

NOT ALL SUPPORT IS THE SAME: UNDERSTANDING COACHING, MENTORING, AND THERAPY



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Through our experience working in the corporate coaching field over the past three years, we have observed that although different forms of support serve unique roles, they are frequently misunderstood and viewed as one and the same. In today's professional and personal development spaces, people seek support to grow, overcome challenges, and perform better. However, different forms of support exist. Coaching is often misunderstood as advice-giving or counselling. This article aims to clarify what coaching is and how it differs from mentoring and psychological therapy/support.

While there is an overlap in their goal of supporting growth, they differ significantly in their focus, approach, and professional boundaries. In the ever-changing landscape of today's workplace, coaching has emerged as a pivotal practice aimed at unlocking individual and collective potential (Wale, H. 2023).



What is Coaching?

Coaching is predominantly a future-focused, goal-oriented developmental process where a coach partners with a client to help them unlock their potential, remove barriers, gain clarity, and take intentional action (Wale, H. 2023).

According to the International Coaching Federation (ICF), particular key elements form the foundation of practicing ethical and effective coaching. The ICF describes those key elements as the following:

- *Demonstrates ethical practice* - understands and consistently applies coaching ethics and standards of coaching.
- *Embodies a coaching mindset* - develops and maintains a mindset that is open, curious, flexible and client-centered.
- *Establishes and maintains agreements* - creating clear agreements about the coaching relationship, process, plans and goals. This is a collaboration between coach and individual being coached.
- *Cultivates trust and safety* - creates a safe, supportive environment that allows the client to share freely. Maintains a relationship of mutual respect and trust.
- *Maintains presence* - fully conscious and present with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible, grounded and confident.
- *Active listening* - Focuses on what the client is and is not saying to fully understand what is being communicated in the context of the client systems and to support client self-expression.
- *Evokes awareness* - Facilitates client insight and learning by using tools and techniques such as powerful questioning, silence, metaphor or analogy.

Coaching creates a space where people can reflect on their lives, their goals, and the challenges they may be facing. Through meaningful conversations, clients are encouraged to think more deeply about what they want and what might be holding them back, encouraging deeper self-awareness. We as coaches often use tools and techniques such as powerful questioning, challenge perspective, observation, and feedback to help clients gain insight into their strengths and areas for growth (Whitmore, 2017).



In its simplest form, coaching is a personal journey of growth that individuals actively choose to undertake. Our unique coaching approach at Routes Coaching employs ICF accredited coaching standards, while also applying evidence-based methodologies and strategies that are effective with our particular-client base. We draw on elements of Carl Jung's model of the psyche, which highlights how our past experiences shape the beliefs, habits, and behavioural patterns we carry into our professional lives.

In coaching, we explore these learned patterns to increase awareness of how they may influence current thinking, decision-making, and responses to challenges. Additionally, rather than removing obstacles, our approach supports clients in growing their perspective, building confidence, and capability so that challenges feel less limiting and more manageable.

What is the role of Psychology?

Psychologists aim to understand how people think, feel, and behave, and they use research-based methods to help individuals deal with emotional, behavioural, and mental health challenges.

Psychologists may work in different areas such as clinical psychology, educational psychology, counselling psychology or organisational psychology. In therapeutic settings, psychologists often help individuals work through emotional difficulties, trauma, or mental health conditions.

Psychological therapy may involve exploring past experiences to understand how they influence present thoughts, behaviours,

and emotions. Therapy can also involve assessments, diagnosis, and long-term treatment plans designed to improve a person's mental wellbeing (Grant, 2014).

Although coaching and psychology both aim to support people, they differ in several important ways. Coaches refer clients to psychologists when mental health support is needed.

Many coaching approaches are also influenced by psychological theories related to motivation, behaviour change, and wellbeing. However, the depth and purpose of the work usually differs.

Coaching focuses on future goals and practical action, while psychology often addresses deeper emotional or mental health concerns.

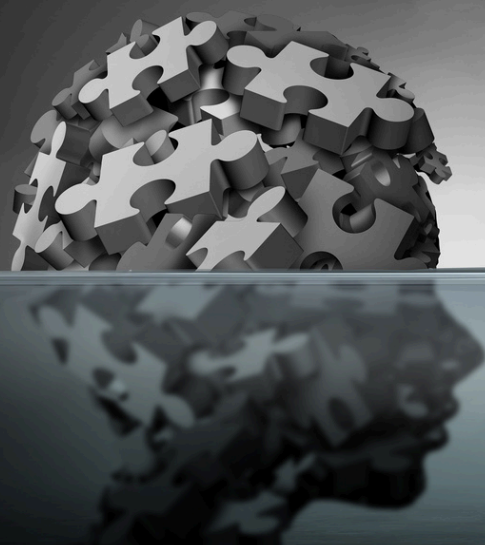
Key Differences Between Coaching and Psychology:

Aspect	Coaching	Psychology / Therapy
Primary Focus	Personal and professional development (non-clinical).	Mental health and emotional wellbeing (clinical practice).
Purpose	Achieving goals and unlocking potential	Understanding and treating psychological challenges
Approach	Collaborative partnership between coach and client	Therapeutic relationship guided by psychological expertise
Assessment and Diagnosis	No formal diagnosis	Involve clinical psychological assessment and diagnosis

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring comes into the picture as a developmental relationship where a more experienced employee supports the growth and development of a less experienced colleague in the workplace. This support focuses heavily on sharing knowledge, guidance, and professional insight. The mentorship

discussion often focuses on the transfer of wisdom gained through experience and often focuses on career paths, navigating internal politics as a trusted sounding board. While, the coaching conversation is an action-focused dialogue with an emphasis on fostering skill development, self-discovery, and personal growth (Menschy, K. 2024).





Mentoring and coaching often intersect in the workplace. Many individuals in corporate environments are allocated internal mentors, while coaching may be offered as an external resource, allowing employees to benefit from both forms of support.

Coaching is a dynamic process where the coachee (the person being coached) is an active participant in steering their professional journey, thus creating a partnership that goes beyond the traditional mentor-mentee relationship.

“The International Coaching Federation (ICF) reported that 80% of people who receive coaching report increased self-confidence, and over 70% benefit from improved work performance, relationships, and more effective communication skills.”

Employee engagement plays a significant role in both job satisfaction and organisational success. Through its personalised and supportive approach, coaching helps cultivate a culture of empowerment. When employees feel heard, valued, and supported in their growth, the coaching process can become a powerful catalyst for deeper engagement in the workplace (Wale, H. 2023).

We have actively observed the value of fostering a culture of coaching and learning. Organisational leadership can encourage employees to adopt a growth mindset, leading to increased resilience, creativity, and innovation that can carry organisations through the most challenging times.

As coaching involves deep conversations, reflection, and meaningful personal insight, it can sometimes feel similar to counselling. Clients often use the word “counselling” simply to describe any supportive conversation about their challenges.

However, coaching is not therapy. Coaches work with individuals who are sufficiently functioning but want support with growth, performance, mindset, or navigating change, and as mentioned previously coaches will always refer clients to engage with psychological and counselling support.

By understanding the differences between coaching, psychological therapy and counselling, and mentoring, individuals can make more informed decisions about the kind of support that may be most helpful for them. This article aims to bridge the misunderstanding out there because not all support is the same.

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