



Where Coaching and Mentoring Diverge

One is actually a subset of the other. When short-term performance is what you need to drive, think and act like a coach.

By Bud Kulesza

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As a football fan, I've been thinking this fall about how coaching accounts for much of a team's performance level. The players' talent is obviously very important, but good coaches exploit that talent. It's the same in any sport — and in business.

CFOs who act as coaches to their teams have higher performing, more effective players. In particular, good coaches make sure team members learn about all key financial positions in the organization, which better prepares them to perform in their own roles and helps develop an energized team of high performers.

Many assume coaching and mentoring are the same thing. They are not. A mentor uses a variety of approaches to develop an individual over time. Coaching might be one of those. Coaching is about maximizing performance to successfully master current challenges. Individuals' and the team's performance on projects, assignments, and tasks are evaluated to make sure the right people are in the right positions and that they perform to their best ability. Where expectations are not met, feedback ideally takes the form of constructive criticism. The purpose should not be to assign blame, but to gain knowledge from experience. Changes might be considered that require reassigning individuals or duties.

Coaches who maintain daily hands-on involvement and interaction with team members have a greater influence on their short-term results. An effective coaching strategy is not about sharing strategic vision, but about working collaboratively to strengthen members' skill sets.

I used a coaching approach extensively when we were installing SAP globally at ITT Automotive. We created a team that traveled to install the system. After each installation, we discussed what we did well and made adjustments to improve the implementation process, whether it was about approach or personnel. While the experience may have had a significant long-term development effect on team members, our focus was clearly on the short-term successful completion of the installations.

The benefits of coaching are obvious: increased productivity, efficiency, and employee development. Realize, though, that it does not yield the same results for everyone.

Successful coaches are committed to a disciplined approach, developing their teams by taking a proactive and trusted leadership position and setting clear expectations of performance. They provide participative review and constructive feedback in a timely fashion, while supporting and encouraging change. In short, successful coaches lead the ordinary in achieving the extraordinary.

Are you acting as a coach in your organization? If so, how has it affected performance? Please share any of your experiences in the comment section below.

Bud Kulesza, CMA, CFM, is dean emeritus of the IMA Leadership Academy and former chairman of the [IMA](#). He is also the former chairman of ITT Industries Canada and CFO of ITT Automotive, a multibillion-dollar company.

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