help you to identify your values. Activity 1 suggests a useful approach. Values work is something that you will need to return to from time to time throughout your career, as your values can alter and develop as you reach different life stages. For example, many people find that having children impacts on their values.

Activity 1 Visually identifying your values

Allow about 30 minutes

In this activity, you're going to create a visual values reminder that you can refer back to when necessary. Focus on general values that you consider to be important in your life – they will be equally relevant to your work and career.

Ideally, you should identify between three to five core values that you can easily reflect on. Many more than that, and it becomes much harder to keep them in mind and apply them in your life.

Here is a list of values from a *Psychology Today* article (Davis, 2018) that you might find useful to start your thinking:

- Authenticity
- Adventure
- Balance
- Bravery
- Compassion
- Challenge
- Citizenship
- Community
- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Determination
- Fairness
- Freedom
- Friendship
- Fun
- Generosity
- Growth
- Honesty
- Integrity
- Justice
- Kindness
- Knowledge
- Leadership
- Learning
- Love

- Loyalty
- Openness
- Optimism
- Recognition
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Security
- Self-respect
- Social connection
- Spirituality
- Stability
- Status
- Wealth
- Wisdom.

If you want a longer list, use your preferred search engine to search ‘list of values’ and you’ll find many options.

If you’re struggling to narrow it down to between three and five, many authors recommend thinking about the following scenarios as a prompt:

- times when you felt really happy
- times when you felt really proud
- times when you felt most fulfilled and satisfied.

Identifying why you felt that way, should help you to recognise the values that were important to you at those times.

When you’ve identified your core values, make a note of them in the free response box below.

To help cement them in your mind and give you a quick and easy reference tool to refer back to, look for visual images (or words if you prefer) to represent each value. Be as creative as you like with this – you can use drawings, photographs, cut things out of magazines, or use text. If you’d rather use technology – you could use a visual ideas board app, such as Pinterest or Corkulous, or even design a PowerPoint slide. The point is to create a visual prompt that you can put on your wall or keep on your desk, to quickly remind you of your values when needed.

If you don’t enjoy visual activities, print out a list of values and circle those that you feel are the most important. If you want to take it a step further, you could describe why each value is important to you or find inspirational quotes that reflect each one.

Provide your answer...

Comment

There are no right or wrong answers when it comes to your values, you are simply identifying the things that are most important to you.

Don’t feel ashamed or embarrassed about the values you choose. For example, some people are reluctant to refer to money or ambition, but these are important if they are the values that drive you, and recognising them will help you to make more appropriate decisions in the future.

> Your coach or mentor would be a really useful person to speak to about this process, helping you to identify your values and apply them to your decision making. For example, if one of your values is learning or growth, you could discuss ideas for development with a mentor. Similarly, if one of your values is respect, and you don't feel you're working in a respectful environment, you could reflect on what type of working environment might suit you better.

2.2 Self-reflection

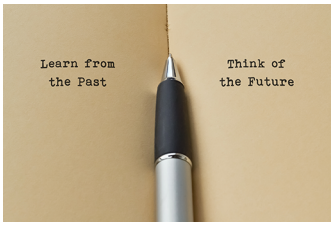


Figure 3 Writing my narrative

Once you've had a chance to practise introspection, you should have access to more information about yourself, and can start to reflect on what it tells you – learning about yourself and your motivations and building your confidence about how to apply that learning in the future.

When supporting you to develop your self-awareness, coaches have a number of techniques or approaches they might use to encourage self-reflection. You will look at three of these in more detail in the next sections.

2.2.1 Telling my story

A starting point for many career coaches is to focus on your career story so far. As David Drake, the creator of a coaching approach known as 'narrative coaching' (2014, p. 119) explains, 'the stories people tell about their lives are of considerable importance in coaching because there is an intimate connection between the ways in which people narrate their identities and enact their lives.'

In her book, *Brilliant Career Coach*, author and coach Sophie Rowan (2011, pp. 20–2) introduces a self-directed exercise she calls 'What's your story?'. She asks a series of prompt questions, which include the following:

- What is your career story so far?
- What have you enjoyed most and least in your career?
- How would you describe yourself at work?
- Which work relationship has been the most positive and why?
- Which parts of your story make you happiest?
- Which parts would you prefer to skip over or delete?

Narrating your story might allow you to recognise patterns or identify more clearly what type of work or working environment has given you the most satisfaction. It may also help to emphasise the values you identified in Activity 1. The process will give you information that you can use when considering any future career path you want to take.

Rowan recommends taking a day to do this properly, covering an A4 page, perhaps in several sittings. She proposes that the story should be as positive and persuasive as possible, '…full of your skills, strengths, unique talents and all-round brilliance'. A strong story will help you to feel more confident about future career decisions and transitions.

Activity 2 Interpreting Tonya's story

Allow about 20 minutes

When you're writing your own narrative, it can be difficult to pull out the positive learning points. This activity will give you an opportunity to practise doing that with someone else's story.

Read Tonya's story.

> While at secondary school, I helped my busy parents to care for my baby sister, and I was good at it, so decided a job in childcare might be for me. I started a course but soon realised this was not what I wanted and left. My passion has always been for design and I'm a talented, creative person – so I started an interior design course, which I loved. Unfortunately, personal circumstances meant that I had to leave that course too and get a job. Eventually, I was lucky enough to find work in an interior design consultancy where I learned a huge amount. I realised that I thrive in a creative environment. I'm a strong communicator and able to understand and adapt a client's brief effectively. I also realised that if I'm going to work in a small business, I need to be the boss. I'm not interested in constantly having to boost someone else's self-confidence and pick up the pieces when things don't go their way! I'm currently a sales representative for an artisan tile-making company. I travel all over the country on my own, selling to retailers. I have recently negotiated deals with two large department store chains. In the future, I plan to open a boutique selling interior design products.

In the box below, list five positive points from Tonya's story. Can you identify any of her values in what she has to say?

Provide your answer...

Comment

You could have chosen:

- Tonya can make brave, pragmatic decisions, for example, leaving a university course that wasn't right; leaving a second course because the timing was wrong.
- She is creatively talented – interior design is her specialism.
- She likes to be her own boss.
- She is a good negotiator and can sell in competitive environments.
- She is good with people – from young children to colleagues and potentially demanding clients.

- She has a capacity for dealing with change, for example, moving from university to employment, changing employers etc.
- Tonya's values might include autonomy, creativity, communication or determination.

For the sake of brevity in this activity, Tonya's story is shorter than Rowan (2011) recommends. For example, she could have included much more detail about herself and what makes her happy, how other people would describe her etc.

When you write your own story, it might be useful to find a trusted friend or colleague to read through it with you. They might draw different conclusions about your strengths and abilities.

Taking some time to write your own narrative will allow you to discover all sorts of things about yourself. Remember, this is for you, not for an application form or CV, so there's no pressure to do it a certain way or use key words that you think an employer might be looking for.

You might also identify, particularly if you work on this with the help of a coach, parts of your narrative that you'd like to change. In a blog about narrative coaching, The Moment Institute (no date) explains 'Once clients are more aware of the stories they tell themselves, they gain agency and have space to consider what alternative stories they may want to tell instead.' The author continues 'When you change your narratives, you start a systemic change process from the core of who you are. You'll find that you start to talk differently, stand differently, and feel differently.'

You might have found that by making your story as positive as possible, you've already started that narrative change.

2.2.2 Using a journal

Many coaches incorporate journaling into their coaching practice as there are benefits for both coach and client. As Pennock (2023) explains, 'coaches can better understand their clients' perspectives and tailor their coaching approach accordingly' and clients can 'uncover patterns, identify limiting beliefs, and discover new possibilities for personal growth.'

Sometimes it can be useful to use a range of prompts to start your thinking and there are many online blogs offering lists of journalling prompt questions. Regan (2023) offers 77, including:

- When do you feel most free and alive? Describe the moments or activities that have helped you tap into a sense of profound vitality.
- Imagine five alternative lives you would like to lead, each exploring different passions, purposes, or paths.
- Do you think career and purpose are intertwined?
- What's one thing you'd like to be proud of by the end of this week/month/year?
- If you were a natural landscape, what would you be?

Pennock advises you to 'write freely and without judgement', and to remember 'that there are no right or wrong answers.'

Activity 3 Using prompts

Allow about 15 minutes

a) Choose one of Regan's prompts, either from the list given here or from her original blog post. (Note: Her original blog post does include several prompts that are more obviously career related if you'd prefer to focus on one of those.)

Write your response in the box below.

Provide your answer...

b) How might what you've written be related to your career decisions and choices? Explain any insights you have gained in the box below.

Provide your answer...

Comment

Examples:

1. If you chose the question about describing yourself as a natural landscape – did that give you any insight into the kind of person you are? Or perhaps you were reflecting on the life you currently lead and how it makes you feel. Did you choose a bucolic scene or a crashing seascape or erupting volcano?

   Is this something you'd like to change or something you want to develop further? Does your current career support that or conflict with it? Perhaps the landscape you chose reflects where you'd like to live in the world… what would it take to achieve that?
2. Reflecting on when you feel most alive can give you lots of clues about your values and what might make you happy and fulfilled in a career. For example, if you feel most alive when you are with family and friends – what could you do to facilitate more time with them? If you feel most alive when solving tricky problems with your work colleagues – do you have enough problem solving in your current role? Is this something you could increase?

These are techniques and insights that a coach could certainly help you to explore in more detail and you'll find out more about the role of a coach in Weeks 6 and 7.

2.2.3 Visualisation



Figure 4 What does my future self look like?

The last of the three approaches you'll learn about in this section is visualisation.

Visualisation is used in positive psychology, a branch of psychology that focuses on human potential and the things that make life worth living.

This positive psychology coaching technique involves imagining your best possible future self. The more real you can make that future self seem, the more motivated you will be to help them develop – exploring the goals you need to achieve to become that person. From a career perspective, goals might involve changing location, earning more money, finding a better work-life balance, gaining greater job satisfaction etc.

Also, the more connected we feel with our future self, the more likely we are to make decisions and choices that will be beneficial in the longer term. Hershfield (2011, p. 30) explains, 'when the future self shares similarities with the present self, when it is viewed in vivid and realistic terms, and when it is seen in a positive light, people are more willing to make choices today that may benefit them at some point in the years to come'.

Activity 4 Imagining my best future self

Allow about 20 minutes

Pick a future date, perhaps one year, five years or even ten years from now.

For this activity, concentrate on your future self at work. Imagine that everything has gone exactly how you wanted it to and all your goals have been achieved. At this stage, don't worry about how you got there, just imagine this future as vividly as you can.

For example, are you in your dream job or perhaps running your own business? What work are you doing? Who are you working with? What environment are you in? Do you have an office? What is it like? Are you working full time or just two or three days each week?

In the box below, try to describe your future self in as much detail as possible.

Provide your answer...

Comment

Ideally, you will repeat this exercise regularly and consistently over a month – really cementing who this future self is in your imagination.

As well as making you feel more motivated and connected to your future, this type of exercise has the potential to make you feel more optimistic and happier.

The important thing is to imagine this person in as much detail as possible. Research shows that we stimulate the same regions of the brain when we visualise something as we do when we actually do it.

The more vivid the images you conjure up, the more easily you can trick your brain into thinking it is a real experience. Your brain is therefore less likely to respond negatively, for example, by introducing self-doubt, and you'll start to have more confidence about your future.

Many coaches recommend writing a detailed record of what you imagine, or even writing a letter to your future self. If you have a journal, that would be an ideal tool for this type of exercise.

In the next section you'll shift your focus from internal to external self-awareness – exploring how to better understand how others see you.

3 Enhancing my external self-awareness

External self-awareness is all about gathering insights from the world around you and attempting to understand how others see you. In the workplace, this can help you become more empathetic and to build stronger relationships with colleagues. It will also enable you to identify areas for personal development.

An obvious way to do this is to ask people directly, but when collecting feedback from the people around you, don't ask everyone you know or work with all at once, as that amount of feedback could easily overwhelm you. For example, start by choosing one or two trusted colleagues and ask them for some constructive feedback on a particular aspect of your approach. This might feel daunting, but people are often flattered to be asked as it shows that you value their opinion. Think about how you would feel if someone asked you for feedback, and how you might prefer to be approached.

Watch this short video to hear how business speaker and trainer Michael Kerr explains the power of asking for feedback in the workplace.

Video content is not available in this format.



Activity 5 How do others see me?

Allow about 30 minutes

a) Choose a trusted colleague or a friend and ask them for some feedback.

Think carefully about what you want feedback on – is it something specific, such as how you interact with people in a certain situation, or do you want their perspective on your strengths and weaknesses?

Note what they say in the box below.

Provide your answer...

b) Now think about how you feel about that feedback. Did it surprise you? Did it make you feel defensive? What have you learned about yourself?

Note your responses in the box below.

Provide your answer...

c) Finally, try to turn your learning into a positive action for change. For example, if they pointed out that you can be overly dominant in team meetings, not letting anyone else speak – perhaps, for the next meeting, you could resolve to really listen to what everyone says and invite others to contribute.

List your proposed actions in the box below.

Provide your answer...

Comment

This activity will probably highlight positives as well as negatives. Embrace and celebrate the positive feedback you receive and refer to it when you are feeling uncertain. Everyone has things that they do well and things they need to work on. Becoming more self-aware allows you to identify what those things are and to celebrate the positives while doing something about the negatives.

Gathering insights doesn't have to involve asking for direct feedback (Marlow Group, 2023). Here are some other suggestions:

- **Indirect feedback:** Rather than asking for feedback, think through comments others have made. Have people offered advice without you asking? Do they respond positively or negatively to your contributions, or do they seem to be indifferent?
- **Body language:** Observe the body language of those around you – when you take action or make a suggestion, do they behave in the way you would want or expect?
- **Outcomes:** Are you achieving your desired results overall? If, for example, your ideas are never adopted by coworkers, this is likely a good place to start. Ask yourself 'What steps can I take to change this outcome?'

Although the benefits of becoming more self-aware might seem logical, our brains can sometimes put obstacles in our way. In the next section, you'll explore what those obstacles to self-awareness might be.

4 What might get in my way?



Figure 5 Obstacles to self-awareness

When you are working towards becoming more self-aware, there are potential obstacles to your progress.

Farmer (2023) writes about 12 obstacles to building self-awareness. They include:

> Fear: fear of unpleasant emotions; of opening a Pandora's Box of memories; of trying something new.
>
> Discomfort: people are comfortable doing what they've always done, even if it's not working; people feel uncomfortable focusing on themselves.
>
> Accountability: it's easier to live unconsciously; it's easier to live through other people; it's easier to give responsibility for your happiness or success to someone or something else.
>
> Negativity: self-awareness takes a lot of work; it's difficult to break habits; self-awareness is intangible; people don't see the value in getting to know themselves.
>
> (adapted from Farmer, 2023)

If you are interested in mentoring and coaching, it is unlikely that you will hold negative views about self-awareness – you're already exploring methods of enhancing your own. So, do you have any other blocks to becoming more self-aware?

Watch this short video from Tasha Eurich in which she explains 'Why we're not as self-aware as we think'.

Video content is not available in this format.
Why we're not as self-aware as we think



In the video, Eurich talks about blind spots, which she explains in more detail in her book (2017, pp. 58–63):

- Knowledge blindness – our inability to base our opinions on how we perform rather than our more general beliefs about ourselves and our skills
- Emotion blindness – our inability to recognise the impact that our emotions have on our judgements
- Behaviour blindness – our inability to see our own behaviour clearly or objectively.

Activity 6 What's in my way?

Allow about 10 minutes

Eurich refers to blind spots and self-absorption in her research, and Farmer's list suggests lack of self-confidence, fear or a negative attitude. Finding the time to actually sit down and think might be another problem! Use the boxes below to answer these questions.

What are your obstacles to becoming more self-aware?

Provide your answer...

What can you do about them?

Provide your answer...

Comment

You may have identified a range of obstacles and they may be difficult to overcome without support. Think about who could help you, or how you could set aside some

time each day. For example, finding 10 minutes to reflect might be manageable – perhaps on your journey to work or instead of browsing your social media accounts.

Remember – self-awareness and self-reflection are skills like any other. The more you use them, the better you will get.

As Dr Julia Yates explained at the beginning of this week, self-awareness is at the heart of coaching and mentoring, and your own self-awareness will grow when you work with a mentor or coach. Over the next few weeks of this course, you'll have a chance to consider in more detail the support that a mentor or coach can offer and make some decisions about how they could help you.

5 This week's quiz

Now that you've completed Week 2, you can take a short quiz to help you to reflect on what you've learned.

Week 2 practice quiz

Open the quiz in a new tab or window and come back here when you've finished.

6 Summary

Now that you've looked at the concept of self-awareness in more detail, you should feel more confident about what it involves and why it plays such a critical role in your self-development. You've undertaken a variety of exercises that have enhanced your self-awareness and helped you to build a clearer picture of who you are.

You should now be able to:

- recognise the value of self-awareness
- use some of the tools and exercises available to help you become more self-aware
- identify obstacles to developing self-awareness.

Reflection

Use the box below to note down any actions you will take as a result of what you have learned this week. This will be useful when you come to Week 8, reflecting on what you have learned over the whole of the course and planning your next steps, but you can also use it to check on your progress at any point.

Provide your answer...

Next week, you'll focus on some of the other skills that are crucial to effective mentoring and coaching, including building rapport and listening.

You can now go to Week 3.

Week 3: Key skills for a mentor or coach

Introduction

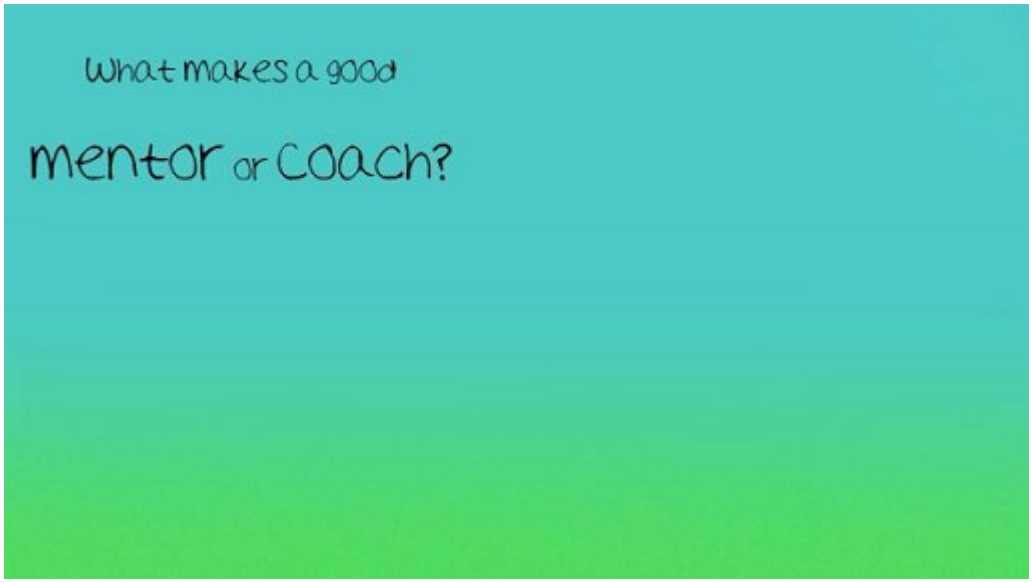
Welcome to Week 3 of the course.

Last week you focused on knowing yourself. You considered the importance of self-awareness, a variety of the tools and techniques that can help you to develop it, and the potential obstacles that can get in the way.

This week, you'll look at other skills that are vital for an effective mentoring or coaching relationship. Understanding what makes a good mentor or coach should give you an advantage when trying to identify the right mentor or coach for you. Many of the skills discussed this week will also be advantageous for the mentee or coachee to develop.

Now watch the following video to introduce the week.

Video content is not available in this format.



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- understand what makes a good mentor or coach
- recognise how rapport and trust can be built
- describe the listening and questioning skills that a good mentor or coach will demonstrate.

You'll start this week with a look at what makes a good mentor and what makes a good coach. As you'll see, there are many similarities but some key differences.

1 What makes a good mentor or coach?



Figure 1 Five star support

You'll start this week by considering your own views about what makes a good mentor or coach.

Activity 1 What makes a good mentor or coach?

Allow about 10 minutes

Start by choosing whether to focus on a mentor or coach. Base this decision on the role that interests you the most or that you feel more familiar with.

In the box below, list the skills and qualities that you think a good mentor or coach should demonstrate.

Why do you think these skills and qualities are important?

Provide your answer...

Comment

Even if you have never been mentored or coached formally yourself, you can have an opinion on the kind of support you'd like to receive. Were the skills you listed more aligned to personality, for example, friendly, open, easy to talk to, good listener, or were you more focused on what you need to help you to progress, for example, knowledge, influence, challenging questions etc.?

Read on to find out what business professionals and other commentators think are the essentials.

1.1 What makes a good mentor?

An effective mentor needs several key skills and a quick online search will take you to a wide range of blogs and articles on the subject. Common themes include:

- the ability to listen
- the ability to question and challenge effectively
- honesty and a respect for confidentiality
- an open mind
- a positive approach that motivates and encourages
- the ability to build rapport

- empathy
- patience and time to commit to the relationship
- relevant knowledge and experience
- self-awareness.

A leading expert in mentoring, David Clutterbuck (2008, p. 6, Table 3), explains that all mentors must:

- respond appropriately to a variety of needs, which may include recognising and reconciling different and perhaps conflicting purposes
- recognise and adapt appropriately to the phases of the mentoring relationship (you'll learn more about these in Week 4)
- respond with the appropriate level of directiveness and balance between stretch and nurture
- recognise different developmental roles, and move between them appropriately and comfortably
- recognise the boundaries between mentoring and other roles
- establish a positive, dynamic atmosphere within the relationship.

1.2 What makes a good coach?

At the core of good coaching is an interest in making things better for people, and the emotional intelligence to build effective relationships with them.

Listen to these coaches sharing their opinion of what makes a good coach.

Video content is not available in this format.



Many of the skills described by the coaches in the video are similar to those used by a mentor, including listening and questioning, rapport building and empathy. But a key difference is that a coach usually won't have personal experience of their client's context and so will be using their intuition to facilitate the coachee's own problem solving abilities – working creatively to encourage them to reflect on and explore their thoughts.

Van Nieuwerburgh (2020, pp. 179–181) focuses on how a coach can develop 'a coaching way of being'. He explains that the most effective coaches:

- are humble
- are confident in their ability as coaches
- care about people
- believe that their coachees will achieve more of their potential
- treat others with respect
- have integrity
- demonstrate intercultural sensitivity.

In the next section, you'll start to look at some of the key skills that an effective mentor or coach will demonstrate.

2 Building rapport and trust



Figure 2 Building trust

Rapport and trust are important elements of a mentoring or coaching relationship.

The Clay Team (2023) explain that the key to good rapport is trusting the other person and showing them that you are trustworthy. They share three key tips for building trust:

- active listening – giving the other person your full attention, summarising their key points back to them and asking follow-up questions. You'll explore active listening in more detail later this week.
- finding common ground – talking about interests and hobbies, exploring shared experiences or backgrounds, or recognising mutual goals or dreams.
- showing empathy – being generous, authentic and non-judgemental. Using 'I' statements to express support can make your response more personal and relatable. You'll look at empathy later in this section.

Activity 2 demonstrates how a coach or mentor might build rapport with their client.

Activity 2 Good rapport vs bad rapport

Allow about 15 minutes

Watch this video, taken from the OpenLearn course, Three principles of a coaching approach. It demonstrates ineffective rapport building between a coach and their client.

Video content is not available in this format.



Use the space below to note what you observe about the coach's behaviour, use of language and energy. How do they differ from those of the client?

Provide your answer...

Now watch a second video and make the same observations.

Video content is not available in this format.



Provide your answer...

Comment

In the second video, the behaviour, language and energy of the coach and client were much more aligned. It is an important part of the mentor or coach's role to observe, listen and respond appropriately.

In Activity 2, you observed the impact of something that is often referred to as 'mirroring and matching', which involves closely matching elements of the other person's behaviour, such as their body language.

We automatically feel more comfortable with people we have something in common with, and establishing a connection in this way can enable more effective and efficient communication. The Hypnosis Training Academy (2023) describes a range of mirroring and matching techniques you can try, including:

- Pacing and leading – you 'pace' the other person by matching and mirroring them, and 'lead' by changing something. For example, if they cross their arms, you cross your legs. If they follow you and cross their legs too, you know you've got rapport, but if they don't follow you, there's more work to do.
- Movements – match their expressions, gestures or gesticulations. It's important not to make it too obvious as you don't want to appear to be mocking the other person.
- Tonality – match the tone, speed, pitch or rhythm of their voice.

Try it the next time you have a one-to-one conversation with someone and see if it makes a difference to your interaction. This is something you could reflect on in a journal.

If the conversation is with someone you know well, you could explain afterwards and discuss their observations and perspective.

2.1 Focusing on empathy

As you've already learned, a key component of building rapport and trust is empathy. Watch this video by researcher and storyteller Brené Brown, which clearly explains the difference between empathy and sympathy.

Video content is not available in this format.
Brené Brown on empathy



While the majority of effective professional coaches will be empathetic people, coaches and mentors in the workplace might not necessarily have that skill. Are you empathetic? You might think that you can't develop empathy if it doesn't come naturally to you, but you can!

The Mind Tools content team (no date) have put together a useful check list to help you practise:

- Put aside your viewpoint and try to see things from the other person's point of view.
- Validate the other person's perspective. Accept that people have different opinions from your own, and that they may have good reason to hold those opinions.
- Examine your attitude. Are you more concerned with getting your way, winning or being right? Or, is your priority to find a solution, build relationships and accept others?
- Listen to the entire message that the other person is trying to communicate. What tone of voice is being used? What is the person doing with his or her body while speaking?
- Ask what the other person would do. When in doubt, ask the person to explain his or her position.

While it isn't your responsibility as the mentee or coachee to build this rapport and trust, you certainly play a key part in it. By understanding some of the ways in which mentors or coaches work to develop the relationship, you can play your part more effectively.

An understanding of these skills and techniques will also be beneficial in any of your own interactions with other people, both at work or in general life.

In the next section, you'll look in more detail at listening and questioning skills.

3 Listening and questioning



Figure 3 Listening skills

In any mentoring or coaching relationship, the mentor or coach must be prepared and able to actively listen to their client and ask them challenging questions at the right time to support learning and development.

3.1 Listening

Dr Julia Yates explains why she believes that listening is the most important skill of all.

Video content is not available in this format.



In his book *Introduction to Coaching Skills*, Van Nieuwerburgh (2020, pp. 27–41) explains that 'if people listen to us genuinely and attentively, we feel more confident about our topic and are able to think about and discuss it more fluently.'

For example, an active listener will:

- maintain eye contact
- keep open body language
- make encouraging sounds and nod
- allow silence.

Most coaches will aim to speak 20 per cent of the time, allowing their client to fill 80 per cent of the conversation. Compare this to a normal social conversation which tends to be closer to 50/50.

Activity 3 Listening skills

Allow about 15 minutes

Watch this video taken from the OpenLearn course, *Three principles of a coaching approach*. The commentator in the video focuses on summarising, but in order to summarise effectively the coach needs to listen carefully to what his client is saying. Is this coach demonstrating good listening skills?

Video content is not available in this format.



Make a note of some of the things that the coach doesn't do well.

Provide your answer...

Now watch this video. The coach is demonstrating good listening skills, which enable him to summarise his client's situation more effectively.

Video content is not available in this format.



Make a note of some of the things that the coach does well. Focus on listening and summarising.

Provide your answer...

Comment

Listening and summarising are very important coaching skills, and a coach's ability to reflect and paraphrase what they are hearing can often be key to a client understanding their issues more clearly.

There are several models that describe the different levels of listening required for an effective coaching conversation. Yates (2022, p. 113) describes four levels.

1. *Level 1*: attending listening – providing time and space in which others can talk
2. *Level 2*: accurate listening – listening in order to reflect back and paraphrase content
3. *Level 3*: empathetic listening – listening to the words and feelings being conveyed
4. *Level 4*: generative empathetic listening – understanding not just what is said but picking up on clues in the tone of voice or body language and being aware of your own empathic response, to understand what is not being said.

A good coach will be able to reach level 4.

3.2 Questioning

Another key aspect of a mentor or coach's role is to ask intuitive questions that enable them to understand any issues and support their client in resolving them.

A Pocketbook for Mentees (Lowbridge, 2012, pp. 20–21) suggests '20 killer questions' that a mentor might ask, including:

- What do you want to focus on today?
- What is happening now that is working well?
- What is happening now that tells you that you have a problem?
- Where do you want to be a year from now? How will you measure your success?
- What do you not know about this situation/project? How could you find out?
- What do you enjoy about what you do?
- What have you learned from this?
- What will you do next?

In the coaching context, Van Nieuwerburgh (2020, pp. 42–53) devotes a chapter of his book to 'Asking powerful questions'. In it he presents a selection of what he calls 'thought-provoking questions', including:

- How would you describe…?
- How might this situation…?
- What would you…?
- What other options…?
- What makes this situation…?
- How else might you…?

He explains that if the response to the question is silence, this is a good thing and indicates that the question was thought-provoking in some way.

Watch this short video to hear how coach Christine Hassler views the value of asking 'powerful questions'.

View at: youtube:sGv-moiGZps



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You might also find the 'powerful question' technique useful in the wider workplace, such as when discussing a problem with a colleague or manager.

The questions suggested in this section are largely interchangeable between a mentoring and coaching context, but there may be a difference in the motivation behind asking them, i.e. a coach wants their client to realise something about themselves through their answers to the questions, whereas the mentor can also use responses to identify the best advice and experience to share with their mentee.

As the client on the receiving end of mentoring or coaching, your listening and questioning skills are not under such scrutiny. However, actively listening will allow you to really understand the questions your mentor or coach is asking you and have a better experience.

Sometimes it isn’t possible to develop an effective relationship with your mentor or coach. In the next section, you’ll explore some of the reasons for that.

4 When mentoring or coaching don’t work



Figure 4 Sometimes things go wrong

Before you start to explore this subject in more detail, take a moment to consider how the mentoring relationship in Activity 4 went wrong.

Activity 4 Louise’s story

Allow about 15 minutes

Louise was a manager struggling to find time for her own development and she thought that having a mentor would magically solve that. She imagined a person who would be in regular contact, setting her goals, checking that she was achieving them and generally keeping her on track.

Her mentor was a very busy individual, with a new venture just beginning. He worked for a different organisation and they were matched by a mutual contact. Their relationship was a long distance one, conducted via telephone.

In their first conversation, Louise was unable to be clear about what she needed from him. She also failed to appreciate how much of his time she was expecting him to give up. They didn’t really make a connection and a time for the next conversation wasn’t set.

Louise very quickly fell back into her normal routine. She tried to contact him a couple of times, but he didn’t respond so the relationship did not develop any further.

Answer the following questions:

a. What went wrong?
b. Was it all Louise’s fault?
c. How could things have been improved?
d. What preparation could Louise have done before that first conversation?

Provide your answer...

Comment

There may be many reasons why a mentoring relationship doesn’t take off, or perhaps fails a little further down the line. In this case, Louise didn’t really know what she wanted from her mentor and he probably shouldn’t have taken on that responsibility at a time of transition in his own career.

If they had communicated more effectively, this might have been a more productive relationship, with clearer expectations on both sides.

Being clear about what you need from your mentor will allow you to articulate your needs and help them to assess whether they can support you effectively.

4.1 Characteristics of a failing relationship

Straus *et al.* (2013, Table 3) use the findings of their qualitative study to summarise the characteristics of a failed mentoring relationship. Key themes are:

- Communication – lack of open communication, failure to communicate tactfully, inability to listen
- Commitment – lack of commitment, lack of time committed to the relationship or waning interest over time
- Personality differences – different personal characteristics between the mentor and mentee
- Perceived (or real) competition – overlapping interests, failure to recognise that a mentee's success reflects well on his or her mentor; lack of clarity around intellectual property
- Conflicts of interest – competing agendas (particularly if both parties work for the same organisation)
- Lack of experience – mentor may not have relevant knowledge, skills or experience.

Many of these characteristics can also be applied to coaching relationships that don't work. The following issues might also occur:

- A client is pushed into coaching by a senior manager and is therefore resistant to it
- The contract between coach and client breaks, for example, one party fails to attend several sessions
- Both parties fail to identify clear goals to work towards
- The coach is not qualified or has limited practical experience
- The client thinks that coaching will be a quick fix.

Many of these issues can be mitigated by having a clear discussion about both parties' expectations at the beginning of the relationship, and continuing to revisit them throughout.

Activity 5 What would I do?

Allow about 10 minutes

Consider these scenarios and decide what you think would be the best response from each coach:

a. Sarah's boss has told her she needs a coach. Her immediate reaction is to wonder what she has done wrong. She meets Tariq, the coach, and he immediately senses a reluctance in his client. Should he:

- Cancel the appointment straight away? There's no point continuing.
- Conduct the appointment as he normally would, but look for an opportunity to raise his concerns with some careful questions?
- Say straight away that he detects a negative attitude and explain why that won't help their relationship?

b. Aisha has been seeing her coach for three months but doesn't think it is making any difference to her work life. She decides to end the relationship with her coach at their appointment that evening. What should her coach do?

- Spend some time exploring why she doesn't think she's moving forward. Have they set the right goals? Is she acting on them between appointments?
- Accept that she's not happy and agree to end the relationship.
- Respond with disappointment.

Comment

a. By choosing this option, the coach has an opportunity to demonstrate how the session might benefit Sarah, and he can explore her reluctance as part of the coaching interaction.

b. By choosing this option and exploring Aisha's dissatisfaction, both parties have an opportunity to review and consider how they might take things forward. This might mean the end of their coaching relationship, or it might allow it to develop more positively.

A coach must be sensitive to their client's mood and responsive to the cues they pick up. It is important not to be judgemental or defensive and to give the coachee an opportunity to provide feedback. If a relationship isn't working, it doesn't necessarily mean that the coach or coachee have done anything wrong.

Communication and commitment are the key facilitators of a successful mentoring or coaching relationship. As long as both parties communicate their expectations, regularly re-assess them and commit time and enthusiasm, this will create a strong base for the relationship to build from.

If problems develop, it is important for both parties to feel able to be honest about issues and difficulties. This is easier to do if there is rapport and trust.

5 This week’s quiz

Now that you’ve completed Week 3, you can take a short quiz to help you to reflect on what you’ve learned.

Week 3 practice quiz

Open the quiz in a new tab or window and come back here when you’ve finished.

6 Summary

By now, you should feel more confident about recognising a good mentor or coach and identifying the key skills that allow them to do their job well.

You should now be able to:

- understand what makes a good mentor or coach
- recognise how rapport and trust can be built
- describe the listening and questioning skills that a good mentor or coach will demonstrate.

Reflection

Use the box below to note down any actions you will take as a result of what you have learned this week. This will be useful when you come to Week 8, reflecting on what you have learned over the whole of the course and planning your next steps, but you can also use it to check on your progress at any point.

Provide your answer...

Next week, you'll focus on mentoring, investigating what it can do, how it works and who can benefit from it.

You can now go to Week 4.

Week 4: Understanding mentoring

Introduction

Welcome to Week 4 of the course.

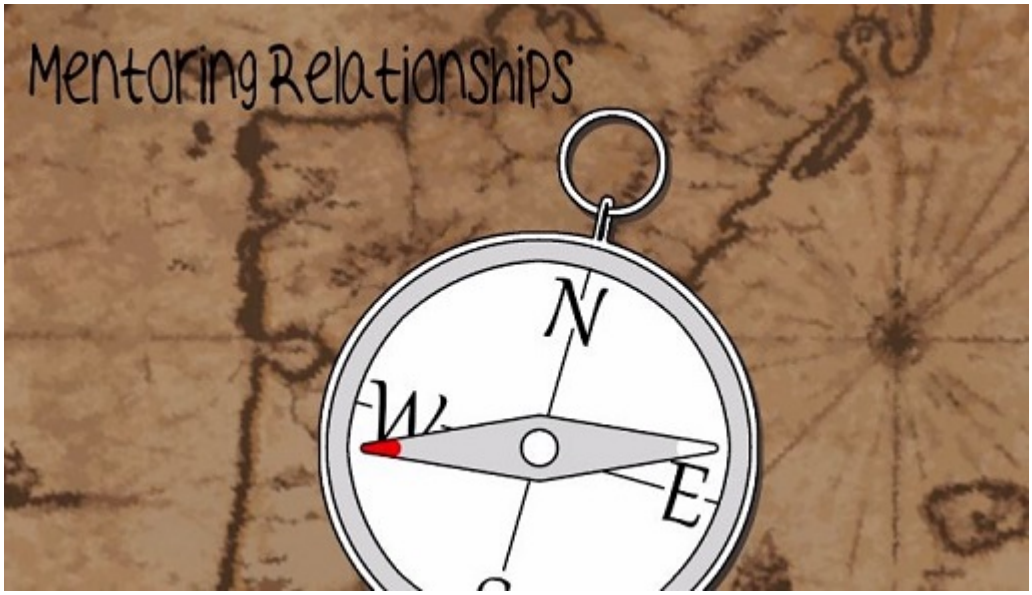
Last week you focused on rapport-building, listening and questioning – some of the core skills required by mentors and coaches. You also looked at how mentoring and coaching relationships can go wrong.

This week, you'll focus specifically on mentoring in the workplace.

You'll explore what it is and why it works, and learn about the different ways in which mentoring can support and enhance an individual's career.

Now watch the following video to introduce the week.

Video content is not available in this format.



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- describe the various phases of a mentoring relationship
- recognise the benefits of mentoring
- identify some of the misconceptions about mentoring.

You'll start with a brief overview of the history of mentoring.

1 A brief history of mentoring



Figure 1 When mentoring began

To understand why mentoring is used so extensively today, it can be useful to know a little about its history.

It is widely cited that the concept of mentoring originated with the character of Mentor in Homer's *Odyssey*. In this Ancient Greek epic poem, dating back around 3000 years, Odysseus entrusts his young son Telemachus to the care of Mentor, his trusted companion, when he goes to fight in the Trojan War. Unexpectedly, he is away for decades and during that time Mentor nurtures and supports the boy.

Roberts (1999) argues that Homer does not give Mentor characteristics that we would associate with mentoring – describing him simply as an old friend of Odysseus. Instead, he proposes that a French author, Francois Fenelon, is responsible for this popular view of Mentor. He developed the character in his 1699 novel *Les Adventures de Telemaque*, referring to Mentor as a 'guide and instructor' and 'another father'.

McKimm, Jollie and Hatter (2007, p. 2) make a historical link to the Middle Ages, when they explain that mentoring 'became common practice in the time of the guilds and trade apprenticeships when young people, having acquired technical skills, often benefited from the patronage of more experienced and established professionals'.

In the 1970s, business people and researchers started to recognise 'the vital role mentors play in the development of corporation executives' (Roche, 1979).

From the 1970s onwards, mentoring has been increasingly used in the workplace – traditionally to help a junior member of staff to progress.

Activity 1 Dumbledore and Harry Potter

Allow about 15 minutes

Choose a well-known mentoring relationship and describe what characteristics you think make it a relationship of mentor and mentee.

You could choose a historical pair, for example:

- Robespierre mentor to Napoleon
- Socrates mentor to Plato.

Or a fictional relationship, for example:

- Yoda mentor to Luke Skywalker (Star Wars)
- Dumbledore mentor to Harry Potter.

If you're in need of inspiration, this LinkedIn blog about famous mentoring pairs provides a list of examples that might help.

Use the box below to record your thoughts.

Provide your answer...

Comment

Although these relationships are historical or even fictional, it is interesting to consider how stories of mentoring are often framed. They almost always involve an older, wiser individual advising a young, ambitious, sometimes foolish one! Usually, they are both men. These days, mentoring relationships are much more likely to cross boundaries of gender, race, ethnicity etc. In some organisations, an older, more established member of staff is mentored by a new recruit.

In the next section, you'll explore the power of mentoring by reviewing some well-known case studies in more detail.

2 What can mentoring do?

As you started to explore in Activity 1, there are many famous examples of mentoring between two individuals, such as the relationship between talk show host Oprah Winfrey and celebrated poet and civil rights activist Maya Angelou. In Oprah's words 'She's the woman who can share my triumphs, chide me with hard truth and soothe me with words of comfort when I call her in my deepest pain' (Winfrey, 2000).



Figure 2 A strong mentoring relationship can change your life

Although that mentoring relationship went deeper than just work-related issues, a more work-orientated bond was formed between Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg during the early years of Facebook's development.

Zuckerberg explains:

> Early on in our history when things weren't really going well – we had hit a tough patch and a lot of people wanted to buy Facebook – I went and I met with Steve Jobs, and he said that to reconnect with what I believed was the mission of the company, I should go visit this temple in India that he had gone to early in the evolution of Apple, when he was thinking about what he wanted his vision of the future to be.
>
> (D'Onfro, 2015)

Zuckerberg went to India, and his vision for Facebook was reinvigorated by witnessing the way that people connected with each other. The two men went on to form a strong relationship.

Many famous mentoring relationships that have developed over a long period of time are successful because both parties gain some benefit. Watch the video below to hear leadership expert Simon Sinek's opinion about truly effective mentoring relationships.

View at: youtube:NrWg1qy2WNI

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Activity 2 What did these mentors do?

Allow about 15 minutes

Read the following case studies.

Case study 1 Mentoring a new trainee

When Loretta became a trainee, she had limited self-confidence. This was particularly evident when she was giving presentations, which she hated doing and had always avoided in the past.

Her manager suggested she find a mentor who was more experienced in giving presentations and could help her. Over a period of six months, Fiona regularly spent time with Loretta, talking about her anxieties, suggesting useful tools and techniques and offering feedback on the structure and content of her presentations.

Gradually, Loretta's confidence grew, and she began to enjoy the process. At this point the mentoring relationship came to a natural end, although Fiona was always at the end of a phone if Loretta needed to run any ideas past her.

Case study 2 Mentoring an experienced staff member

Simon had been in his role for several years when his relationship with his line manager suddenly broke down. They disagreed on several issues and stopped communicating effectively. Simon didn't know what he had done wrong.

He eventually spoke to Joseph, a colleague who shared the same manager. He wasn't experiencing the same issues, but could see there was a growing problem between Simon and his boss.

After several informal conversations over lunch, Joseph offered to take on a more structured mentoring role, which Simon subsequently found extremely useful. He sometimes used their meetings to vent his frustration, and this allowed him to approach interactions with his boss more calmly. On other occasions, they discussed tactics to facilitate more effective interactions. Joseph was also able to mediate between Simon and his manager during heated discussions in team meetings.

Compare and contrast the two scenarios.

How did each mentor approach the issue presented to them?

What did both individuals gain from the experience of being mentored? Did it make a difference that Joseph wasn't a senior colleague?

Use the box below to record your thoughts.

Provide your answer...

Comment

Despite the mentees' different levels of experience and seniority, the fundamental role of the mentor in both scenarios was to listen, offer advice and support based on their own experience, and review progress.

Both mentees had issues with self-confidence, driven by different problems – for Loretta it was a lack of experience and for Simon, a difficult relationship.

The mentoring relationship allowed them to build (or re-build) that self-confidence through feeling supported and receiving feedback and suggestions for action.

Simon's mentor needed to really use his listening skills in a sensitive situation. By offering to become a mentor to Simon, Joseph gave the relationship a formality that allowed him to set aside their friendship during those interactions, enabling a more productive conversation.

3 Diversity mentoring

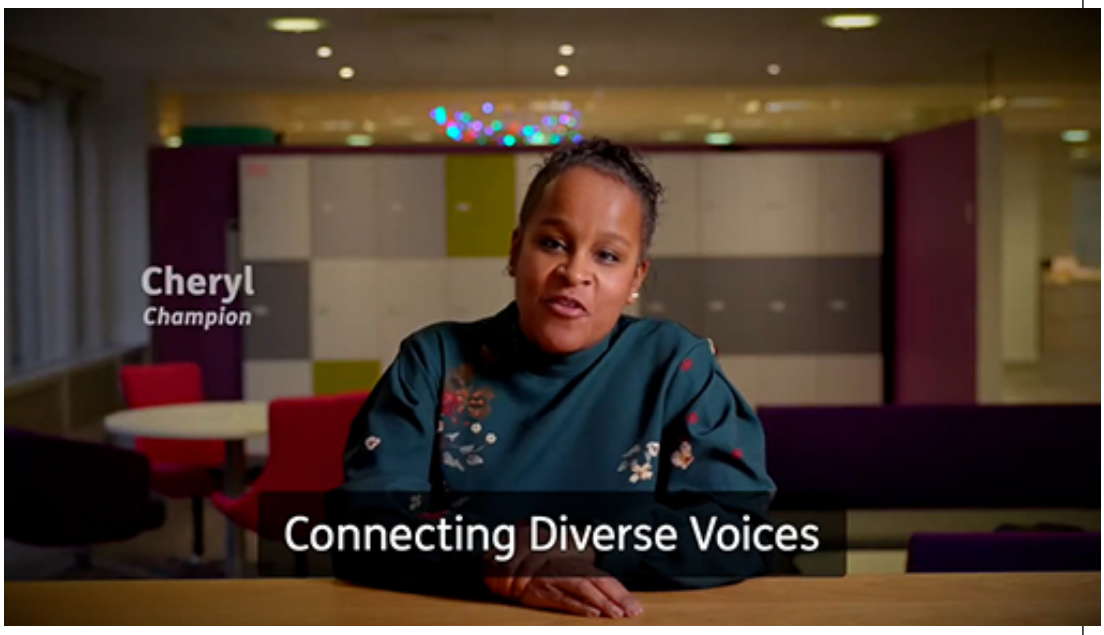
Mentoring can also enhance diversity and inclusion within an organisation, supporting individuals who are facing barriers themselves and raising awareness of different perspectives.

As Clutterbuck *et al.* (2012, p. 1) explain:

> Diversity mentoring is a developmental process of open dialogue that aims to achieve both individual and organisational change through shared understanding and suspending judgement within a relationship of mutual learning in which differences that exist are perceived as integral in learning, growth and development.

Watch this short video to hear from some of the participants of the Government Communication Service's 'Connecting Diverse Voices' scheme.

Video content is not available in this format.



If you want to understand more about enhancing diversity in your workplace, look for the OpenLearn Badged Open Course 'Diversity and inclusion in the workplace'.

Now you have a better idea of the impact mentoring can have, in the next section you'll start to look at the process involved.

4 The mentoring process



Figure 3 Growth and development

A mentoring relationship is all about growth and development which, at its best, impacts on both parties.

Clutterbuck (2008, p. 3) describes the relationship in five phases:

- Phase 1: Rapport-building – mentor and mentee decide whether they want to work together and negotiate what each expects of the other.
- Phase 2: Direction-setting – mentor and mentee achieve clarity about what each aims to achieve from the relationship and how.
- Phase 3: Progress-making – having helped the mentee define and commit to personal change, the mentor must guide and support them as needed.
- Phase 4: Winding down – when the relationship has helped to deliver the desired outcomes or the mentee outgrows the mentor.
- Phase 5: Moving on/professional friendship – moving on from a formal mentoring relationship towards a less committed, more casual one.

Each phase requires different behaviours and competencies from the mentor.

Other authors describe similar structures, but the key elements for the mentor are building rapport, ensuring that the relationship is productive and knowing when to end it.

Activity 3 Which mentoring stage?

Allow about 15 minutes

Look at the descriptions below and decide which of Clutterbuck's five phases of mentoring each pair are currently in.

a. Nick has a mentor called Alison. She is in a very senior role and hardly ever available. He finds this frustrating and doesn't feel like he's had a chance to get to know her or talk about his development.

b. Sue is very happy to have Louise as a mentor. They get on well and meet regularly. Although they are very clear on what they expect from each other in terms of the relationship, Sue feels she needs help to set some goals and progress.

c. Parminder has been working with her mentor, Andrew, for 12 months. She has really progressed during their time as mentor and mentee but often feels like she knows what he's going to say.

Once you've chosen what phase they are in, consider what you would do next if you were in the mentee's position. Make notes in the box below.

Provide your answer...

Comment

a. Nick and Alison are still in Phase 1 – they haven't done very well building rapport just yet, so the next move will be for Nick to formally book some time in Alison's diary. If that doesn't work, it may be time to consider a different mentor.
b. Sue and her mentor have successfully completed Phase 1 – rapport-building, and now they need to move towards direction-setting (Phase 2). Sue should feel fairly comfortable about raising this with her mentor as they get on well.
c. Parminder is ready to wind down the relationship (Phase 4). She's starting to outgrow her mentor and is ready for new challenges. She must talk to her mentor and together they can find a way to move the relationship towards the more casual professional one outlined in Phase 5.

A mentoring relationship relies on honesty from both parties, so in each case it should be possible for the mentee to raise their issue. This is best done in a face-to-face situation and may provide a useful learning experience for both mentor and mentee.

Non-traditional mentoring processes

In the modern workplace, mentoring processes are diversifying. Dagli (2023) lists the following examples:

- Peer mentoring – colleagues at similar job levels share their experiences. Often used to help assimilate new hires into the company culture.
- Reverse mentoring – less experienced, often younger, employees mentor more senior staff, bringing fresh perspectives.
- Group mentoring – brings together one mentor and several mentees, creating a collaborative learning environment and fostering a sense of community.
- Flash mentoring – short, focused sessions, often used to address specific, immediate challenges, focusing on a particular topic or skill.
- Virtual mentoring – connecting through online platforms and transcending geographical barriers. A key advantage is its convenience and adaptability, particularly in remote or hybrid working environments.

As referenced in the final bullet point, with more organisations continuing to support models of hybrid or remote working, virtual mentoring is likely to increase in popularity. Goredema (2023) has some useful advice for maximising a virtual mentoring relationship, including:

- Adapt to your different work environment – if you're working from home, find a location that minimises background noise or distractions and aim to maintain confidentiality in the same way you would if you were meeting in person.
- Have a backup plan for technical issues – consider what you will use to continue your conversation if the internet connection goes down. Could you speak on the phone?

- Maintain connection – plan some conversation starters to help you get to know each other, such as ‘What are you working on today?’ or ‘What was the highlight of your week so far?’
- Don’t multi-task – stay focused on your conversation, close other windows, silence messaging apps, etc.
- Follow up – send a quick email thanking them for their time and highlighting a couple of details from the conversation.

In this section, you’ve focused on how a mentoring relationship develops and changes over time, and you’ve looked at some different mentoring approaches. Next, you’ll consider how mentoring can benefit all of those involved.

5 Who benefits from mentoring?



Figure 4 Sharing the benefits

Lots of people benefit from mentoring in different ways. For example, some value the opportunity to talk through their ideas with a ‘critical friend’, while others need the accountability that a mentor can provide.

Activity 4 Why mentoring matters

Allow about 15 minutes

Watch this video of people talking about why workplace mentors matter.

View at: youtube:S-01t1tVPIo

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In the box below, make a list of the key points expressed in the video.

Provide your answer...

Comment

You might have highlighted the mentoring process, for example, comments about having a number of mentors, meeting regularly or working through a development plan.

Or you may have picked out comments that illustrate the benefits of mentoring, such as personal growth, the mentor also learning from the mentee, or having your own cheerleader!

The key point here is that different people will look for/provide/value different elements in each mentoring relationship. Finding the right mentor is key to getting what you need from the relationship, and you’ll look at how to do that in Week 5.

The following table, adapted from the work of McKimm, Jollie and Hatter (2007, p. 3), lists some of the benefits of mentoring, to the mentee, mentor and organisation.

Table 1 Benefits for mentees, mentors and organisations

Mentee/Learner	Mentor	Organisational
• Develops learning, analytical and reflective skills • Develops organisational and professional knowledge • Develops political awareness • Develops own practice • Develops or reinforces self-confidence and willingness to take risks • Develops ability to accept criticism • Broadens horizons • Increases job satisfaction • Offers opportunities for effective role modelling • Encourages ongoing learning and developing, and identifying learning opportunities in the working situation • Offers help with problem solving	• Improves awareness of own learning gaps • Develops ability to give and take criticism • Develops up-to-date organisational and professional knowledge • Offers networking opportunities • Improves leadership, organisational and communication skills • Develops ability to challenge, stimulate and reflect • Raises profile within organisation • Increases job satisfaction • Offers opportunity to pass on knowledge and experience • Provides stimulation • May offer career advancement opportunities	• Widening of skills base and competencies in line with the organisation's strategic goals • Increased staff morale and job satisfaction • Develops habits of trust and confidentiality • Gives senior management a more informed view of the organisation's talent • Use for succession planning • Helps achieve mission/vision • Develops a mature management population • Improved quality of service through increased competence and confidence of supported practitioners • Improves teamwork and cooperation

Many organisations run formal mentoring programmes to develop and support their workforce. For example, they may be aiming to:

- offer orientation support to new staff
- enhance morale during a time of change
- develop staff who are currently under-achieving
- develop staff who are considered to have potential – succession planning for the future
- provide support for staff with a range of diversity characteristics.

In all these cases, the right kind of mentoring support can significantly enhance an individual's workplace experience and career development.

Now that you've spent some time looking at what mentoring is, the next section will allow you to consider what mentoring is not!

6 Mentoring misconceptions



Figure 5 Not what you expect

Understanding what mentoring can't do is an important part of your learning, whether you are a potential mentor or mentee. It highlights the need to set and agree clear expectations right from the beginning of the relationship.

Looking at the mentoring process in general, the Mentorloop team (2017) make the important point that 'mentoring is not a passive endeavour – it isn't just a conversation that happens occasionally, it should involve frequent, goal-orientated communication.' They also explain that 'mentoring is not a cure all – progress can't be made unless the individual has a desire to change and move forward, listening to advice and taking action.'

Ryan (2023) expands on the mentor's role in her blog post, 'What's the definition of a mentor… and what isn't?':

1. A mentor isn't: a task-manager – a mentee should be able to manage their own time and daily tasks, or look for support from a boss or colleague
2. A mentor isn't: a problem-solver – a mentee should consider their own solutions and bring them to the discussion
3. A mentor isn't: a gossip – a mentee must focus on the facts rather than unproductive communication
4. A mentor isn't: a networking tool – unless it seems appropriate, a mentee should avoid simply asking for introductions.

Looking from the perspective of an academic employer, the University of Edinburgh (Hutchinson, 2022) suggests that mentoring is not:

- the same as supervision or line management, and both mentor and mentee should be clear about the boundaries in the relationship
- an individual surrogate for poor / absent supervision or line management
- an institutional excuse for not dealing with a poor line manager.

In the following activity, you'll be asked to spot some common myths about mentoring.

Activity 5 Demystifying mentoring

Allow about 15 minutes

In her blog post, Cantalupo (2023) explains five myths about mentoring.

See if you can identify which five of the following are her myths:

1. Being a mentor takes too much time
2. A mentor must be a good listener
3. Mentoring is a one-to-one relationship
4. Mentoring can be just as effective virtually as it is face-to-face

5. The mentoring relationship must be open and honest
6. Mentors have to be older and/or more experienced than their mentees
7. Only mentees benefit from mentoring relationships
8. Mentoring is a feel-good thing, but it's not measurable
9. Mentoring can be formal or informal
10. Mentorship and sponsorship are two different things.

Comment

Cantalupo's five myths are:

1) Being a mentor takes too much time – it's actually not as demanding as many people think. Even an hour a month can make a significant impact on a mentee's career and personal growth.

3) Mentoring is a one-to-one relationship – as you've already read, there are different kinds of mentoring, including one-to-many or group mentoring and mentoring circles.

6) Mentors have to be older and/or more experienced than their mentees – age and experience don't necessarily equate with effective mentorship. In fact, younger leaders may provide new and innovative solutions that older ones may not consider.

7) Only mentees benefit from mentoring relationships – the opposite is true. As you saw from the work of McKimm, Jollie and Hatter (Table 1), the benefits for both mentors and mentees, as well as the organisation itself, are numerous.

8) Mentoring is a feel-good thing, but it's not measurable – with mentoring technology, both the qualitative and quantitative benefits of mentoring can be measured.

2), 4), 5), 9) and 10) are all true.

You've already seen that listening is one of the most important skills for both mentors and coaches.

Virtual mentoring doesn't suit everyone, but it certainly has the potential to be just as effective as an 'in person' interaction.

It is vital for a mentoring relationship to be honest and trusting, and a good relationship will be beneficial to both parties.

As long as the level of formality is agreed between both parties, a mentoring relationship can be formal or informal.

While a mentor shares their knowledge and expertise with their mentee, a sponsor proactively advocates for them across their own professional network. A mentor will often grow into a sponsor as they become more invested in supporting their mentee's career development, perhaps putting their name forward for a promotion or inviting them to meet key people.

Now that you've busted some myths about mentoring, after completing the Week 4 quiz you can go on to Week 5 and learn more about what mentoring could do for you.

7 This week's quiz

It's now time to complete the Week 4 badge quiz. It's similar to previous quizzes but this time, instead of answering five questions, there will be 15.

Week 4 compulsory badge quiz

Remember, this quiz counts towards your badge. If you're not successful the first time, you can attempt the quiz again in 24 hours.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window and come back here when you've finished.

8 Summary

By now, you should have a better understanding of how mentoring works, its history and its processes.

You should now be able to:

- describe the various phases of a mentoring relationship
- recognise the benefits of mentoring
- identify some of the misconceptions about mentoring.

Reflection

Use the box below to note down any actions you will take as a result of what you have learned this week. This will be useful when you come to Week 8, reflecting on what you have learned over the whole of the course and planning your next steps, but you can also use it to check on your progress at any point.

Provide your answer...

Next week, you'll focus more specifically on how to make mentoring work for you, looking at different mentoring techniques, identifying and setting clear objectives, and finding the right mentor.

You'll also learn how you can become a mentor. This might be something that interests you personally, but if not, understanding the process that potential mentors have gone through will bring useful insight.

You are now half way through the course. The Open University would really appreciate your feedback and suggestions for future improvement in our optional end-of-course survey, which you will also have an opportunity to complete at the end of Week 8. Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

You can now go to Week 5.

Week 5: How can mentoring help me?

Introduction

Welcome to Week 5 of the course.

Last week you focused on how mentoring works. You considered the phases of a mentoring relationship and explored the benefits to all those involved. You also looked at some common misconceptions about mentoring.

This week, you'll look at what mentoring can do for you. You'll explore typical goals and objectives, and look at some of the models a mentor might use to structure your discussions. You'll also focus on how to find the right match between a mentor and mentee, and finish by learning how you could become a mentor yourself.

Now watch the following video to introduce the week.

Video content is not available in this format.



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- identify the goals and objectives that a mentor can help you with
- find the right mentor for your needs
- describe how you might become a mentor yourself.

You'll start this week with a look at typical mentoring goals and objectives.

1 Setting goals and objectives



Figure 1 Setting goals

One of the first things your mentor will ask you about is your goals – both for your career and the relationship. The discussions you then have will enable you to set objectives and measure progress towards those goals.

So, it can be well worth spending some time thinking about goals before you meet for the first time. They could be goals for the mentoring relationship itself, such as ideas about how often you'd like to meet and for how long, and career goals you want to discuss.

Bright (2023) lists some broad topics for discussion with your mentor, including:

- career planning and development
- networking and relationship building
- conflict resolution and problem solving
- workplace culture and dynamics.

So, what career goals could a mentor help **you** with?

Activity 1 Identifying your career goals

Allow about 5 minutes

Try to answer the following question in 30 seconds.

What are your three most important career goals right now?

Provide your answer...

Comment

Life coach and hypnotherapist Bennie Louw (no date) explains his 'Quick List method' as follows:

> What we have found is that when you only have 30 seconds to write your three most important goals, your answers will be as accurate as if you had 30 minutes or three hours. Your subconscious mind seems to go into a form of "hyper-drive" and your three most important goals will pop out of your head and onto the paper, often to the surprise of the person doing the exercise.
>
> What did you come up with? Were your goals short, medium or long term?
>
> In career terms, Rowan (2011) suggests short term = 6–12 months, medium term = 1–3 years and long term = 3–7 years.
>
> As you learn more about mentoring and coaching throughout this course, you'll be in a better position to identify whether you need a mentor or a coach to help you to achieve the goals you have identified. For example, a mentor might be in a stronger position to facilitate profile raising or skills development in your workplace. A career coach might be a better choice if you know you need to change job or career, but don't know where to start.

In a career context you could have many different goals, ranging from raising your profile in the workplace to developing your skills in a specific area or even finding a new job. Your mentor will work with you to break your main goals into smaller, more manageable ones. Running a marathon might be a useful analogy. The marathon is the main goal and the smaller ones that will get you there might include: buying the right equipment; joining a running club; planning a training programme and implementing it; running a half marathon, etc.

You've already learned about the importance of asking thought-provoking questions in a mentoring or coaching relationship, so it will be helpful to think about some key questions you'd like to ask your mentor. Bright (2023) suggests 33 possible questions, including:

> Are there certain things I should be doing so that I can learn skills that will help me prepare for my own career?
>
> What's one thing you wish someone had told you when you were at the career stage I am currently?
>
> If you were me, how would you have approached X situation?
>
> Who are the people I need to align with in this organization to achieve success?

In the next section, you'll look at how a mentor might structure your discussions in order to support you in achieving your goals.

2 Using models and frameworks

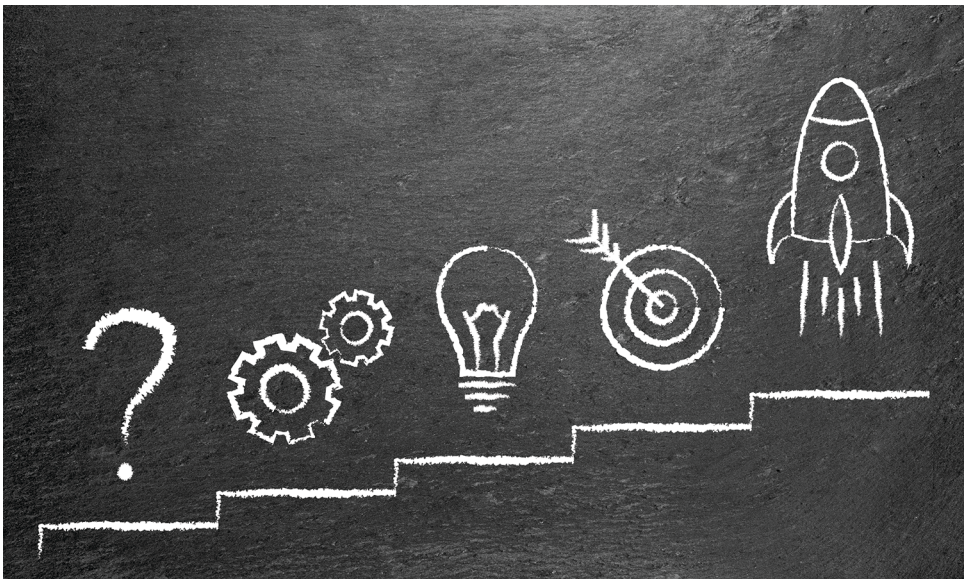


Figure 2 Models used in mentoring

Once you've identified your goal, the mentor will often use a framework or model to give structure to your discussions about how you might achieve it. In this section, you'll focus on two of these models.

Understanding the way a mentor might approach this can help you to work with them more effectively. You could use your understanding of these models to start thinking about a problem you are facing or a goal you have set yourself.

2.1 The 5 C Model

The 5 C model (Pegg, 1999, p. 139) supports a mentee who wants to focus on a particular set of challenges or has a range of options to decide between. The 5 Cs are:

- Challenges – an issue or problem the mentee is currently facing
- Choices – the options available to them for dealing with that issue or problem
- Consequences – the consequences of choosing one option over another
- Creative solutions – other solutions that the mentor and mentee might come up with during their discussion
- Conclusions – a decision about what to do next and a commitment to take action.

Harvey (2020) offers a useful list of the possible questions/prompts that a mentor could use at each stage, including:

Challenges

- Which is the first challenge you would like to explore?
- What outcomes would you like to achieve?
- What three things can you do to give yourself the greatest chance of success?

Choices

- What possible options do you have for tackling the challenge?
- What are the pros and cons of each option?
- What would happen if you ‘did nothing’?

Consequences

- Explore how attractive each option feels.
- Describe all the possible negatives.
- Rate the attractiveness of each option on a scale of 1-10.

Creative solutions

- Looking at the options you have generated, is it possible to take the best parts from each option and create a new road? How would this look?
- Learn from your own successful history.
- Explore best practice and positive models.

Conclusions

- Prepare your action plan with the key steps.
- What can you do to get some early success?
- Reality check – rate your desire to pursue this option, and rate the possibility of success on a scale of 1-10.

2.2 The G-STAR model

The G-STAR model (Lowbridge, 2012, pp. 32–3) can provide a useful structure to mentoring conversations, particularly if the mentee is facing a specific issue or has a specific goal they want to achieve.

In Activity 2, you’ll investigate the different stages of the G-STAR model.

Activity 2 What does G-STAR stand for?

Allow about 5 minutes

Choose what you think each letter stands for from the list of options

G options: Goals, Growth, Generate or Gaps?

S options: Situation, Strengths, Support or Steps?

T options: Thinking, Theory, Transition or Testimony?

A options: Actions, Achievements, Assets, Assumptions?

R options: Results, Reasons, Reality, Reactions?

G=
S=
T=
A=
R=

Comment

G = Goals
S = Situation
T = Thinking
A = Actions
R = Results

When using this model, the mentor will be exploring:

What are your **G**oals?
What **S**ituation are you facing?
What is your **T**hinking at this time?
What **A**ctions are you considering?
What **R**esults will you achieve?

Other frameworks often used in mentoring are the GROW model, which you'll explore in Week 7, and identifying SMART goals, which you'll consider in more detail in Week 8.

Now that you have a better idea of what you want to discuss with a mentor and how that conversation might be structured, you'll spend some time looking at how to find the right mentor for you.

3 Finding the right mentor



Figure 3 Looking for a mentor

There are several ways to find a mentor.

Find them yourself

Evidence suggests that mentees who find their own mentor tend to have a more successful experience. You might do this by approaching an individual directly. If you choose this approach, make sure you do your homework first. Know what you want from them and what you can offer in return.

Activity 3 Who might mentor me?

Allow about 20 minutes

Consider the goals you came up with in Activity 1. Who could best help you with those?

Start with your own network of contacts. A mentor could be anyone! Are there people at work who you could approach? Are there people outside work or within your local community? Do your friends or family know anyone who might be useful to talk to?

Think about the characteristics or experience you want to benefit from. For example, if you are thinking about starting your own business, an entrepreneur who seems to be doing well – regardless of their product or service – could offer some useful advice. Or if you want to enhance your profile within your profession – choosing someone well connected who might be prepared to introduce you to their contacts could be important. Remember, you aren't necessarily looking for a relationship that lasts for years – it may be that a single meeting will give you what you need to move forward.

Also, try to identify people that you have something in common with. If they can remember being in your shoes, they are more likely to want to help.

In the box below, start a list of possible contacts.

Provide your answer...

Comment

Once you've come up with a shortlist, rank them and then decide how you're going to make contact. A personal introduction is always a good way to start if you have a mutual contact. Use Week 8's next steps activity (Activity 2) to make a plan.

> If you are taking this course because you want to become a mentor – having a mentor yourself will be a useful experience. You can learn from their approach and techniques – either borrowing things you think are effective, or learning from their mistakes.

When you've decided who you're going to approach – it's important to approach them in the right way. For example, sending an email that says 'will you be my mentor' without trying to form some kind of connection first is likely to end in disappointment.

O'Connell (2023) suggests the following process, particularly relevant when approaching a stranger without an introduction from a mutual contact:

- Don't ask someone outright – start by engaging with them and their work. For example, you might share and comment on their updates on social media, attend events they'll be at and start insightful conversations with them, or help to solve their problems.
- Arrange an informal chat first – ask them for a coffee, or organise a casual video call. Say you'd love to talk to them about a specific topic and have some questions ready.
- Ask them to be your mentor – set expectations about the regularity you'd like, the goals you are working towards, challenges you are facing, and explain how you believe they can help you.
- Follow up – be patient when waiting for a response and don't be disheartened if they say no, express your gratitude for the time they've already spent with you.

Arranging an informal chat might seem easier said than done, but there are various ways to start the conversation. For example, you could highlight an article they have written or a topic they have commented on in a social media post, explaining that you'd be interested to discuss it further with them. Another approach might be to share that your ambition is to follow a similar career path and you would really value an opportunity to hear more about how they did it.

Through your employer

Many larger employers offer in-house mentoring schemes with formal matching processes. This process will be undertaken either by experienced staff or online matching software.

When the matching has been done by someone else, it can be more difficult to build the mentoring relationship. Refer back to Week 3 to remind yourself about building rapport and trust.

A lower maintenance option is for an organisation to hold a list of people looking for a mentor or mentee. It is the responsibility of the individual to contact potential mentors/ mentees from the list to discuss the possibilities further.

Independent mentoring organisations

If you're not currently in employment or your employer doesn't have a scheme, there are also independent mentoring schemes available.

For example, the Coaching and Mentoring Network lists coaches and mentors in an online directory with a keyword search. Clicking 'submit query' at the bottom right of the form reveals a more detailed list of search criteria.

Mentorsme.co.uk is an online provider of business mentoring, which offers a directory of mentoring services and organisations searchable geographically.

Alternatively, your professional organisation may offer a scheme that is appropriate for your specific occupation.

Now you've spent some time considering the mentoring relationship from the perspective of the mentee, the next section looks briefly at what is involved in becoming a mentor.

4 Becoming a mentor



Figure 4 Could I be a mentor?

If you have no interest in becoming a mentor at this point in your career, don't view this section as less relevant to you. Activity 4 will give you a useful insight into your own skills and experiences, helping to build your self-awareness. You might even be persuaded that mentoring is a role that you'd like to explore in the future! Remember – you don't have to know all the answers to be a successful mentor. Being able to offer reassurance to someone less experienced, helping them to think things through and connecting them with relevant people, can all be valuable mentoring activities.

There is no single path to becoming a mentor. For example, you might be asked directly by someone, volunteer to become involved in a workplace scheme or even set up a programme yourself. More important at this stage is the path towards deciding if you want to do it and what you hope to gain from the experience.

Any potential mentor should ask themselves the following questions:

- Do I want to openly and honestly share my knowledge and experience with others?
- Am I able to listen carefully and to give constructive feedback?
- Do I have the time to commit to a mentoring relationship?

If the answer to these questions is yes, the next thing to consider is what you want to gain from the experience. Is it the personal satisfaction of helping someone move forward in their career; the opportunity to add something positive to your own CV; or the probability that you'll also learn something, for example, from a younger colleague who might be more technically savvy than you?

Once you're clear on your own motivation, you can consider who you want to help and how.

Activity 4 Who could I mentor?

Allow about 10 minutes

Take some time to consider who you would like to mentor and what you have to offer them. For example, are you thinking about:

- staff in your workplace, e.g. junior staff, staff with particular lived experience of diversity, new staff etc.?
- young people considering their career options and opportunities, e.g. in a school, college or university context?
- entrepreneurs, e.g. small business start-ups?
- staff within your profession, e.g. through a professional organisation scheme?

In the box below, describe your ideal mentee. Try to identify a real person, for example, someone you work with or someone you have encountered in your local community. If you can't think of anyone – create a fictional individual. What are their characteristics? What do they need support with? Why do they need a mentor?

Provide your answer...

Now consider what you have to offer to that individual. For example, can you help to build their confidence, give them practical advice on making job applications, guide them through a particular project etc.

Provide your answer...

Comment

This activity will help you to clarify what type of mentoring you want to focus on and what you have to offer. You looked at the skills of a good mentor in Week 3. Do you feel confident that you have those skills? Are there any key skills you need to develop further before signing up to become a mentor? For example, do you need to look for opportunities to practise your listening skills? Use the next steps activity in Week 8 to make a plan.

If you don't want to be a mentor at this stage in your career – what have you learned about yourself through this activity? Are you now more aware of the support needed by a colleague? How can you help them without taking on a formal role? Have you realised that you do have something to offer that you hadn't previously considered? Or do you feel you have nothing to offer yet – how can you change that?

4.1 Building your mentoring skills

Key areas to work on are communication skills, empathy and goal setting. There are many scenarios that will allow you to develop and enhance those skills, from communicating with members of your team in the workplace to setting goals for your own children.

Practise being really present in every conversation – not cutting the other person off or jumping in to finish off what you think they're going to say, but really listening and responding in a measured and thoughtful way.

The Indeed Editorial Team (2024) offers useful advice about becoming a better mentor. You'll notice that most of the following examples focus on strong communication:

- Get to know your mentee – it's beneficial to invest time in getting to know them as a person, e.g. finding out about their educational background, personal goals, etc.
- Allow them to learn from your mistakes – this might be challenging, but can help to build trust as well as improving their problem solving skills.
- Know what you have to offer – before you start, make a list of your skills, strengths, useful networks etc. and be clear about what you can and can't help with.
- Celebrate their successes – this allows you to practice empathy and demonstrates that you understand their perspective.

You will find out more about training for mentors in Week 8.

4.2 Progressing your career

An Art of Mentoring post (no date) presents the following list of ways that being a mentor can benefit your career:

1. Become a better leader
2. Learn more about your company or profession
3. Achieve personal career gains
4. Shape the leaders of tomorrow
5. Gain new perspectives and fresh ideas
6. Put your finger on the pulse of a younger generation
7. Change someone's world
8. Exercise emotional intelligence
9. Strengthen the lessons you've already learned
10. Improve productivity
11. Feel good about yourself.

Expanding on point 3, the author refers to research conducted by Sun Microsystems between 2010 and 2015, which found that employees who had acted as mentors were six times more likely to be promoted than those who hadn't, and 20% more likely to get a pay rise.

Of course, having a mentoring role on your CV will also be of interest to future employers. It provides evidence of your commitment to learning and development; a range of important communication skills such as building rapport, listening and questioning; and your desire to share your knowledge and experience, benefitting your mentees and your organisation. This could be particularly relevant if you are applying for a management or leadership role and want to demonstrate your interest in developing and supporting people.

5 This week's quiz

Now that you've completed Week 5, you can take a short quiz to help you to reflect on what you've learned.

Week 5 practice quiz

Open the quiz in a new tab or window and come back here when you've finished.

6 Summary

By now, you should have a better understanding of what a mentor could do for you and how to find one. You've also considered what you could offer if you became a mentor yourself.

You should now be able to:

- identify the goals and objectives that a mentor can help you with
- find the right mentor for your needs
- describe how you might become a mentor yourself.

Reflection

Use the box below to note down any actions you will take as a result of what you have learned this week. This will be useful when you come to Week 8, reflecting on what you have learned over the whole of the course and planning your next steps, but you can also use it to check on your progress at any point.

Provide your answer...

Next week, you'll change your focus to career coaching, investigating what it is and why it works, and looking at some of the most common coaching approaches that are used in that context.

You can now go to Week 6.

Week 6: Understanding career coaching

Introduction

Welcome to Week 6 of the course.

Last week you focused on what mentoring could do for you – looking at how a mentor can help you to set and achieve goals, and learning how to find the right mentor. You also considered how you might become a mentor yourself.

This week, you'll shift your perspective to look at career coaching. You'll see how career coaching has developed over time, what it can do and why it works.

Now watch the following video to introduce the week.

Video content is not available in this format.



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- understand how and why career coaching has developed
- recognise the difference career coaching can make
- describe some of the theory that underpins coaching.

You'll start with a brief summary of the history of coaching that will underpin your understanding of the approaches and processes that coaches use.

1 A brief history of coaching



Figure 1 The origins of coaching

The word ‘coach’ was initially used to describe a horse drawn vehicle, but its transition to meaning ‘instructor’ probably began in the 1830s, when it was used at Oxford University as a slang word to describe a tutor who was ‘carrying’ a student through an exam. Later in the nineteenth century, it started to be used in sporting circles to describe an individual who helped an athlete to improve and move forward.

In the 1970s, people started to realise that the coaching approach used in sport could add value to life in general. In 1975 Tim Gallwey, a successful US tennis player, first wrote his bestseller *The Inner Game of Tennis: The Ultimate Guide to the Mental Side of Peak Performance* (2015). This book was one of the first to focus not just on fitness, but on the ‘battle within ourselves as we try and overcome self-doubt and anxiety’. He soon found himself in demand from US business professionals as well as sports people.

Activity 1 Are sports coaches as tough as we think?

Allow about 15 minutes

When we see sports coaches on television or in films, they are often portrayed as tough, unsympathetic characters – sometimes even bullies.

Watch this clip created by Burger Fiction and Esquire.

Movie coach super speech

In the box below, summarise the approach of a sports coach as it is portrayed in the film clips presented.

How does this differ from your understanding of a career/life/business coach and what they do?

Provide your answer...

Comment

As business coaching grew out of sports coaching, it is useful to explore the differences and similarities between them, but the media portrayal doesn’t always present the full picture.

While the media often depicts lots of shouting and belittling of players who don’t perform, the reality can be very different.

In his LinkedIn blog post, Andrew Neitlich (2016) explains that what we see on the sports field is the coach as a manager – managing the game and their team, for example, shouting from the sidelines.

> Behind the scenes, the approach is more aligned to how we imagine life or business coaching. For example, the coach will ask the players questions about their performance, encouraging them to take accountability and offering them feedback.

Cox et al. (2024, p. 2, Table 0.1) explain how the more directive coaching approach, which was used in the early days to educate trainees or apprentices, has adapted and changed over time:

Table 1 Transitions from traditional coaching

From	To
Coach requires expertise/knowledge of the task	Coach requires expertise/knowledge of the coaching process
Driven by the coach's agenda, or, at best, an agreed agenda	Driven by the client's agenda
Client performance (doing)	Client development (becoming)
Skills acquisition (building knowledge of the task)	Capability development (building insight and self-knowledge as stepping stones to more substantive change)
Meeting standards set by others	Meeting standards set by the client

(Cox et al., 2024)

As you can see, the emphasis has changed and is now placed on the coachee or client driving the process and affecting their own transitions.

Career coaching has taken career development theory plus decades of careers advisers' and career counsellors' experience, and combined it with the tools, techniques and positive, solution-focused approach of modern coaching.

In the modern workplace, a range of individuals might take on a coaching role. Cox et al. (2024, p. 3) present a list of coaching roles that they have observed within a range of organisations, some more successful than others:

- Line manager as coach – not always effective as they often won't have sufficient time to dedicate to the coaching relationship and may not be able to prioritise the client's agenda.
- Coaching role model – senior managers receive training and act as role models for good coaching practice and as champions for the coaching agenda within the organisation.
- The expert coach – experienced employees are rewarded for transferring knowledge and skills to others. The coaching skills required are arguably too similar to instruction giving and there are potentially similar issues to line manager as coach.
- The internal coach – a professional coach working full time within the organisation. May be constrained by hierarchical structures and find it difficult to take an independent perspective.

- The performance coach – typically an external professional brought in to achieve task-specific behavioural change in a relatively short time.
- The developmental coach – also an external professional brought in to focus on broader, longer-term changes in the client as a professional.

Now that you've explored how coaching has evolved in the workplace context, the next section provides case studies to show you how it can impact on individuals.

2 What can coaching do?

Listen to what Dr Julia Yates has to say about the typical issues that people see a career coach about.

Video content is not available in this format.



One of the most powerful ways to learn what coaching can do is to hear from others who have already experienced it.

1. John and his self-doubt

John was already a successful manager, progressing up the career ladder through a range of increasingly complex roles. He reached a point where he started to doubt his capability and realised that a coach could help him. His goal was to gain more self-confidence and the coach helped him to do that, offering useful techniques and tips. Over the course of a year he used her as a sounding board for his plans and ideas, and hearing her reflect them back to him gradually convinced him that he was competent and effective in his role.

John's advice for others considering coaching: *Do it now!*

2. Ginny and her need for change

Ginny was feeling stuck in her job. She knew she needed to change something but felt overwhelmed when she tried to look for answers. Her goal was to feel good at her job again so she had the confidence to explore what the future might hold. Her coach helped her with practical productivity tools and challenged her assumption that she was no good at her job. Over a period of six months she was gradually reassured, and her confidence grew. This enabled her to re-set her expectations

about what work could or should be. Shortly afterwards, she made the positive decision to leave her job to set up her own values-based business.

Ginny's advice for others considering coaching: *Don't do it if you think coaching is the answer – coaching is just the beginning of the answer.*

3. Paul and his organisational crisis

Paul was struggling to keep up with both operational and strategic matters. This was especially difficult as he was also managing and restructuring a large team and dealing with crisis management. He had professional supervision and was benefitting from co-coaching with peers but needed to focus on his organisational skills. His coach introduced him to a system he could use to compartmentalise and monitor each distinct area of his work, for example, email, project planning etc. Paul implemented this methodology and it made a huge difference. Now, he can confidently pinpoint the material he needs and plan key tasks regularly and realistically.

Paul's advice for others considering coaching: *Be clear on what you need to achieve and focus on that goal.*

4. Rachel and her aspirations

Rachel was in her mid-20s when she first worked with a coach. She had reached a point in her job where she needed new challenges and was starting to wonder whether to stay or go elsewhere. Her coach asked challenging questions about her aspirations and whether they were possible in her current context. Her coach listened and shared observations and that allowed Rachel to see herself differently. It became clear that what she needed was a new job in another organisation and Rachel now felt confident that this was the right decision.

Rachel's advice for others considering coaching: *When approaching a coach, ensure there is rapport, connection and trust. If you don't get on, get another coach; a lack of fit doesn't mean coaching doesn't work.*

You can see from these examples that coaching can be beneficial for people at any stage in their career. It can help with specific operational tasks or broader confidence issues, as well as career transitions.

Activity 2 Common themes

Allow about 10 minutes

Now that you've read the four brief case studies, can you see any common themes in the ways that the various coaches helped their clients? Note your ideas in the box below.

Provide your answer...

Comment

Self-confidence is a recurring theme. John, Ginny and Rachel all needed to find the confidence to progress, and Paul's self-confidence had been affected by his struggle to keep on top of everything.

Listening and challenging were key to the coach's role in most of the cases – the exception being Paul where a more solution-orientated coaching style was adopted.

It isn't always easy to distinguish between executive coaching and career coaching in the workplace, as the issues are often interconnected. Dr Julia Yates explains in the following video.

Video content is not available in this format.



There are numerous stories to tell about how coaching has helped and inspired individuals to make changes and improvements to their life and work. But what makes coaching so effective? In the next section, you'll start to explore why coaching works.

3 Why coaching works



Figure 2 Conversation with a coach

Yates (2022, pp. 4–5) suggests that while career coaching is still an emerging field, research already supports the efficacy of the tools and techniques it uses. For example, she cites studies demonstrating that:

- one-to-one and group career interventions are effective (Whiston et al., 2017 – quoted in Yates, 2022)
- career coaching has been shown to enhance clients' levels of career optimism and career security (Ebner, 2021 – quoted in Yates, 2022)
- career coaching improves job satisfaction (Fassiotto et al., 2018 – quoted in Yates, 2022)
- career interventions substantially raise people's chances of getting a job (Liu et al., 2014 – quoted in Yates, 2022).

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that coaching works, but why does it work?

Cox et al. (2024, pp. 6–8) set out three theories of adult learning that they feel underpin all of coaching practice:

1. Malcolm Knowles' (1978) work on andragogy (the method and practice of teaching adult learners) – focusing on what motivates adult learning, including self-direction and a need for relevance. These motivations are clearly reflected in coaching practice, which supports the client to identify their most relevant issues and to come up with their own solutions.
2. David Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning, in which he suggests that our ideas are not fixed and irreversible, but are 'formed and re-formed through experience' (Kolb, 1984, p. 26).
3. Jack Mezirow's theory of transformative learning (2003), which explains how something, for example, a life event or a coaching interaction, can challenge our thinking and give us a new perspective that leads to change.

There isn't time to cover all three adult learning theories in detail on this course, so you'll focus on Kolb's theory. This is a process that you can usefully apply when reflecting on your own experiences. References are given, should you be interested in exploring the other theories further.

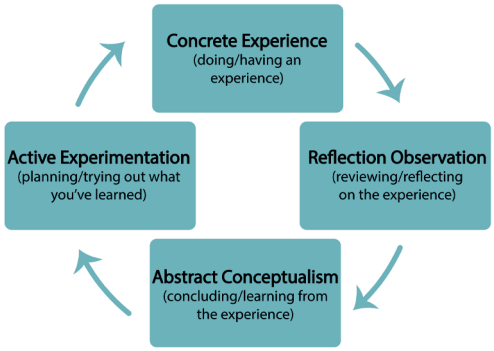


Figure 3 Kolb's theory of experiential learning

Reflecting on an experience, drawing conclusions, and implementing what you've learned is key to making progress, and a coach can provide support throughout that process.

Activity 3 My experiential learning

Allow about 20 minutes

Use the process outlined by Kolb to assess an experience that you have had. For example, it could be a disagreement with someone at work, a difficult issue you've had to discuss with a child, a leisure activity you've tried for the first time etc.

In the boxes below, make notes for each stage:

1. Concrete experience

Describe the experience.

Who was involved?

Where did it take place?

Provide your answer...

2. Reflective observation

Was it a positive or negative experience?

Did something go wrong?

Did something go particularly well?

Was the outcome what you expected?

Were you surprised by what happened?

Provide your answer...

3. Abstract conceptualism

What did you learn from the experience?

Did you receive any feedback? If yes – how did it make you feel?

What would you do differently next time?

Is there anyone you could discuss it with to get their perspective?

Provide your answer...

4. Active experimentation

When can you test out your learning?

Will the situation occur again or do you need to organise it?

Provide your answer...

Comment

Although this activity is a self-reflective exercise, the questions outlined above are the types of questions a coach might ask in a discussion about a particular situation or issue.

Cox et al. (2024, p. 8) conclude that these three adult learning theories 'are at the heart of all adult learning and development and consequently are at the heart of coaching practices'. You'll explore a range of different coaching approaches in Week 7.

Now that you've got a better idea of what coaching is, in the next section you'll explore what coaching is not, by looking at some common misconceptions.

4 Coaching misconceptions

The University of Exeter HR department (no date) has compiled a useful list of misconceptions about coaching in the workplace, presented in the form of common questions from staff, including those shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4 Questions about coaching

You can explore some of these questions further in Activity 4.

Activity 4 Doubts about coaching?

Allow about 15 minutes

Here are excerpts from four of the answers supplied by Exeter. Can you match them to the question given below?

a. *The nature of the coaching relationship is characterised by mutual trust, mutual respect and freedom of expression. Confidentiality is one of the hallmarks of coaching.*
b. *Most people are coachable some of the time, but not everyone is coachable all of the time. An important factor in coaching is the readiness of the coachee.*
c. *While coaching is not intended to be a quick fix, many coachees experience tangible results after one or two coaching sessions. Coaching for engaged and motivated people … can lead to some remarkable and rapid changes in thinking and behaviour.*
d. *It's more important for the coach to have the skills and abilities to help you transform yourself and acquire the skills you need. The most helpful coach is one who listens to you and helps you reflect on your choices, behaviours, interpretations and judgements.*

Questions:

1. Isn't coaching only for senior managers and leaders?
2. Does it take a long time to see the results of coaching?
3. Isn't it risky to open up and talk frankly to a coach?
4. Isn't coaching too 'touchy feely', like therapy?
5. Is it true that everyone is coachable?
6. Will a coach tell me how to do my job?

7. To be able to help me, shouldn't the coach have a similar background?
8. Won't I lose face with my staff and peers if I have a coach?

a)
b)
c)
d)

Comment

a. Isn't it risky to open up and talk frankly to a coach?
b. Is it true that everyone is coachable?
c. Does it take a long time to see the results of coaching?
d. To be able to help me, shouldn't the coach have a similar background?

Do any of these questions reflect your own queries or concerns about coaching? If you want to read more of the Exeter article, here's the link:
13 Myths About Coaching

There are many online articles and blog posts aimed at dispelling the myths about coaching. Olubamiji (2023) outlines some of the most common misconceptions about career coaching specifically. They include:

- career coaching is only for those at a crossroads or in crisis
- career coaching is only for executives or high level professionals
- if I'm good at my job, I don't need career coaching.

At this stage in the course, your learning should already be telling you that these perceptions are wrong! Anyone who wants to can benefit from career coaching.

5 This week's quiz

Now that you've completed Week 6, you can take a short quiz to help you to reflect on what you've learned.

Week 6 practice quiz

Open the quiz in a new tab or window and come back here when you've finished.

6 Summary

By now, you should be feeling more informed about what career coaching is. You've explored some of its history and looked at how it can make a difference to individuals in the workplace. You've also looked in more detail at how Kolb's learning theory underpins the coaching approach.

You should now be able to:

- understand how and why career coaching has developed
- recognise the difference career coaching can make
- describe some of the theory that underpins coaching.

Reflection

Use the box below to note down any actions you will take as a result of what you have learned this week. This will be useful when you come to Week 8, reflecting on what you have learned over the whole of the course and planning your next steps, but you can also use it to check on your progress at any point.

Provide your answer...

Next week, you will continue to look at career coaching, this time with an emphasis on how coaching can benefit you. You'll start by looking in more detail at a range of the techniques and approaches coaches use.

You can now go to Week 7.

Week 7: How can career coaching help me?

Introduction

Welcome to Week 7 of the course.

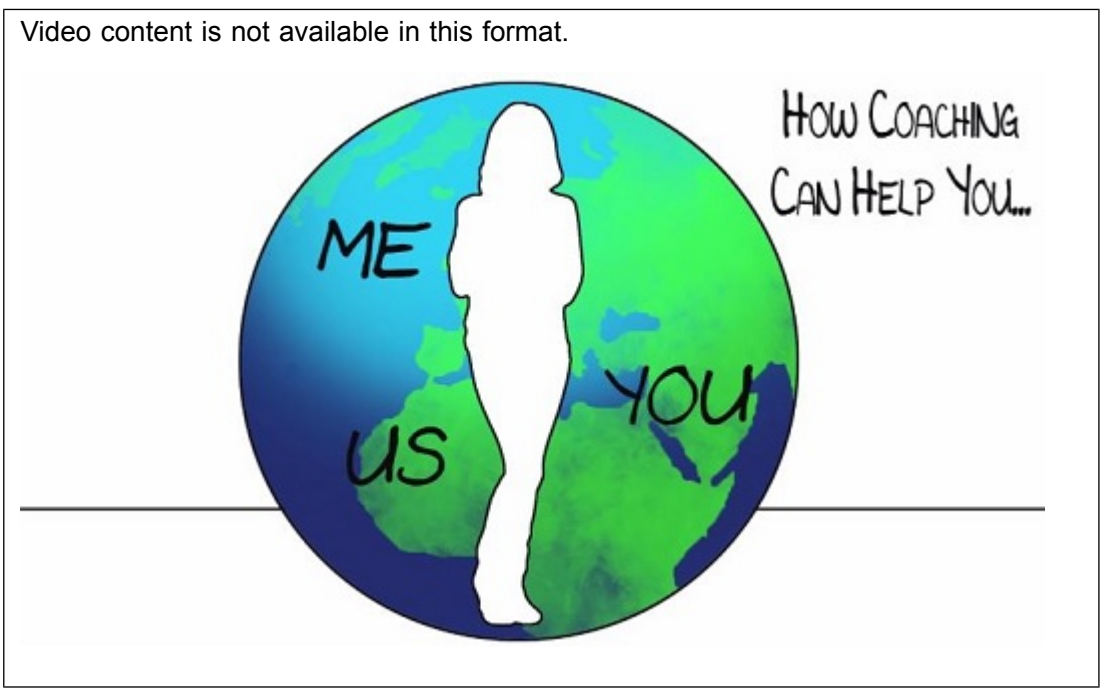
Last week you started to look at coaching, exploring its history and some of the theory that underpins it.

This week, you'll focus on what coaches can do for you, looking in more detail at some coaching approaches and practices that are commonly used in a career coaching context. You'll also investigate how to find the right coach for you and explore how to become a coach yourself.

It is important to note that there are numerous approaches, tools and techniques available to coaches, and in a short course we only have time to touch on a small number. The approaches discussed this week have been chosen due to their particular relevance in career coaching.

Now watch the following video to introduce the week.

Video content is not available in this format.



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- recognise some key coaching approaches and practices
- identify the right coach for you
- understand the process of becoming a coach.

A quick online search will identify many different coaching styles and approaches, but you'll start this week by looking at two of those that are particularly relevant to a careers coaching context.

1 Person-centred coaching



Figure 1 Focus on the person

The person-centred, sometimes known as ‘humanistic’, approach to coaching is based on the work of Carl Rogers in the 1950s. Van Nieuwerburgh (2020, p. 170) explains that Rogers based his thinking on two foundational premises:

- People are their own best experts and therefore best placed to understand their own perceptions and make their own decisions.
- The natural human tendency is to strive towards self-actualisation i.e. to be the best that we can be.

The role of the coach is to encourage the coachee to come up with their own suggestions and decisions, and to support them in removing any obstacles to their growth and development.

A common analogy, one used by Rogers himself (Redwood, 2015), is that of a plant struggling to grow towards the light, and the coach or counsellor helping to provide the right conditions for optimal growth.

In a later paper, Rogers (1962) outlines how the coach can make a relationship a ‘growth-promoting climate’:

- Congruence – the coach is genuine and authentic.
- Empathy – the coach feels and demonstrates empathy.

- Positive regard – the coach has a warm, positive acceptance attitude.
- Unconditionality of regard – the coach maintains a positive feeling without reservations, evaluations or judgements.

The positive attitude of the coach towards their client is fundamental to this approach and might not always be easy to maintain. This is often known as unconditional positive regard (UPR).

Yates (2022, p. 110) asks, 'Is it possible to increase your UPR?' and suggests that there are two elements a coach can usefully reflect on:

- Be aware of the kinds of things that might make UPR challenging, for example, political affiliation, religious beliefs, personal preferences and experiences, values etc.
- Find out where your client's views have come from and this should make it easier to empathise with them and understand how they've ended up where they are.

Activity 1 Can I be non-judgemental?

Allow about 5 minutes

Kate has come for her first appointment with her coach, Janice. She feels stuck in a rut and sees opportunities for promotion passing her by. As they talk about her current role, she begins to reveal a negative attitude towards immigrant workers in her organisation who 'get all the best jobs'. She clearly feels that they are stopping her from progressing as she'd like to.

Janice's husband is from overseas and has recently obtained UK citizenship.

If you were Janice, how would you react to this conversation?

What would be an appropriate response?

Make notes about your thoughts in the box below.

Provide your answer...

Comment

Even if you disagree with her views, understanding that Kate feels ignored and unappreciated should help you to empathise with her.

A non-judgemental response might be to say 'Ok – so you haven't managed to get a promotion yet. What jobs have you been going for?' This could then lead into a discussion about Kate's skills and experience, and some further clarification about the types of roles she's applying for and whether they are the right ones for her.

Responding to Kate this way is more likely to build trust and encourage her to continue the discussion. The discussion could then be focused on how she can improve her chances of success rather than what might be stopping her.

Based on the belief that the client will know what's best for them, person-centred coaching can be a useful approach for career issues where someone is nervous or frightened to make a change or struggling with head versus heart decisions, such as '*I know the sensible choice would be X but my heart tells me to do Y.*'

Yates (2022, p. 116–117) suggests a range of phrases and questions that might be used when taking a person-centred or humanistic coaching approach. They include:

- Tell me a bit more about that.
- I was just wondering about that decision.
- Now that you've shared some of your story with me, how does it sound to you?

Next, you'll look at cognitive behavioural coaching (CBC).

2 Cognitive behavioural coaching (CBC)



Figure 2 Thoughts and feelings

The basic principle underlying CBC is that our thoughts and feelings directly influence our behaviour. Thus, if our thoughts and feelings about an event or issue are negative or self-limiting, our behaviour will be too.

Williams et al. (2014, p. 35) list the main goals of CBC as to:

1. facilitate the client in achieving their realistic goals
2. facilitate self-awareness of underlying cognitive and emotional barriers to goal attainment
3. equip the individual with more effective thinking and behavioural skills
4. build internal resources, stability and self-acceptance in order to mobilise the individual to their choice of action
5. enable the client to become their own self-coach.

Basically, the coach needs to look out for examples of ‘thinking errors’ (Yates, 2022, p. 151) and to explore whether they are reasonable assumptions on the part of the client.

One way they might do this is to ask the coachee to replace any performance interfering thoughts (PITs) with performance enhancing thoughts (PETs) whenever they come up. Over time this can be a very effective technique.

Williams et al. (2014, Table 2.2, p. 40) present a useful example of PITs and PETs, focused on the activity of making a presentation.

Table 1 PITs and PETs

Performance interfering thoughts (PITs)	Performance enhancing thoughts (PETs)
It's going to go badly	It will be at least okay
I'm terrible at making presentations	Some have gone well, some less well, but overall I'm reasonable at making presentations
Visions of being unable to speak and of being laughed at	Visions of making the presentation with a mistake or two, but overall going well
The audience will be bored	How do I know? I haven't even given the presentation yet!

See if you can identify some of your own PITs and PETs in Activity 2.

Activity 2 My PITs and PETs

Allow about 20 minutes

Think of a situation, such as a job interview or a difficult conversation, where you might have performance limiting thoughts (PITs). This could be an upcoming event or something that has happened in the past but is likely to recur. List your PITs in the left-hand column of the table below. When you've done that, try to convert them into thoughts that make you feel more positive about that situation (PETs), and list those on the other side of the table.

Table 2 My PITs and PETs

PITs	PETs
Provide your answer...	*Provide your answer...*
Provide your answer...	*Provide your answer...*
Provide your answer...	*Provide your answer...*
Provide your answer...	*Provide your answer...*
Provide your answer...	*Provide your answer...*

Comment

This is not a one-off exercise that will solve every problem. It requires practice, but can eventually lead to a powerful change in your feelings about an event or activity.

CBC helps clients to link their feelings, thoughts and behaviours. It provides techniques to deliberatively change those thoughts, thus leading to a change in behaviour.

A typical scenario where this might be useful in a career context is when an individual has a fear that isn't grounded in reality, such as believing that they could never do a particular type of job or that they wouldn't get it anyway as they can't perform well in interviews.

Yates (2022, p.155) shares the following questions that can be useful when a client is displaying thinking errors:

- What's your evidence for thinking that?
- How would you feel about someone else who was in your position? Would you judge them as harshly as you are judging yourself?
- You say you're awful at that. Let's think about a scale running between excellent at 10 and awful at 1. Where would you put yourself?

In the next section, you'll look at a framework that is popular in the workplace, and regularly used by both coaches and managers.

3 The Grow Model



Figure 3 Growing upwards

Most effective coaches draw on a variety of frameworks to give structure to their coaching sessions.

A popular example is the GROW model (Whitmore, 2017). The coach may not always explain the model to the coachee, but you'll explore it in more detail here to gain some insight into how coaches often focus their support during a session.

Each letter stands for a stage in the process:

G = Goal
R = Reality
O = Options
W = Way forward (or 'will')

When a coach uses the GROW model with you, there are often different levels to each stage. For example, when setting goals, they will start by exploring your main career goal, for example, to find a new job. They must then break that down into a goal for the session that will allow you to move forward.

In the reality part of the process, the coach helps you to really understand where you are right now, analysing what has happened to bring you to this point, how you are feeling about it etc. During this conversation, you might find that the main goal for the session changes.

In order to generate options, the coach wants you to do the work! You know best what your options are, and it is their job to help you articulate those options clearly, not to suggest options for you.

When it comes to determining the way forward, the coach will help you to narrow down your options and set a realistic timescale for each specific step you plan to take. Again, they won't suggest actions for you as evidence shows that you are much more likely to take action if you own your action points. However, they will make sure that the actions

are as specific as possible and suitably challenging. Action points that are too easy are unlikely to inspire and motivate.

Throughout the process, the coach will use a range of tools and techniques to encourage you to think about your situation and your goal – encouraging you to look from a different perspective, perhaps even tapping into your subconscious brain.

Activity 3 How can I GROW?

Allow about 15 minutes

Watch this video of the GROW model in action.

Video content is not available in this format.
The GROW model in action!



The video showed someone who was struggling with his presentation skills. Think of something specific that you'd like to achieve in a work context and make it your goal for this activity. You may have come up with something appropriate when you identified your career goals in Week 5, Activity 1. Fill in each of the boxes below.

My Goal

Provide your answer...

The Reality of my current situation

Provide your answer...

My Options

Provide your answer...

A Plan for the way forward

Provide your answer...

Comment

The key benefit of using a model such as GROW is that it provides structure. By thinking an issue through in stages, you can often identify and articulate the solution much more clearly.

The added advantage of working through this structure with a coach is that they will encourage you to think in different ways, view things from a different perspective etc., allowing you to imagine and articulate solutions that you might not have come up with on your own.

Now you have a better idea of how a coach might support you, you can start to look at identifying the right coach to offer you that support.

4 Finding the right coach

The 2023 International Coaching Federation's 'Global Coaching Study' (ICF, 2023) estimates that there are approximately 109,200 professional coach practitioners world-wide, with approximately 30,800 (the largest share) operating in Western Europe.

So, how do you choose the right one for you?

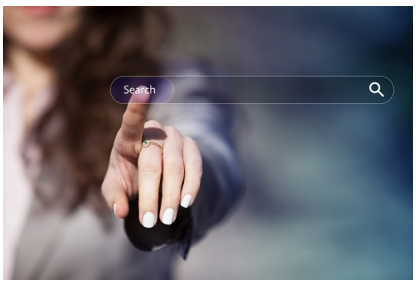


Figure 4 Search criteria

Budkowski (2016) lists some key considerations in his blog post 'How to choose the right coach: 15 simple principles to follow', including:

- Remember that you are the client – you have the right to have doubts and ask questions.
- Check where the coach was trained.
- What is their real coaching experience, e.g. how many hours, how many clients?
- How do they monitor/assess the quality of their work?
- Does the coach follow written ethical principles?
- Do you get along?
- Have they produced content, e.g. blogs, articles etc.?
- Does he or she continue to learn?
- What opinions do previous clients have?
- Are goals set during the first session?
- Do you make a contract?

Do your research. As Budkowski suggests, seek out testimonials and recommendations. Most coaches will have a website that tells you a little about them, their experience, their specialisms etc. Having the chance for a 'chemistry session', to check whether you can build rapport and trust with each other, can be very valuable. Many coaches offer an initial conversation free of charge.

Even if a specific coach has been recommended or put forward by your employer, meeting or talking to them before you agree to work together is an important part of the process.

You should also consider the mechanics of the relationship – are you happy to be coached via telephone or Zoom, or would you rather have face-to-face interactions with your coach?

Activity 4 Key characteristics of your ideal coach

Allow about 10 minutes

You've looked at the skills of a good coach (Week 3) and considered what you might discuss with them (Activity 1, Week 5), but what characteristics are you looking for in the individual you choose?

For example:

- Is there any specific knowledge or expertise you would like them to have, e.g. small business experience?
- Would their gender make a difference to you?
- Would they need to be older than you?
- Do they need to have the same occupational background as you?
- Do they need to have similar interests or would you prefer them to have a completely different perspective on life and work (coaches often share some personal information on their websites etc.)?

Write a summary of your thoughts in the box below.

Provide your answer...

Comment

Did you decide you'd prefer a coach who was very similar to you? Sometimes, talking to someone with a very different perspective can be transformational! Talking to your prospective coach before signing up to a series of sessions is so important. The key element of a good coaching relationship is rapport, and that is something you can only gauge when you begin a conversation.

If your perspective for this course is to explore becoming a coach yourself – think about the characteristics you came up with – how does that reflect on the potential client group you are considering? Does it matter if the type of coach you would like for yourself is different from the type of coach you want to be?

4.1 Where to look for a coach

Your workplace may offer internal or external coaching programmes – contact your Human Resources department to find out more.

If you work in a small organisation without an HR department, you could look for a coach yourself. There are several organisations that provide lists of qualified coaches. For example, 'Coaching at Work' offers an online 'Coach Directory', searchable by professional body membership or service offered. The International Coaching Federation (ICF) in the UK also has a searchable directory. Under 'Coaching theme' you can select 'Job/Career Change'. To identify an international list of coaches, visit the global site for the ICF and search their coach finder tool under location.

Ask friends, relatives and colleagues for recommendations – especially if you are looking in your local area. You might be surprised by what the members of your personal network can suggest. A Google search for coaches in your location might also prove useful, but remember to check the credentials of anyone you identify.

If you've been inspired by what you've read and considered, and are thinking about stepping into the coach's shoes, the next section will briefly explain how to do that.

5 Becoming a coach



Figure 5 Supporting people

Even if you are not currently interested in training to be a coach, this section will give you a useful insight into the thinking that your coach should have done before choosing their role.

As with mentoring, there is no single career path to becoming a career coach. Some people find themselves informally coaching colleagues, realise they enjoy it and decide to investigate further. Others may choose to transfer their own experience from a related area, e.g. careers advice, training or human resources. Many will undertake a coaching qualification, combining both theoretical learning and practical experience. It is also possible to undertake an apprenticeship in coaching, sometimes sponsored by an employer.

Although coaching is not currently a regulated industry, most successful coaches will either have a relevant qualification or extensive expertise in their field.

Even without a professional qualification, a good coach will use a relevant framework to clarify/measure their competencies, behaviours, etc. The European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) (Abrahamsson et al., 2015, p. 5) has identified a framework of core competencies against which to benchmark individuals and coaching programmes:

1. **Understanding self**

   Demonstrates awareness of own values, beliefs and behaviours; recognises how these affect their practice and uses this self-awareness to manage their effectiveness in meeting the client's objectives.
2. **Commitment to self-development**

   Explore and improve the standard of their practice and maintain the reputation of the profession.
3. **Managing the contract**

   Establishes and maintains the expectations and boundaries of the mentoring/coaching contract with the client.
4. **Building the relationship**

   Skilfully builds and maintains an effective relationship with the client.
5. **Enabling insight and learning**

   Works with the client to bring about insight and learning.
6. **Outcome and action orientation**

   Demonstrates approach and uses the skills in supporting the client to make desired changes.
7. **Use of models and techniques**

   Applies models and tools, techniques and ideas beyond the core communication skills in order to bring about insight and learning.
8. **Evaluation**

Gathers information on the effectiveness of own practice and contributes to establishing a culture of evaluation of outcomes.

You'll find out more about coaching training in Week 8.

In Week 3, you considered what makes a good coach. You looked at key skills, such as the ability to listen and question, and to establish rapport. In Activity 5, you'll start to consider whether you have the right skills and attributes to be a coach yourself. Even if you don't want to become a coach at this point in your career, these are all skills that can be useful in the workplace, for example, when working in teams and with a wide variety of different people. Evaluating your proficiency might give you some goals for self-development that you weren't previously aware of.

Activity 5 Auditing my coaching skills

Allow about 20 minutes

In the table below, you will find a list of commonly described skills that a coach needs, taken from the materials summarised in Week 3. Under 'Proficiency', score your level of expertise against each skill/ability as follows:

0 = no experience yet
1 = basic
2 = competent
3 = proficient

Under 'Evidence', add at least one example of when you've demonstrated that skill.

If you are struggling to get started, you might find it useful to refer back to some of the self-awareness and reflective work you did in the activities of Week 2.

When you've completed the task, ask someone who knows you well whether they agree with your assessment.

Table 3 Coaching skills

Skill	Proficiency	Evidence
Listening	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*
Questioning	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*
Challenging constructively	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*
Establishing rapport	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*
Empathy	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*

Inspiring and motivating	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*
Self-confidence	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*
Being non-judgemental	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*
Having discretion and integrity	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*
Wanting to help others achieve their potential	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*
Self-awareness	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*

Comment

Are there any key skills or aptitudes you need to develop further? For example, how do you feel about being non-judgemental about your coaching clients?

For the final part of the activity, talking to someone who knows you well can help you to understand whether your perceptions of yourself are accurate. They may also have ideas to add. Many people underestimate their own abilities!

Even if you don't currently have ambitions to become a coach, this type of exercise can enhance your self-awareness.

5.1 Building your skills

If you're interested in becoming a coach, you will probably already have many relevant skills and attributes, such as empathy and the ability to establish rapport. But you may need to work on developing some of the others, for example listening and summarising.

Watch coaching expert Dr Julia Yates explain how to build relevant coaching skills in the following video.

Video content is not available in this format.



To build your coaching skills, you might look for opportunities to listen to and support your colleagues. Practice asking them challenging questions and ask them for feedback regarding whether they were helpful.

You can practise building rapport by talking to strangers (in an appropriate setting!) and trying to find some common ground.

Benefits to your own career

Becoming a coach can bring advantages to an individual in many areas of life.

Van Nieuwerburgh (2020, p. 190) describes six things that you can start to do every day:

- Listen to others
- Allow for choices
- Show an interest in others
- Provide helpful feedback
- Believe in others
- Encourage others to identify meaningful goals.

Apply these rules to everyday conversations with your family, at work etc. and you'll see a difference in the quality of your interactions with other people.

If you currently lead a team, adopting a coaching approach can enhance team relationships and allow you to communicate more effectively with them.

Julia Yates shares what she has gained personally from becoming a coach in the next video.

Video content is not available in this format.



One other reason why many people consider coaching as a potential career is the opportunity to set up your own business. If you crave autonomy and flexibility alongside all the other elements listed – coaching could be the career for you!

6 This week's quiz

Now that you've completed Week 7, you can take a short quiz to help you to reflect on what you've learned.

Week 7 practice quiz

Open the quiz in a new tab or window and come back here when you've finished.

7 Summary

By now, you should have a better idea of the wide range of approaches that coaches use with their clients. You've sampled some of the tools and techniques that accompany them and you've considered how you might apply that knowledge to choosing the right coach for you. You've also looked briefly at what is involved in becoming a coach.

You should now be able to:

- recognise some key coaching approaches and practices
- identify the right coach for you
- understand the process of becoming a coach.

Reflection

Use the box below to note down any actions you will take as a result of what you have learned this week. This will be useful when you come to Week 8, reflecting on what you have learned over the whole of the course and planning your next steps, but you can also use it to check on your progress at any point.

Provide your answer...

Next week, you'll finish the course by considering what you've learned, identifying your next steps and setting some SMART goals.

You can now go to Week 8.

Week 8: What next?

Introduction

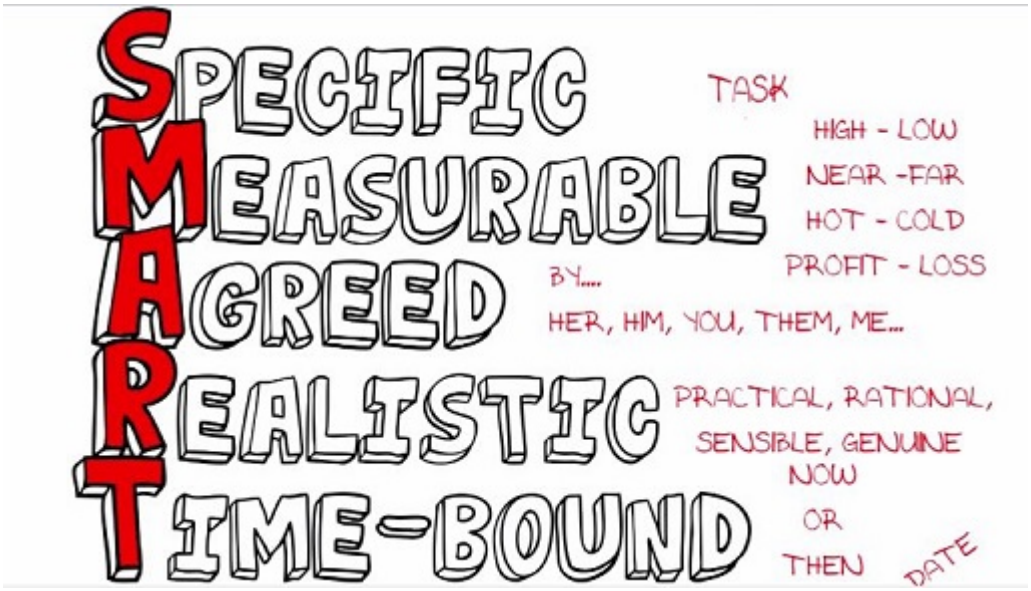
Welcome to Week 8, the final week of the course.

Last week, you looked at some key coaching approaches and techniques, finding the right coach for you and how you might become a coach yourself.

This week will help you to reflect on what you've learned throughout the course and make some decisions about your next steps.

Now watch the following video to introduce the week.

Video content is not available in this format.



By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- evaluate how coaching and mentoring can support your career development
- identify your next steps and set SMART goals
- describe possible scenarios for the future of coaching or mentoring.

You'll start by reflecting on what you've learned.

1 What have I learned?

This course has covered a wide range of topics relating to mentoring and coaching. Some of the themes may be more familiar to you than others, but hopefully each week has offered ideas and suggestions that are relevant and interesting.



Figure 1 Summarising learning points

You'll start this week with an activity that encourages you to look back over the course and reflect on what you've learned each week.

Activity 1 Pulling it all together

Allow about 40 minutes

Review your notes and responses to each activity, then summarise your key learning points in the boxes below. These notes don't need to be too detailed – thinking in bullet points should help to capture the key points. You may already have done some of this thinking when using the reflective boxes to record future actions in each week's Summary section.

If you have printed out the PDF document of all your answers to the activities, refer to that now. If you haven't and would like to, choose the option to download given underneath the 'My answers' section on the left-hand side of the page.

Week 1

Provide your answer...

Week 2

Provide your answer...

Week 3

Provide your answer...

Week 4

Provide your answer...

Week 5

Provide your answer...

Week 6

Provide your answer...

Week 7

Provide your answer...

Comment

Summarising your learning in one place should illustrate how your knowledge and understanding of mentoring and coaching has developed over the last eight weeks. You can now use that to work out your next steps.

As you learned in Week 2, self-reflection plays an important part in the mentoring and coaching process, boosting your learning and development. So, the more you can practise this technique, the more proficient you will become.

What did your summarising in Activity 1 show you? For example, you may have decided that you need a mentor and have already identified some specific issues you could discuss with them. Hopefully you'll also have some ideas about who you'd like to approach.

Alternatively, you may have decided that a coach is for you. Perhaps the self-awareness activities in Week 2 have made you realise that you need some help pinpointing what you want to do next in your career.

Or maybe you have decided that you'd like to be a mentor or a coach. If so, this course will have given you a useful insight into the skills and aptitudes you will need.

In the next section, you'll narrow down your options further and start to plan your next move.

2 Planning my next move



Figure 2 What next?

Now that you know what you want to do next, you can start to set some goals that will help you to get there.

Another way to consider your goals will be to review the actions you recorded in the reflective boxes in each Summary section – are there any actions you haven't had time to undertake yet? Could you use those in your goal setting?

You might have decided that a key goal is to find a mentor or a coach, or to become one yourself. If you don't feel ready to explore mentoring or coaching further at this point, focus on developing your self-awareness as that will form a strong basis for any personal development you might undertake in the future.

Try to make the goals you come up with SMART:

S = Specific

M = Measurable

A = Agreed

R = Realistic

T = Time bound

In your Toolkit, you'll see a Goal Setting tool, which takes you through the SMART process and helps you to write down and plan your goals. If you choose to access this, you'll notice that R = Relevant, A = Achievable and the acronym has been expanded to SMARTER, adding Engagement and Reward to the list of letters. There are various different interpretations of the SMART tool and you should choose the one that resonates for you.

In this course, we've chosen to use 'Agreed' as you may need to agree your plans with a current manager, particularly if you want to take time for mentoring or coaching during your working day and within your work context. 'Realistic' has been chosen as it's important that your goal is achievable and that you've identified and can remove any potential obstacles or constraints, such as financial cost to either yourself or your organisation.

If none of this resonates with you, there are other goals setting tools available, such as HARD (*heartfelt*, *animated*, *required* and *difficult*) and PACT (*purposeful*, *actionable*, *continuous* and *trackable*), which we don't have time to cover in detail here, but that you can easily explore using your preferred search engine.

Swann (2024) suggests that to be effective for the individual in that specific situation, different types of goals should be set in different circumstances. He goes on to explain that setting the wrong goal can be detrimental and lead to feelings of failure, and proposes two important questions to ask yourself:

- Are you already good at the task? – If you already have the ability and resources to pursue the goal, then a specific goal will probably work best. He recommends aiming high!
- Are you new to/still learning a complex task? A learning goal will work better for you instead. For example, focus on identifying a number of strategies that you aim to try out in order to get better at something.

Tables 1 and 2 show one way of breaking down each goal. In Activity 2, you will be able to come back and fill in the last three boxes (outcome, evaluation, next step) after you have completed your planned actions.

Table 1 Scenario A

Goal	**To find a mentor to help me progress at work**
Current status: a. **Experience** b. **Knowledge** c. **Skills**	a. I haven't had a mentor before b. I don't know if my workplace offers any relevant schemes c. I have started to develop my self-awareness but need more practice
Development/training/knowledge needed to reach my goal	Understand the options that are open to me either at work or outside my organisation
Action plan	Research the options – internal and external: • Internal e.g. talk to staff with HR responsibilities – if nothing internal, what can they recommend? • External – investigate mentoring programmes offered by my professional body or association, or look online
Outcome	I found out that my employer does offer an in-house scheme so I put my name down and now have a mentor
Evaluation	The relationship is developing well and I have a clearer sense of how I might progress
Next step	To put into practice some of the suggestions made by my mentor, by the end of the year

Table 2 Scenario B

Goal	**To train as an internal coach for my organisation**
Current status: a. **Experience** b. **Knowledge** c. **Skills**	a. I haven't had coaching training but do informally support various colleagues b. I don't know if my workplace offers any training opportunities c. I have the relevant skills and an interest in helping others find their potential

Development/training/knowledge needed to reach my goal	I need to undertake some relevant training to consolidate my skills and build my confidence and credibility
Action plan	Explore coaching training options – internal and external: Internal – talk to HR staff to see if they offer anything for internal coaches External – look online
Outcome	My employer does not offer training for internal coaches, but may consider funding my training externally – I am currently in discussion with my line manager and HR about possible options
Evaluation	I am close to signing up for a course that will meet my needs, so I feel satisfied that I am on track
Next step	Complete the course and take on my first internal client by October next year

Activity 2 Achieving my goals

Allow about 30 minutes

Now it's your turn! Use the template below to set your goals and work through your next steps. If your workplace has a template that is used to support performance review processes etc., use that if you prefer. You could also use the Goal Setting Tool in your Toolkit.

Table 3 Setting my goals

	1	2	3
Goal	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*
Current status: a) Experience b) Knowledge c) Skills	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*
Development/ training/ knowledge needed to reach my goal	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*
Action plan	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*
Outcome	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*

Evaluation	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*
Next step	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*	*Provide your answer...*

Comment

If you have identified more than one goal, prioritise your action plans. Are they sequential or can you do them all at once? Make sure you don't take on too much alongside your day job – if you don't achieve all your goals this can be a negative experience.

You should now have a set of relevant goals, and an action plan for achieving them.

In the next section, you'll look at some of the useful resources available to help you in your next steps.

3 Mentoring and coaching training and resources



Figure 3 Useful resources

If you're interested in becoming a mentor or a coach, training is an important consideration. Even if you have decided that option isn't for you yet – read on to gain some useful insights. Activity 3 in the next section will be valuable regardless of your future goals.

Throughout this course you've looked at the skills of a good mentor or coach and the models, frameworks and techniques that they might use. There are many books and courses that can teach you to use those tools and provide you with practical experience.

3.1 Mentoring training

While you can become a mentor without any formal training, and this course will have shown you the basics, you might find it useful to learn more about mentoring in a situation where you can interact with others and practise your skills.

If you work in a large organisation, they may offer a formal mentoring programme. If they do, it is likely that they will also offer some relevant training. This will allow you to explore the role in more detail, learning about how it is implemented in your organisation, what record keeping is required etc.

If you work in a small organisation, they may have an informal scheme that doesn't incorporate training, or there might be nothing in place at all. In that case, you might want to explore some of the external organisations that offer relevant training.

You could start with your own professional body or association to see what they offer, but there are also independent training companies offering courses, both in person and online.

Before you pay for an independent training course, ask the following questions:

- Will this course help me to develop the right skills and take me closer to achieving my goals?
- Is the course practically or theoretically based, or a mix of the two? What suits my needs best?
- Do I feel inspired/motivated by the content/style of delivery etc. of the course?
- Will there be regular opportunities to receive feedback on my progress?
- Will the course be recognised by employers, current and future?
- Can I talk to previous participants before signing up?

Do as much research as possible before signing up. Courses can be expensive, and you don't want to choose one that isn't going to add something to your CV, build your mentoring skills and confidence, or allow you to develop a useful peer support network – preferably you'd like all three!

In Activity 3, you'll look at a typical example of a mentoring training activity. Even if you don't want to undertake mentoring training, this activity will be useful for anyone who ever has to give feedback.

Activity 3 Giving feedback

Allow about 15 minutes

This typical mentoring training activity focuses on giving feedback appropriately and effectively. This activity is adapted from an example provided by Trainingcourse-material.com (no date).

Look at this criteria for effective and ineffective feedback.

Table 4 Effective and ineffective feedback

Effective feedback	Ineffective feedback
Describes the behaviour which led to the feedback: 'You are finishing my sentences for me…'.	Uses evaluative/judgemental statements: 'You're being rude'; or generalised ones: 'You're trying to control the conversation'.
Is owned by the provider, who uses 'I' messages and takes responsibility for his thoughts, feelings and reactions.	Ownership is transferred to 'people', 'the book', 'upper management' etc.
Includes the provider's feelings about the behaviour (as long as they are relevant): 'I get frustrated when I'm trying to make a point and you keep finishing my sentences.'	Feelings are concealed, denied, misrepresented or distorted. One way to do this is to 'transfer ownership'.
Is checked for clarity, to see that the receiver fully understands what's being conveyed.	Not checked.

Specifies consequences of the behaviour: 'If you keep finishing my sentences I won't want to spend much time talking to you in the future'.	Provides vague consequences: 'That kind of behaviour is going to get you into trouble'; or specifies no consequences: 'You shouldn't do that.'
Refers to behaviours about which the receiver can do something.	Refers to behaviours over which the receiver has little or no control.

Now look at the sentences below and use the criteria provided to identify which of them deliver effective feedback.

1. 'When you interrupt me like that, it makes me want to stop talking to you.'
2. 'You're really overreacting to what I just said.'
3. 'When you continue to talk so softly, even after I've said I have trouble hearing you, I get frustrated and want to end the conversation.'
4. 'It really doesn't matter to me, but a lot of people would really be upset with what you just did.'
5. 'Do you understand what I mean when I say you're sending me a double message?'
6. 'That kind of adolescent behaviour won't get you anywhere around here.'
7. 'I could work with you more easily if you had a better sense of humour.'

Comment

The more effective statements are:

> 'When you interrupt me like that, it makes me want to stop talking to you.'
> 'When you continue to talk so softly, even after I've said I have trouble hearing you, I get frustrated and want to end the conversation.'
> 'Do you understand what I mean when I say you're sending me a double message?'

Statements 1 and 3 describe the behaviour, include the provider's feelings about it and specify potential consequences.

Statement 5 checks for clarity to ensure that the receiver understands the feedback.

3.2 Coaching training

As mentioned in Week 7, coaching is not currently a regulated industry. However, this is likely to change in the future and many coaches already have relevant qualifications.

Large organisations may offer training programmes for staff interested in internal coaching, i.e. coaching colleagues within the organisation. Ask your Human Resources team for more information. If not, there may be funding available for you to train externally as part of your own professional development.

If your employer is unlikely to fund your training, or you are not currently in employment, there are many independent training providers offering coaching courses and qualifications.

Try to find courses that are recognised or accredited by one of the three leading professional associations in the UK:

- European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC)
- Association for Coaching (AC)
- International Coaching Federation (ICF)

Check out their websites to find out more about how they accredit courses. They also offer advice and information about individual accreditation, as well as news pages, blogs etc.

Each organisation has a subscription fee, which will give you access to members-only resources, such as recent research and discussion groups.

There are also many useful publications available, written primarily for coaches or trainees. For example:

- *The Complete Handbook of Coaching* (2024), 4th edn., Sage Publications.

  Edited by Elaine Cox, Tatiana Bachkirova and David Clutterbuck, with chapters from leading, international professionals, it is presented in three parts: theoretical perspectives; genres and contexts; professional practice issues. It is viewed as the most comprehensive and accessible overview of the field today, and new editions seek to include the latest developments and ideas.

  This book is full of practical examples and case studies, and a new online teaching guide provides videos and further reading to support learning.

  It would be particularly useful for coaching practitioners and trainees.
- *An Introduction to Coaching Skills: A Practical Guide* (2020), 3rd edn., Sage Publications.

  Written by Christian van Nieuwerburgh, this book is aimed at novice and trainee coaches. It takes a step-by-step approach that is easy to follow, and is written in an honest and encouraging style. It is a practical book, full of activities and coaching questions to try.

  It also links to a companion website, which presents numerous videos to illustrate different coaching behaviours and their impact.
- *The Career Coaching Handbook* (2022), 2nd edn., Routledge.

  Written by Julia Yates, who you have seen in short video clips throughout this course, this book combines the latest career development research with the most up-to-date coaching approaches, allowing the author to clearly explain what career coaching offers to clients.

  It has an engaging and straightforward style aimed at new practitioners looking to enhance their career coaching practice.

From a US-based coach's perspective, The Coaching Tools Company (Elsey, 2024) suggests 'The top 15 coaching books to make you a better coach'. The list includes examples from some key authors in the field, including Sir John Whitmore who developed the GROW model. Find the link to this article in References.

Now you've looked at some of the resources available to help you progress, the next section rounds off the course by looking at the future of mentoring and coaching.

4 The future of mentoring and coaching



Figure 4 The future

As mentoring and coaching continue to grow in popularity, becoming more professional and providing clearer benefits, it is interesting to consider what might come next as these services develop further. It seems likely that our appetite for online provision and social media interaction will have an impact, and that clients will demand increasingly professional products and services from their mentors and coaches.

How do you think mentoring and coaching might change?

4.1 The future of mentoring

Many commentators have a view on the future of mentoring.

In a recent white paper, coaching and mentoring organisations PushFar and Sheridan Worldwide (no date) make the following predictions about the future of mentoring:

- Mentoring will be used to support internationalisation – helping to connect, engage and empower teams working remotely and globally.
- Organisations will support Generation Z (many of whom felt the impact of the pandemic on their education and early careers) through mentoring – building their loyalty and helping them to get what they want from the workplace.
- Mentoring will be used to support mental health and well-being – building hope, resilience and capability amongst employees who may fear what the future will bring.

In addition, Reeves (2023) predicts the following trends:

- The use of AI powered mentoring tools – matching suitable mentors and mentees, and monitoring progress
- Peer mentoring across different sectors
- Organisational impact measurement – assessing how it boosts productivity and employee retention

- Skills based mentoring and mentoring focused on reskilling – focused on both technical skills and softer skills such as communication and problem solving
- Greater use of mentoring programmes tailored to specific groups, e.g. groups with particular diversity characteristics, returnees after a career break, etc.

Virtual mentoring, or mentoring that uses virtual platforms ranging from Zoom to specifically developed programmes, has certainly grown in popularity since 'work from home' regulations during the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated it. Many organisations have recognised its benefits for those working remotely or across different countries, and so the practice has continued to develop.

In a time before the Covid-19 pandemic, Rashid (2015) saw it from a slightly different perspective, using the phrase 'virtual mentor' to mean someone we don't have to connect directly with or spend precious time chasing to organise meetings. This is still a useful concept. In his blog post, he recommends simply watching a video, finding a podcast or reading a book that they have produced to learn 'everything (or at least the most important things) [your] hero and mentor has dedicated decades and thousands of hours of his or her life mastering'.

Activity 4 Who could become your 'virtual mentor'?

Allow about 30 minutes

In his blog post, Rashid (2015) identifies his own virtual mentors, explaining why he follows their work and what he gets out of it.

Do you have any virtual mentors already – people who you follow on social media, for example, Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn – who talk about the issues that matter to you and share wisdom and experience that you find inspiring and useful?

If you already have people you learn from in this way, list them below and try to explain what you gain from them.

If not, identify someone and summarise what is interesting about them here.

A useful way to start might be to look for TED Talks or YouTube clips on career-related topics that interest you. Then see if the speakers are on Facebook or LinkedIn etc. (start with social networking platforms that you are already on). For books, look on Amazon or in your local library for any they may have written.

Provide your answer...

Comment

Highly regarded 'virtual mentors' in this context include the likes of leadership expert Simon Sinek (see the clip about mentoring in Week 4, Section 2) and champion of productivity Chris Bailey (alifeofproductivity.com). One advantage of following the social media posts or blogs of such individuals is that when you've learned what you need, you can end the relationship without any awkward conversations!

4.2 The future of career coaching

When exploring the views of different commentators on the future of career coaching in particular, there are some interesting themes emerging. One of these is the possible impact of artificial intelligence (AI).

Box 1 The use of AI in career goal setting

For their research, Terblanche et al. (2022) divided 327 undergraduate students into four groups – those who would see a human coach once per month for six months and those who had access to an AI chatbot coach, 24/7, as many times as they wished over the same period. There were two control groups who received no coaching support. At the beginning of the process, participants were asked to specify two goals that they wanted to work on over the phase of the project, and progress was measured at eight time points through an online survey.

In both studies, human and AI coaches were found to be significantly more effective in helping clients reach their goals compared to the control groups who worked without support. More surprisingly, results showed no significant difference between the success of the human coaches compared with the AI chatbot.

The authors suggest that in the case of goal setting, the 'rigour and mechanistic execution of goal theory by the AI coach and its inability to deviate from a set process […] compensated for its lack of human intelligence' (Terblanche et al., 2022).

While one interpretation could be that the role of human coaches will eventually become defunct – it is perhaps more likely that the opposite will be the case. You've learned throughout this course that empathy and the ability to build rapport are crucial to effective mentoring and coaching, and these very human abilities are currently beyond the scope of AI. Many individuals will continue to prefer human contact over 'mechanistic execution', particularly as they will often need support in identifying appropriate goals to pursue. In this study, the AI only became involved once the goal had been specified.

One very positive point is that this could increase the scalability and availability of coaching in countries and across demographics where coaching is currently inaccessible, often due to cost. The authors suggest that 'If AI can help democratize coaching, more first-time users of coaching services would be exposed to the benefits of coaching' and that, given the clear limitations of an AI coach, this could in fact create more opportunities for human coaches.

They close with a recommendation that human coaches should 'evaluate their coaching maturity and invest the necessary resources to improve their coaching knowledge and skills to ensure that they offer their clients a valuable and relevant service' (Terblanche et al., 2022). This could support the profession's desire to introduce regulation into the industry, reducing the number of unqualified and inexperienced coaches who have no desire to learn and develop and are operating at the same level as an AI chatbot.

As the world of work continues to change, with an increase in remote working and the growth in AI technologies, new roles will continue to emerge – some of which may be of interest to career coaches themselves, such as:

- **Future of work coach** (Verd, 2023) – plays a pivotal role in guiding individuals and organisations through this transformative period in the workplace, ensuring that humans harness AI to their advantage, adapt to change, and thrive in a dynamic work environment. Verd explains, ‘It is about igniting human potential in the age of disruption and equipping people with the skills, mindset, and strategies necessary to thrive in an ever-evolving work landscape’.
- **Learning ambassador** (Merrill, 2019) – helps clients and employees to proactively identify skill gaps in a changing workplace, then helps them to choose the right learning experience to acquire and apply new skills that close those gaps.

While there are clearly lots of exciting possibilities for the future of career coaching, there are some fundamental aspects that need to make progress too. Career coach and academic Dr Julia Yates has this to say about her hopes for what might come next:

Video content is not available in this format.



5 This week's quiz

Congratulations on almost reaching the end of the course.

It's now time to complete the Week 8 badge quiz. It is similar to the badged quiz that you took at the end of Week 4, with 15 questions in total.

Week 8 compulsory badge quiz

Open the quiz in a new tab or window and come back here when you've finished.

6 Summary

This week, you have pulled together your learning from the course as a whole, and considered how you can use that knowledge to support your next steps.

You've spent some time identifying key goals, and actions to support them, and investigating useful resources for further research.

Finally – you've briefly considered the future of mentoring and coaching.

You should now be able to:

- evaluate how coaching and mentoring can support your career development
- identify your next steps and set SMART goals
- describe possible scenarios for the future of coaching or mentoring.

Congratulations! You have come to the end of the course. Don't forget that to finish the course and get your badge you will need to complete this week's quiz.

Where next?

If you've enjoyed this course, you can find more free resources and courses on OpenLearn. If you have not already done so, you might be especially interested in looking at our other badged courses on employability.

New to University study? You may be interested in our Access courses or certificates.

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Tell us what you think

Now you've come to the end of the course, we would appreciate a few minutes of your time to complete this short end-of-course survey (you may have already completed this survey at the end of Week 4). We'd like to find out a bit about your experience of studying the course and what you plan to do next. We will use this information to provide better online experiences for all our learners and to share our findings with others. Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

Further reading

Coaching and Mentoring network

Mentorsme.co.uk

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