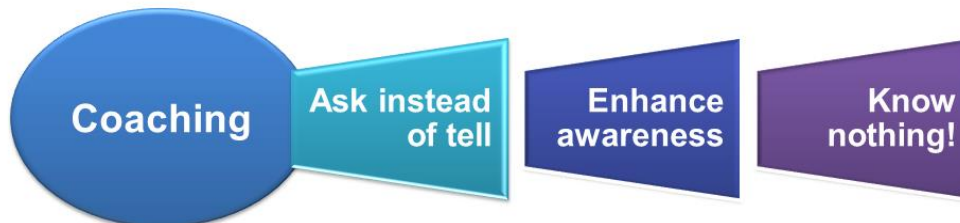


## The Difference Between Coaching and Mentoring

What is the difference between coaching and mentoring? Some organisations use the terms interchangeably, but I believe they are two different things:

### Definition of coaching:



Coaches work on improving the performance and wellbeing of an individual or group through setting goals, exploring values and beliefs, and creating plans of action. This is achieved not by advising or telling, but largely by questioning to facilitate awareness and self-directed learning. The coach does not require any knowledge, skills or experience of the coachee's field of work. In fact, ignorance here can be an advantage, and may encourage the coach to ask more neutral and less leading questions.

### Definition of mentoring:



I would define Mentors as people who impart their own experience, learning and advice to those who have less experience in the particular field. In modern business, the practice of delivering mentoring in a coaching style is on the increase.

The term originates in ancient Greece, with Homer's classic poem, 'The Odyssey', in which Odysseus appoints a guardian called Mentor to look after his son in his absence, as a teacher, guide and friend.

## The coaching-mentoring-managing continuum

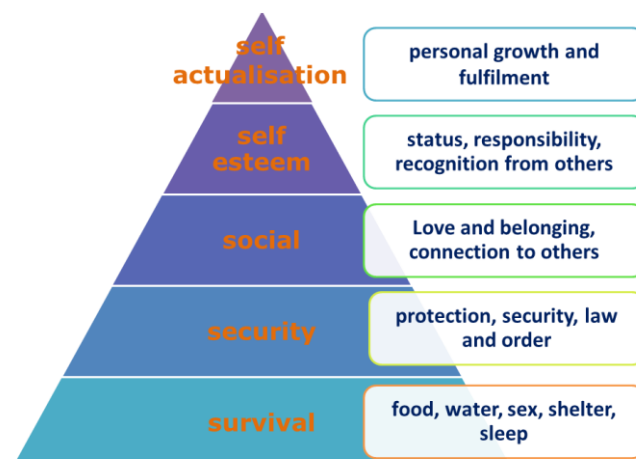
Learning coaching skills and having a coach are both becoming a regular part of a leader's working life today. One of the current challenges most frequently heard from coaches and leaders alike is when to coach, when to offer advice and when to be directive, either at work or in the coaching relationship. An effective manager today must be able to move smoothly along the continuum between coaching, mentoring and directive management:



## The history of coaching

Coaching has its roots mainly in psychology and sports coaching. However, early psychology, up to and during the time of Freud and Jung, was largely remedial and remained so even when it later developed through behavioural and cognitive therapies. Therapy was about identifying what was wrong with the subject and attempting to fix it.

In the 1960s, humanistic psychology was developed, the key figures being Abraham Maslow, renowned for his 'Hierarchy of Needs', and Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt Therapy. The breakthrough made by these psychologists was that they started to look at what was right with people rather than what was wrong – focussing on their best potential rather than their problems. The Hierarchy of Needs places 'self actualisation' at the top of the human evolutionary journey.



Maslow focussed on the top of the triangle: how to reach the pinnacle of achievement and satisfaction. He believed that the process of reaching upwards would solve problems lower down on the way.

### *The founders of coaching*

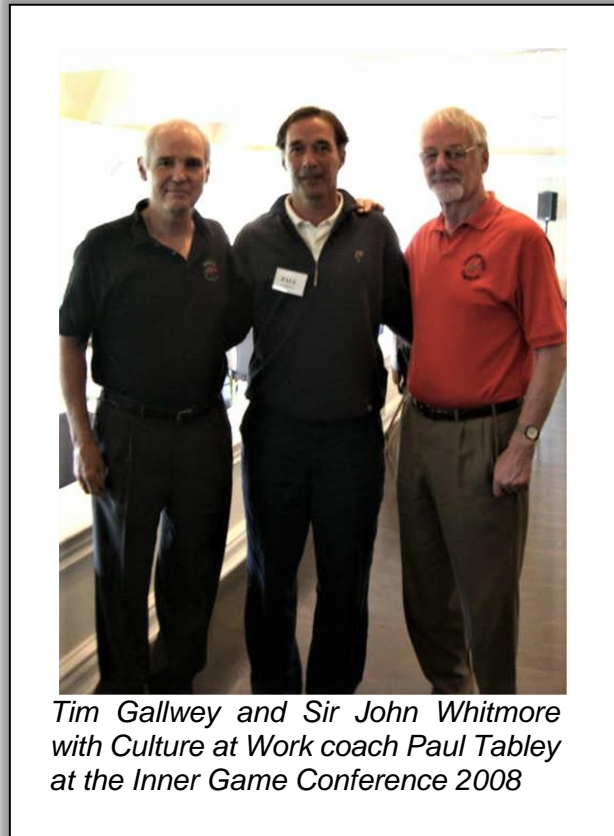
It was not until the 1970s that a tennis coach applied the principle to coaching. Timothy Gallwey was a Harvard graduate who, while on sabbatical, became captain of the Harvard tennis team. Gallwey noticed that when he left the court, his students tended to improve faster than when he was there to instruct them.

Already a disciple of spirituality and psychology, Gallwey explored this paradox and developed a series of techniques to encourage the benefits. One of his key findings was to apply 'directionality' – naming one's goal before starting out. Gallwey wrote a series of books called 'The Inner Game', applying this and his other theories to performance in life and work as well as sport.

During the 1980s, Gallwey's work was embraced by English baronet, the late Sir John Whitmore, who brought the techniques to Europe and founded schools of skiing and tennis to develop them. At one point, Whitmore's team was asked to provide a day of 'self-directed' tennis coaching by a large organisation which wanted its managers to incorporate the Inner Game approach into their leadership styles. This was termed 'Performance Coaching' to differentiate it from conventional sports coaching, and Whitmore wrote a book about it called 'Coaching for Performance', which has since been translated into 19 languages and has become something of a bible for coaches and organisations.

And this, it seems, is how the term 'coaching', to which the fields of psychology, business and self-development have all contributed so much, originated.

Executive, business, career, personal and other types of coaching are all based on the principles described above. Coaching is a process, like accountancy, and the process remains much the same regardless of which type of coaching is taking place. There are a growing number of categories in coaching, such as life, executive, team, group and career coaching, but the process is largely the same. Just as the more successful an athlete is, the more likely he or she is to work with a sports coach, performance coaching is not necessarily about fixing problems but about helping successful individuals and teams to become more so.



*Tim Gallwey and Sir John Whitmore with Culture at Work coach Paul Tabley at the Inner Game Conference 2008*

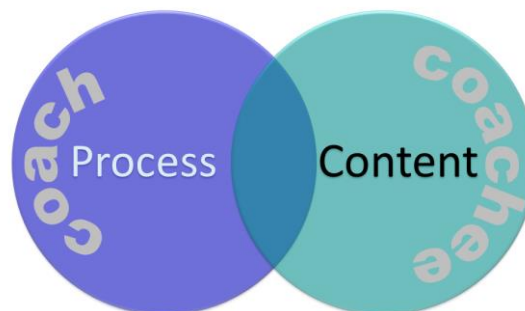
The profession is currently self-regulated, but most coaches will have undergone some form of training and accreditation. Several coaching bodies have been set up by coaches around the world, including The Association for Coaching, the ICF and the EMCC. In addition, some accreditation bodies like the ILM provide coaching qualifications, and university post-graduate degrees in coaching are becoming more common.

### The principles of coaching

Coaching is positive, non-judgemental, solution focused and challenging:



Although the control of the process lies with the coach, the content always lies with the coachee, making the coaching experience an empowering, productive and enjoyable one. The crossover area in the centre of the diagram below represents the times when coaches make suggestions or share their own insights. They usually ask permission before doing this, making a clear boundary between the client's agenda and their own:



Coaching can be practised either one to one or with groups of any size and is used with teams to achieve a unified and supportive force. The roots of communicating in a

coaching style are ancient and inherent in all people; some are natural coaches who were raised in a coaching atmosphere. For others, it is possible to learn the skills and change their style of communication, hence the growing popularity of coaching in corporate and public organisations. Good leadership is virtually synonymous with good coaching skills.

Occasionally, emotional baggage may surface during coaching and the coach may refer the coachee to a counsellor or therapist. However, sometimes the process of coaching is found to dissolve deep seated blocks and traumas which have been holding the coachee back, simply by its solution focussed approach, without the necessity of deeper exploration. Coaching has also produced results in physical healing, sometimes combined with related fields such as David Grove's Clean Language, Transactional Analysis or other disciplines.

### Is there a difference between coaching and mentoring?

The boundaries between coaching and mentoring are now dissolving as mentors discover that mentoring in a coaching style is more effective than simply giving advice, while conversely it is becoming increasingly acceptable for coaches to impart advice and share their experience, albeit by observing certain guidelines that maintain the principles of coaching.

### Reverse mentoring



The practice of 'reverse mentoring' is gaining ground, meaning that the less experienced members of staff act as mentors to those who are more senior or who have more experience. In today's flatter hierarchies, the knowledge and attitudes of the digital-savvy younger generation may have plenty of value to offer their elders.

### Interventions related to coaching

#### *Therapy, Psychiatry, Psychology and Psychotherapy*

A psychiatrist is a qualified medical doctor with further training in psychiatry but not necessarily in psychology. A psychiatrist is the only practitioner covered in this article who can prescribe drugs to treat a mental condition.

A psychologist will have general training, usually a degree, in psychology, plus further training in a specialist field.

A psychotherapist works with deep-seated emotional difficulties and will have received rigorous training and ongoing supervision.

All of the three categories above usually involve some form of judgement, diagnosis, prescription or advice on the part of the practitioner, whereas such concepts are not part of the coaching philosophy, although occasionally suggestions may be made. In recent times, basic coaching skills are usually included in any kind of therapeutic training.

### *Counselling*

Counsellors often provide the simple service of 'someone to talk to', particularly in situations of grief, shock or anxiety. There are various levels of training, starting with a short course leading to a certificate. Sessions can be on a one off basis, or occurring regularly over months or years.

There are times when people need to come to terms with, say, a recent bereavement or traumatic experience by talking it through, and this is where counselling is more appropriate than any other intervention. Solution-focused techniques are sometimes used in counselling but its function is not necessarily to move the client forward.

### *Consultancy*

'Consultant' is a broad term commonly used to describe anyone who works for an organization at executive level from time to time, but is not actually employed by it, so this category can include external coaches. A consultant is someone who brings outside expertise into the organization in any field, whether setting up computer systems, or giving psychological support to executives, or helping them to improve their performance.

### *Conclusion*

A simple way of expressing the difference between coaching and mentoring is:

*"A coach has some great questions for your answers; a mentor has some great answers for your questions"*

An analogy with driving a car helps to define the differences between all the above fields:

*A therapist will explore what is stopping you driving your car  
A counsellor will listen to your anxieties about the car  
A mentor will share tips from the experience of driving cars  
A consultant will advise you on how to drive the car  
A coach will encourage and support you in driving the car*

### *Case history:*



As well as offering coach training courses, we are occasionally asked to deliver training in mentoring skills as well, and recently provided programmes for mentors in Russia. We have found the workplace culture there and in Eastern Europe to be fairly directive, but people are showing signs of wanting to move towards a more peer-to-peer coaching style of management.

There was a highly developed mentoring programme in place at the Russian organization, but mentees were falling away from the programme and clearly were not finding the process as useful as had been hoped. My guess was that the mentors were doing too much telling and advice-giving, rather than drawing out the inner knowledge of their mentees. It is much more exhilarating to come up with one's own insights than to assimilate someone else's, and I felt that the Russian managers needed to learn how to ignite creative thinking in their mentees.

The training we designed centred around coaching skills and focused on how to move smoothly between mining for a mentee's knowledge more than delivering the mentor's own. So we began with the usual foundation coaching skills exercises on listening, questioning and the GROW model. Another key element of the training was the use of Permission Protocol, described in my article "The Untapped Power of Permission".

Throughout all of the practice sessions, the participants were asked to mentor each other about real situations. Then they went away to work in pairs for six weeks, a regular format of our training style. During the classroom exercises they came to understand the benefits of the coaching style of 'asking' rather than 'telling', and during the six-week practice period they taught themselves how to do it in the way that would suit them best, in terms of their circumstances, personalities and management styles. The training was delivered by my colleague James Wright, and when the group met with him again six weeks later, we were pleased to hear that the sessions the mentors were now delivering had become not only more effective and meaningful, but were more enjoyable for both mentors and mentees.

## About the author



International speaker, writer and broadcaster Carol Wilson is Managing Director of Culture at Work and a Fellow of the Institute of Leadership & Management, the Professional Speaking Association and the Association for Coaching, where she is a member of the Global Advisory Panel. A cross-cultural expert, she designs and delivers programmes to create coaching cultures for corporate and public sector organisations worldwide and has won awards for coaching and writing. She is the author of 'Performance Coaching: A Complete Guide to Best Practice Coaching and

Training', now in its third edition and featuring Forewords by Sir Richard Branson and Sir John Whitmore, and 'The Work and Life of David Grove: Clean Language and Emergent Knowledge'. She has contributed to several other books and published over 60 articles including a monthly column in Training Journal.