



1. WHY IS A MENTOR OR COACH IMPORTANT?

A mentor or coach is important for many reasons. One, he/she can be objective in ways that you may have lost your ability to be. Two, he/she can see things through a lens and from an angle that you may not be able to because you have looked at it or have been in it so long. Three, he/she will likely have experience and/or expertise that you may not have. Therefore, being with someone who can see what you cannot or has experience that you may not—if open—will allow you to grow your thinking and evolve your perspective.

2. HOW DO I KNOW IF I NEED A MENTOR OR COACH?

Everyone needs a mentor. Most need a coach. Mentors help us become better human beings. Coaches help us sharpen our skill, or talent, or craft if you will. Consider this: Everyone influential, rich, successful person you will read about, from Martin Luther King, Jr. to Bill Gates, pays tribute to a coach or a mentor who helped them, inspired them, challenged them, and made them better. Consider this also, we alone are not equipped to call out or remedy our own blind spots.

3. IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A MENTOR AND A COACH? IF SO, WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Some would say there is no difference between a mentor and a coach. As someone who has both and serve as both, I believe that there is a difference. There is typically no fee associated with mentoring whereas there is typically a fee associated with coaching, unless your job provides coaching as an aspect of your professional development. Additionally, the mentoring relationship can last from one year to a lifetime, depending on the initial agreement as well as on how the relationship evolves. The coaching relationship is typically task-related or project based. To this end once the task has been completed or the project has been implemented the relationship ends. Also, you typically speak with your mentor on an as needed basis, which might mean once a month or once every three months. Because, again, coaching is more task-related, you would be meeting with your coach weekly or every other week to ensure the task or project is progressing.

4. WHAT CHARACTERISTICS OR QUALITIES SHOULD I LOOK FOR IN A MENTOR OR COACH?

This is very important. Not only must you think long and hard about what you want a mentor or coach for, you also must do your research on the person you are considering. One, you want someone who is responsible, available, trustworthy, and has the capacity to care about your well being. Two, you want someone who is not perfect, but principled; someone who is who you aspire to become—whether personally or professionally. Three, you want someone who knows their stuff. You want someone who is sharp; someone whose reputation precedes them . . . in a positive way. Four, you want someone who will push you, someone who will listen to you, and someone who doesn't mind your questions.

5. AS THE ONE SEEKING A MENTOR OR COACH, ARE THERE ANY EXPECTATIONS OF ME?

Yes. Mentoring and coaching are both two way streets. Reciprocity is critical. Your responsibility is to make sure you are fully present in the relationship. Make sure you don't go into the relationship for a handout. Make sure you initiate contact with some degree of regularity. Don't just reach out to your mentor or coach when you want something. Make sure you never waste their time. Remember that your mentor or coach has feelings too. Be considerate. Responsibly communicate.

6. HOW DO I APPROACH SOMEONE TO BE MY MENTOR OR COACH?

Sometimes a potential mentor or coach is already in our life—be it a family member, a colleague or someone we see from time to time. Other times it can be a stranger you meet for the first time but sense they need to be in your life. In either case, I always recommend asking in person. Be able to articulate why you want him/her to coach or mentor you. If you are approaching a coach, know your budget, make sure you're able to pay, and make sure you're able to honor a schedule.