

# I WANT A MENTOR... BUT YOU PROBABLY NEED A COACH



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I always wanted to have a Karate Kid-style situation, where a Mr Miyagi, the wise mentor, saw something great in me and committed their time to share their wisdom and knowledge so I could achieve greatness. Instead I was given a coach... and it was the best thing that happened to me. My career accelerated and I developed as a resourceful and resilient person.

Don't get me wrong, a mentor can be a great thing; they encourage learning (Parloe 1995) and transmit their knowledge (Stewart & Kregar 1996). A mentor can be your 'career friend' who is more senior and more influential, sharing useful hints and tips, passing on their advice (Rogers 2016). This is all good stuff, but it is important to be mindful that the journey your mentor had doesn't necessarily mean your journey is going to be the same. Also, you are an individual with different values and beliefs, you have your own way of seeing the world, so what worked for your mentor might not work for you.

Another important thing to consider is how we learn as adults. We learn completely differently to how we learn as children. Transmitting knowledge like a teacher does to its pupils isn't how we learn as adults. As adults we have accumulated various experiences, from the challenges and life stages we have gone through. We are also now responsible for our own lives! To learn and, most importantly, change/do something differently as adults, there are couple of things that need to be at play - we need to know why we are learning something and be 'ready' to learn; we need to be self-directing and have a sense that we are still responsible for making our own decisions; we learn more through reflection/evaluation of our experiences; and we

need to be intrinsically motivated to learn i.e. job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life (Malcolm Knowles) (Jack Meriowz).

## **The power of coaching**

In coaching, you set the agenda and your coach will create an environment where you are truly listened to and you move towards your goals in your own way. Coaching enables you to close the gap between your potential and your current state (Rogers 2016). It is a way of facilitating learning, creating greater self-awareness, helping to identify choices, finding your own solutions, developing your skills and changing your attitudes and behaviours. It is not about instruction or teaching.

Coaching helps you to discover from within rather than being told or taught. A coach will work from your own experience and perceptions rather than from their own (Whitmore 2017) so you are supported in your individual journey to success, whatever that looks like for you.

Whether you decide to go for coaching or mentoring, it is up to you. You need to recognise that progressing in your career is not something that is done for you and it is not the responsibility of your organisation to manage your career. You are responsible for your career, it needs to be led by you, no-one can do it for you.

In my case, coaching worked for me and I would encourage anyone who has the opportunity to have a coach to go for it, you just need to trust the process!