



WHY COACHES NEED MENTORS

Entrepreneur and award-winning coach **Marian Evans** reflects on what drives her to mentor others and how a great mentor can help coaches weather the Covid storm and other crises.

Mentoring has been a big part of my life for the last ten years. As I climbed the ranks in the financial services sector, strong female role models were few and far between. It was almost by default that, as I became more experienced, I started to attract mentees looking for support. One of my regrets is not seeking out a mentor myself in my twenties.

Today, I feel an almost maternal instinct to support and nurture ambitious individuals. Let's not forget: it is also incredibly rewarding. Whether it stems from a desire to make the path easier for others or to protect them from the pitfalls, mistakes and failures I have suffered on the way to building my businesses, I certainly gain as much from the mentoring relationship as I give. As an entrepreneur and award-winning executive coach, I find myself mentoring these days as often as I am coaching and consulting. So, which hat and when?

Much of my business consultancy is based on co-creation, so I offer a blend of services spanning coaching, consulting and mentoring. Often this relationship is defined in the contracting phase; at other times it evolves gradually as I and the client discuss how I can best serve them, and how they can best serve themselves. Coaching is often a short-term, goal-orientated endeavour, while mentoring focuses more upon a client's career development over the long term. Pure coaching relies heavily on great questioning. However, when I am asked to mentor, there is an additional expectation and understanding that I share my knowledge, experience and learnings. When someone is seeking 'pure coaching', in theory the coach need not have in-depth knowledge of the sector or issue. However, my mentees are looking for expertise in business first and foremost. Credibility and a proven track record are important characteristics to look for in a mentor.

Training and supervision are of course essential for helping coaches and organisations ensure that high-quality standards are upheld and that coaching practice is as effective as possible. The greatest benefits of supervision are the opportunities to reflect, raise awareness and continually develop. Coaching supervision provides a wide-angled lens through which to review coaching practice. This is quite different from the relationship between a mentor and mentee, which is less about coaching practice and more about encouraging the wider development of the mentee through knowledge-sharing, experience, connections, insight and expertise on what it takes to get ahead.

Change is constant, and the need to adapt the way we work has never been more relevant. Every threat brings with it an opportunity. Quite often, the skill is to recognise our potential and not be afraid to tackle what it is that holds us back. Of all the models I have studied, the books I have read and the courses I have undertaken (and there have been many!) few skills – if any – are more important than the skill of listening: actively listening. As coaches we are used to listening to others but we do not always listen to ourselves. We are often our own worst critics, and I am struck by the number of coaches who neglect their own wellbeing, and thus never truly fulfil their own potential.

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Covid-19 has amplified this issue: there are those who are busier than ever and those who are struggling to survive. I'm not suggesting that mentoring fixes these problems, but it is a highly effective intervention. Where a coach might help a fellow coach tackle an immediate crisis, the right mentor will help the coach develop the skills to weather the storm. I encourage my mentees to recognise and embrace their strengths and weaknesses. Who we are is what makes us great. We can decide to be limited by that, or empowered by it.

Of late, I find that I am spending more time helping coaches to reflect on the key elements of resilience, both as an individual and in terms of their organisations. To me these include mental toughness, physical wellbeing, emotional balance, purpose and connectivity. When things are out of kilter, we need to refocus on the areas we are neglecting.

SOME TOP TIPS FOR COACHES

If you do nothing else, seek out a great mentor. This should be someone credible and ideally someone you admire; it may be that their strengths lie in the areas that you find most challenging. In my view, a mentor needs to have proven themselves; they need to be able to demonstrate that they have the skills required to help you. Other must-haves include:

- A clear outline of expectations (contract well at the outset – just as we do with our coaching clients).
- A commitment to take action (setting SMART objectives never goes out of fashion).

- An agreement to meet regularly (virtually or face to face) and to be 'present' when you meet.
- A positive mindset.

We all need encouragement, reassurance and a helping hand at times. Find someone who has some energy and enthusiasm – it can be priceless.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Marian Evans, BSc (Hons) ACII, FInstLM, FCMI, is the winner of Inspirational Woman of the Decade (WIB Awards) and Mentor of the Year (WIFA Awards). Marian is a business owner, fellow of the Institute of Leadership & Management and Chartered Management Institute and non-executive director. With a background in financial services, Marian is both a chartered broker and a formidable property investor. A qualified executive coach and facilitator working with leaders of some of Wales's top organisations, clients recognise her dynamism and proven ability to deliver transformational change.

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