

13 Myths About Coaching

Let's look at some common questions and misperceptions about coaching:

1. Doesn't coaching take a lot of time?

Anything worthwhile takes an investment of time, and time spent with a coach is an investment in yourself. According to a coaching study conducted at Ashridge Business School, two-hour coaching sessions four to six weeks apart is an effective model for a coaching engagement. If we include activities related to coaching, you would spend about one hour per week in coaching activities. Is that too much time to spend on your own professional development?

2. Isn't coaching just for people who have problems, not for successful people?

Coaching helps the good and the best get even better. Coaching works best for motivated performers who want to achieve even more or who may feel "stuck" in certain areas of performance or behaviour. Some of the top leaders in the FTSE 100 and the Fortune 100 have their own coaches. Coaching is often used to support good performers who are facing difficult challenges. Leaders moving into new roles with greater responsibility are avid users of coaching.

Coaching is less successful as a last-ditch effort to "save" someone. Poor performers tend not to take coaching seriously and may even resist being coached. They rarely deliver a good return on the coaching investment.

And coaching is not a substitute for managing. It is the manager's responsibility to help staff perform at their best, so if someone is underperforming because they do not have direction, support or appropriate training from their manager, coaching would be ineffective and so is unsuitable.

3. Isn't coaching the same as mentoring?

A mentor is the "sage on the stage," while the coach is the "guide on the side." Mentoring is usually informal, open-ended and intended to provide advice and answers to questions about the organisation. Coaching has clearly defined goals, time limits and mutual accountabilities. Coaches don't give you answers or tell you what to do; coaches help you discover answers for yourself.

4. Isn't coaching only for senior managers and leaders?

Not at the University of Exeter where we believe it can benefit a wide variety of people. However, coaching is indeed often used to support the development of high potential managers and staff, and as a follow-up to management and leadership training. Coaching to assist new managers and leaders get up to speed is also becoming a common practice. Managers at all levels of an organisation can benefit from coaching.

5. Isn't coaching very expensive?

Let's compare the costs of training and coaching. If you attend a leadership training programme, for example, your costs could include travel, accommodation and meals, plus the course fees. Not to mention the hidden costs of being away from your work. Will anyone do your work whilst you're away? If not, there is also the personal cost in longer hours after you return from the course.

If you work with a coach for a few hours a month for 6 months, there's no extra travel, you can continue doing your normal work and the coach will normally meet you on campus. Coaching fees cover the actual contact hours of coaching.

Both training and coaching are valuable when used appropriately, and coaching often proves to be an excellent investment when all costs are factored in.

6. Doesn't it take a long time to see the results of coaching?

While coaching is not intended to be a quick fix, many coachees experience tangible results after one or two coaching sessions. Although human beings tend to change slowly under normal circumstances, coaching for engaged and motivated people who seize the opportunity can lead to some remarkable and rapid changes in thinking and behaviour.

7. Isn't it risky to open up and talk frankly to a coach?

The nature of the coaching relationship is characterized by mutual trust, mutual respect and freedom of expression. Trust implies sincerity and authenticity and requires confidentiality on the part of the coach. Respect is about accepting another person for who they are and who they present themselves to be. In order to have trust, respect and freedom of expression, we need to be comfortable with a coach and believe that the coach can help us achieve our goals. Confidentiality is one of the hallmarks of coaching.

All of the internal and external coaches we engage, have been well trained and abide by our code of ethics which states that the coach will:

- Maintain throughout the level of confidentiality which is appropriate and is agreed at the start of the relationship.
- Disclose information only where explicitly agreed with the client and sponsor (where one exists), unless the coach believes that there is convincing evidence of serious danger to the client or others if the information is withheld;
- Act within applicable law and not encourage, assist or collude with others engaged in conduct which is dishonest, unlawful, unprofessional or discriminatory.

8. Isn't coaching too 'touchy feely', like therapy?

Unlike therapy, coaching is about the present and the future, not the past. Coaches don't explore your family history, search for unconscious motivations or try to change your personality. A therapist's role is that of a healer, while a coach is a catalyst, helping you develop your potential and improve your performance. The emphasis in a coaching relationship is on action, accountability and follow-through.

9. Is it true that everyone is coachable?

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. If you really don't want to be coached and aren't engaged in the process, then coaching is not for you right now. Perhaps later, but not now.

10. Will a coach tell me how to do my job?

Coaches are not qualified to tell you how to do your job and they do not wish to do so. A coach can help you overcome obstacles and achieve your goals by offering different perspectives and new insights to stimulate your own thinking. A coach can be a sounding board and a mirror to enable you to see yourself and your options in different ways. But you're still in charge of you and your work.

11. To be able to help me, shouldn't the coach have a similar background?

While helpful, having a similar background doesn't guarantee that the coach will be effective. 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.

12. Won't I lose face with my staff and peers if I have a coach?

Most colleagues know that personal development is a life-long process and see their colleague/manager receiving coaching as a positive step. They recognise that coaching demonstrates the organisation's commitment to the person, and they also give credit to the individual who has the courage to accept and act on feedback. You become an even better role model to your colleagues and you demonstrate your commitment to learning when you let them know that you're being coached.

If anyone doesn't understand this, it says more about them than it does about you!

13. I'm interested in this idea of coaching my staff but isn't it the same as just giving them feedback?

Giving your staff feedback is part of coaching them. In order to help them develop, you need to let your staff know what they're doing well and what needs change or improvement. As their manager/coach, you want to set them up to succeed. Giving them clear and objective feedback and helping them learn how to improve their performance can inspire and motivate your team members and build their trust in you. Setting specific, high standards and then helping people reach them is part of what it means to be an effective manager. If you would like training in using a coaching style, see our ['Coaching Conversations for managers'](#) course.