Empowering others: Coaching and Mentoring
Thinkpiece
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The greatest gift we can give to others is not just to share our riches with them, but to reveal their riches to themselves.

Swahili proverb

Have you ever had that experience? Where someone you trusted showed belief in you and enabled you to see that you could achieve more than you had thought possible? If you have (and most of us have), you will never have forgotten it and you will know that you are better for it. It’s worth remembering as you embark on this resource on mentoring and coaching. When you read the next two paragraphs, for instance, consider how well the list of characteristics fits the person who influenced you so positively.

A group of staff in a large school in England gathered together not so long ago, as the school set out on the path of converting to academy status and becoming a teaching school. They realised that a key to ongoing success would be the quality of their leadership, so they spent time identifying and agreeing aspects of influential and empowering leadership. At the culmination of their work, they came up with the following list of characteristics:

An influential and empowering leader:
• is committed to making a difference
• acts with integrity
• brings out the best in people
• is insightful – sees things from new angles
• adapts to cultural differences
• has the courage to take risks
• seeks and uses feedback
• learns from mistakes
• is open to criticism

When they were asked about the implications the list had for the practice of all leaders in the school, they were unanimous that what mattered was dialogue; leaders who engage in conversation that enables others to grow.

In essence, when they made this agreement, they were identifying what lies at the heart of mentoring and coaching, and touching on the substance of this resource. They recognised the importance of developing both themselves as coaches and the coaching culture of the school, and they have continued to develop their coaching culture and practice in the school in a number of ways, and over a sustained period.

In this resource, you will have a chance to explore the value, benefits and challenges of mentoring and coaching as a leader; develop your own understanding and practise skills; and become familiar with a coaching model used across National College work.
Coaching and the current context

The two terms, ‘influential’ and ‘empowering’, really mattered to the leaders at the start of this thinkpiece. They recognised that they are working in a rapidly changing and complex environment and that ‘hero’ leaders, while they may have their place in times of crisis, do not unleash the potential of their organisation, the people within it, or the partners with whom they work.

We now understand that the single most important lesson, once you take on a leadership role, is that your achievements matter little compared with those of the people for whom you are responsible. While you may be able to spur your team on to greater efforts and achievements through a heroic approach, it’s unlikely to last for long; where organisations thrive over extended periods, there is a common unifying theme and it is this: leaders work as coaches for their teams, and concentrate their efforts on developing people, as the chief way of delivering results and growing the organisation.

As Barber et al, in their study of high-performing leaders, recognise;

*High-performing principals focus more on instructional leadership and developing teachers. They see their biggest challenges as improving teaching and the curriculum, and they believe that their ability to coach others and support their development is the most important skill of a good school leader... they work the same hours as other principals, but spend more time working with the people in their school.*

Barber, Whelan & Clark, 2010:7

And in today’s climate of unprecedented change in the education system and other public services, developing people matters more than ever (Hesselbein et al, 1996). School leaders are responding to a variety of highly significant initiatives around teaching, learning and school organisation. Viewed separately, these might appear to create a very complex set of agendas, but school leaders who invest time in developing coaching can help staff adapt to the new context and see common threads in the changes, and so derive greater value from them (Creasy and Paterson, 2005).

Much has been written about the notion of a ‘self-improving’ system and autonomous schools. David Hargreaves, in a number of National College thinkpieces, has done more than perhaps anyone to capture the elements that will enable the education system to become truly self-improving. In particular, he identifies the importance of professional learning, partnership competence and collaborative capital as key factors in helping schools and leaders to thrive in this new world. All three of these dimensions imply leadership that influences and empowers, rather than ‘commands and controls’, and, in the second of his thinkpieces, Leading a self-improving school system, Hargreaves writes about the importance of mentoring and coaching as part of professional learning:
Mentoring and coaching are of particular importance in leadership development, since leaders learn best with and from outstanding leaders. Hargreaves, 2011:5

What's more, we now understand the importance of coaching and mentoring in the learning process. John Hattie's work, for example, in one of the most important pieces of recent research into what works, has highlighted the importance of engagement, feedback, coaching and mentoring, including coaching for teachers:

*Coaching involves empowering people by facilitating self-directed learning, personal growth, and improved performance.*

Hattie, 2012:72

And there's a growing body of evidence to suggest that coaching really does make a difference. You can read studies by NFER and the University of Chicago in this resource, and also review the case study about Jubilee Park Primary School.

The National College has also identified benefits, through its work, both for individuals and schools:

*Pupils benefit from learning outcomes including, enhanced motivation, improved organisation abilities and questioning skills and an increased choice of learning strategies – including collaboration.*

*Practitioners develop self-confidence, an increased willingness and capacity to learn and change, enhanced knowledge and understanding, a wider repertoire of teaching and learning strategies and increased confidence in the power of teaching to make a difference.*

In terms of the effects of coaching on teaching and learning, Joyce and Showers (1995) showed the powerful impact of coaching in raising understanding, skill and attainment, when compared with other approaches; but as Reeves (2009) made clear, for coaching to be really effective, what matters is a focus on improved performance, clear and agreed learning plans and specific, timely feedback.

If coaching means anything, it needs to deliver positive change.
What is coaching? And what’s the difference between mentoring and coaching?

So what do we mean by the terms ‘coaching’ and ‘mentoring’? People have written books about the distinctions, and there has certainly been some heated debate about the differences over the years. The word ‘mentor’, of course, can be traced back to the character, Mentor, in the Greek epic poems, the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. Mentor was the elderly and faithful courtier to Odysseus, credited with offering wise counsel to both Odysseus and his son. That derivation gives us a clue to one of the distinctions between coaching and mentoring.

The National College defines the two terms as follows:

*Mentoring is a continuing but informal relationship focused on long-term goals, aspirations and career transitions. It involves passing on knowledge and offering support, based on the mentor’s work experience, to a less experienced colleague. The mentor operates as a wise and trusted friend.*

*Coaching is a time-bound, formal intervention focused on shorter-term goals and challenges. Although there are many models of coaching, they all start from the premise that people have the resources within themselves to achieve their personal and leadership potential, and that the task lies in assisting them to access those resources and apply them.*

*Whilst the skills of the mentor and coach are similar therefore, the key distinction between a mentor and coach is that:*

- A mentor has knowledge of the client’s subject area which they share in order to support their client’s development.
- A coach may or may not have expertise in the subject matter being coached, but has the skills to allow the client to access his or her own resourcefulness to come to their own solutions.

National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2013

We know from the study that resulted in the National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching (2005) that coaching is becoming increasingly popular within schools in England as both an important part of continuing professional development (CPD) and as a vehicle for distributing leadership. When focused on improving teaching and learning, coaching is usually informed by evidence.
Coaching and mentoring can take many forms, but at their heart they’re about two people working together, with one person supporting the other to develop their understanding and practice on an area decided by their own needs and interests. Whether the approach is mainly one of coaching or mentoring depends largely on the needs and focus of the client. It depends on purpose: what the client is trying or needing to achieve. The coach or mentor will help the client identify a clear focus on which to work.

It’s really important to note, at this stage, that coaching and mentoring are not easy options or cosy chats. As already mentioned, they are about change and they are very clearly linked to goals and action, as you will see in the resource (Timperley, 2011).

As John Whitmore, author of *Coaching for performance*, expresses it:

*Coaching is about unlocking potential in order to maximise performance. It is helping them to learn, rather than teaching them. It is about bringing out the best in people.*

Whitmore, 2003:8

This does not mean that tough professional issues are avoided, or the rigour of professional development compromised; but in an environment of strong accountabilities, it is important that coaching is an appreciative process that builds on people’s desires and aspirations.

A more in-depth exploration of the two approaches of coaching and mentoring is contained in the resource, but, at this stage, it is worth pausing to consider the definitions above.

**Personal reflection**

How do these definitions fit with your previous understanding of the two terms, or the approaches taken in your school?

What pitfalls can you foresee, or have you witnessed, with either approach?

If you have acted as a coach or mentor, what aspects of the work have most challenged you as a leader?
The foundations for coaching and mentoring

In the publication *Leading coaching in schools* (2005), the authors suggested six propositions about mentoring and coaching as important leadership and school approaches. These propositions are:

- Leaders have a moral responsibility to promote everyone’s learning – both adults and students.
- Leaders also have a responsibility to develop the next generation of school leaders.
- High-quality coaching in schools supports learning, professional development, school improvement and leadership sustainability.
- Leaders therefore have a responsibility to ensure that processes, structures and resources are in place to support coaching.
- Learning conversations are at the heart of coaching, where open and honest feedback takes place and learning is enhanced.
- Leaders should model the dialogue and personal approaches that create a culture of high-quality coaching interactions across the school.

In the resource, you’ll find four further propositions:

- The mentoring or coaching relationship is based on equality and on openness, truth and respect.
- A focus on solutions rather than problems helps to create change.
- Given the right conditions, people are inherently capable of learning and growth.
- The client has the ability to achieve better results than they are currently generating.

Both sets of propositions focus on matters of belief, or mindset, so, before we consider the implications that stem from them, it’s worth pausing for a moment to acknowledge some of the earlier work that has informed them.

The psychologist Carl Rogers, for example, was working in the middle of the last century, but remains highly influential in developing our understanding of human motivation and learner-centred education.

Carl Rogers was interested in the importance of relationships, and the effect they have on individuals’ development. As early as 1951, he outlined the notion of the ‘person-centred approach’ to learning and described the importance of positive relationships in the development of humans’ concept of self. In his book *On becoming a person*, he coined the phrase ‘unconditional positive regard’ and explored this disposition as a fundamental requirement for helping others to succeed. He believed in the power of facilitating learning, rather than teaching, and went further:
The facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal qualities that exist in the personal relationship between facilitator and learner.

Rogers, 1994:305

The notions of putting the learner (or client) at the centre, and relationships as the foundation for learning, are powerful and seem to be backed up by later – and indeed current – research. The work of Chris Gittins, Director of the Warwick Centre for Learning Behaviour, for example, has focused on the primacy of relationships:

Learning behaviour is about three relationships. The child’s relationship with themselves... the child’s relationship with others... and the child’s relationship with the curriculum...

Other work relates to the importance of motivation. Abraham Maslow was one of the founders of humanistic psychology and is best known for his work on the human hierarchy of needs, first described in 1954 and focused on the fulfilment of human potential through self-awareness. Maslow described the highest level in his hierarchy, which he called 'self-actualisation', as the desire to accomplish everything that one can, to become the most that one can be. Although Maslow’s hierarchy has been contested by some later researchers, the notion of self-actualisation remains relevant.

Carol Dweck, professor of psychology at Stanford University, has been hugely influential in shaping approaches to teaching and learning and, indeed, coaching, through her work on human motivation and intelligence. She has identified the effects on motivation of two mindsets: one that believes that intelligence is fixed, and one that believes that talents can be developed through commitment and hard work. The first she calls a ‘fixed mindset’ and the second, a ‘growth mindset’. Her work has relevance as we consider coaching and mentoring, because she has identified the importance of nurturing a growth mindset in children and adult learners to strengthen motivation and achieve more. Belief in the potential of others to grow is both a prerequisite for, and product of, coaching, as the propositions above suggest:

Self-belief, self-motivation, choice, clarity, commitment, awareness, responsibility and action are the products of coaching.

Whitmore, 2003:38
Personal reflection

First, consider the two sets of propositions above. To what extent do you accept, or want to challenge, the arguments they outline? Are there others that you would add?

How do they reflect aspects of the theories of, say, Rogers and Dweck?

What challenges do they offer and what implications do they have, for your practice as a leader and for leadership more broadly in your school?

CEDAR: a coaching framework

At the beginning of this thinkpiece, I talked about coaching and mentoring as being rooted in conversations. But I also suggested that they are far from being a chat; they are structured, purposeful conversations that focus on action outcomes and that can deliver change.

That being the case, it’s not surprising that various models have developed to help structure the coaching conversations. Amongst these is the well known GROW model, propounded by Whitmore (2003), and there are others to be found in Leading coaching in schools’ and elsewhere.
The model used by the National College is CEDAR, shown here, and this resource is structured around this framework.

Through the resource, you will be able to examine in depth all the stages of the coaching and mentoring process, from contracting through to action and review. At the heart of the framework, as you can see, is the effective coach and mentor, so let’s just consider that aspect here.
What are the implications for leaders who wish to be effective coaches and mentors?

Perhaps, most importantly, there are implications for you as a leader: how you behave, what you believe and what skills and qualities you bring to your work.

Let’s first think about the place of emotional intelligence.

Until very recently, most work in the field of coaching took place outside education. Coaching for senior staff is common in a number of business fields. And yet, as Sir John Whitmore states, business leaders often find coaching very difficult, because they find it so hard to give up the habits of being in control and providing answers.

If coaching is a means of helping people uncover and bring out the best in themselves, as Whitmore argues, with the two key principles of raising awareness and taking responsibility, that requires leaders to give up some of their control and use personal and interpersonal skills to support others.

This resonates with the work of Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Anne McKee (Goleman et al, 2002) who have been highly influential in describing and drawing links between emotional intelligence and performance.

By rooting the work of a coach in the dimensions of emotional intelligence, Whitmore argues that, for a coach to be successful, it is necessary to have a good awareness of self. Only then can the coach begin to build awareness of others. Coaching happens from the inside out, so you have to look at who you are as a leader. You have to be aware of who you are, how you are perceived, what your own strengths and weaknesses are, and learn and develop yourself before you can begin to help others do the same. You must be a model of what you want to see in others.

It’s generally accepted, though, that working as a coach, or adopting coaching approaches in one’s leadership work, brings about changes in the coach or leader, as much as in the client:

*Learning to be a coach or mentor is one of the most effective ways of enabling teachers or leaders to become good and excellent practitioners.*

CUREE, 2005:7
In developing the workbook *Leading coaching in schools*, the authors agreed that coaching practice in schools is built on four essential qualities:

- a desire to make a difference to student learning
- a commitment to professional learning
- a belief in the abilities of colleagues
- a commitment to developing emotional intelligence

They also identified five key skills in which coaching is grounded:

- establishing rapport and trust
- listening for meaning
- questioning for understanding
- prompting action, reflection and learning
- developing confidence and celebrating success

Creasy & Paterson, 2005:14

Well, those qualities and skills don’t look so hard, do they? You’d be surprised. As you work through the resource, you will have the chance to learn more about the qualities and skills you bring to the work. Perhaps it’s just worth thinking about two in particular here: listening and questioning.

**Personal reflection**

Think about a recent professional conversation you had with a colleague – perhaps about their performance. How much time did you allow for the meeting? Where was it held? What percentage of time would you say that you talked for during the meeting?

What did your colleague say? Can you remember what they spoke about in detail, or can you remember the key points?

Were there any points in the conversation when other things came into your mind – perhaps something else you needed to do, or what was going on outside the room?

What was going on in the silences during the conversation? Were you aware of things that were not being said? If so, how did you deal with these?

How do you think your colleague felt during, and after, the conversation? Could the conversation have gone better? If so, how?
The questions in the reflection activity could go on; the point is that, for much of the time as leaders, we have professional conversations ‘on the run’, or as part of a multi-tasking day. A coaching conversation needs a quality and depth of listening that we just don’t access in most of our work. You can learn about, and practise, levels of listening in the resource.

You will also consider the art of questioning. As will be made clear, asking skillful questions is at the core of mentoring and coaching. The *Leading coaching in schools* workbook contains an aide-memoire of questions as a tool for examining the types and purposes of questions (Creasy and Paterson, 2005:54), while the resource contains further resources and opportunities for you to develop your questioning skills.

So the word of caution here is that listening and questioning may appear straightforward, but don't underestimate the level of skill and subtlety required to both listen at a deep level and generate the kind of simple, powerful question that really makes a difference. They are critical competences in both the International Coach Federation competences and the common coaching competencies, which you will encounter in the *Mentoring and coaching: advanced skills* and application resource.

First and foremost, though, a coach will have the ability to form and sustain learning relationships. In the National College publication *Leadership development and personal effectiveness* (West-Burnham and Ireson, 2005), John West-Burnham argues that leadership development is rooted in such relationships. To achieve these, coaches need to:

- establish high levels of trust
- be consistent over time
- offer genuine respect
- be honest, frank and open
- challenge without threat

Important as the relationship is, it is equally important that the coach focuses on developing awareness and responsibility in the learner. So it’s worthwhile reminding ourselves of what coaching is not.

Coaching is not about:

- giving answers or advice
- making judgements
- offering counselling
- creating dependency
- imposing agendas or initiatives
- confirming long-held prejudices
So, before you start on the resource, just remind yourself of the Swahili proverb at the beginning of this thinkpiece, and the person who had such a profound and positive effect on you. Leaders who coach and mentor have the potential to bring about both significant improvements in performance and to unlock these very positive and profound changes in others.
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