

Description

Coaching: How Might it Support and Nurture You to do the Job you Love?

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Introduction

Coaching is often traditionally seen as the remit of executives and the private sector. However, it is also being used widely within public sector organisations, including the NHS, such as through the NHS Leadership Academy programme. In this blog, International Coaching Federation (ICF) member coach Laura James explains what coaching is, how it differs from other support available, how it could benefit student and newly-qualified midwives and tips on how people can find the right coach for them.

What is coaching?

The ICF defines coaching as an action. It is “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential”.[1] Rather than acting as a sounding board, or a listening “buddy”, a coach will be more of a thinking partner. The purpose of coaching is threefold:

- It helps people define for themselves what they want
- It brings into awareness options that might have been previously unknown
- And then helps coachees develop strategies to move towards these outcomes.

Crucially, coaching has a positive, forward momentum and is goal-oriented. It asks, now you have that done that new thinking (about a topic or yourself), what are you going to do with it? How will that inform your thinking going forward?

In coaching we assume that the coachee has all the resources necessary, and all the answers, including the ability to find and use the resources they need. The coach asks the questions needed to bring those answers into the field of

awareness.

How does coaching differ from mentoring or therapy?

Sometimes coachees come to coaching with a misunderstanding about what coaching might be. Organisations and companies often lump coaching and mentoring together and it is easy to see why coachees might not be fully aware of the differences. Whenever I'm explaining the difference between mentoring and coaching, I like to use the analogy of a map (you can imagine for yourself which type of map, personally I like to picture a pirate treasure map as there's gold at the end, but you can use whatever works for you).

A mentor has usually reached the same destination as the mentee wants to get to themselves. They may offer the mentee their own map and point out dead ends/wrong turns and obstacles on the way.

> A mentor will often provide their own opinion and will give help, ideas, suggestions and advice based on their own experience.

By contrast, coaching is non-directive. If we're still using the map analogy, the coachee will decide the destination they want to get to and the coach will support the coachee to draw their own map, or might remind them of a map they've used previously.

They have no judgment or opinion about either the coachee's final destination or the path they are taking. There is a probability that the coach hasn't travelled to that specific destination. The lack of specialist knowledge or experience of a particular field can be a huge advantage, the less a coach knows about the subject, the less risk there is of them "leading" the coachee or their own opinions creeping in.

Sometimes coachees might mistake coaching for therapy. Coaching can be therapeutic in nature but one of the main differences between counselling and coaching is the forward-looking aspect of coaching. While counselling will often focus on the "why", looking backwards, coaching asks, "given where you are, where do you want to get to and how are you going to get there?". "Why" is a question that is seldom used in coaching. It is worth saying that coaches are not trained therapists or counsellors, although some may hold dual qualifications.

What might be the benefits of coaching?

If you've read this far, by now I'm hoping you might have started realising what some of the benefits of coaching might be. Of course, by its very nature, those benefits are highly individualistic. Often coachees report having a better understanding of themselves as well as ways in which they can fulfil their goal.

> The coaching process can be hugely empowering for a coachee as they realise they hold the answers to the questions they were seeking.

This in turn can lead to an increase in confidence, in resilience and in self-esteem. Essentially coaching can support a coachee to unravel and make meaning of their jumbled up thoughts and feelings, or release a "block" that a coachee has about a certain topic or issue.

The ICF global coaching client study found that coachees reported:

- greater self-confidence
- enhanced relationships
- more effective communication skills
- better work-and-life balance
- and an improvement in wellness

Finding the right coach

Coaching is an unregulated profession and as such there are countless "coaching companies" offering very short training programmes to turn people into coaches. However, there are global organisations doing a lot of work to safeguard the reputation and profession of coaching and who hold the coaches they have as members to a very high

standard. Some of the biggest and most reputable organisations are:

- International Coaching Federation (ICF),
- European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC),
- International Authority for Professional Coaching and Mentoring (IAPC&M)
- International Association of Coaching (IAC)

When seeking a reputable coach, it is worth asking about their training and their accreditation/membership. A good coach will demonstrate ethical practice, establish and maintain agreements, build trust and safety, listen actively, evoke awareness and facilitate growth.[2] They should offer a no-obligation chemistry conversation with a potential coachee to check compatibility, establish the overall goal of the coaching, check the coachee's understanding of coaching and establish how the coachee learns best. Part of that conversation will be around logistics – when, how, for how long and how we know when the work is done.

What sort of coaching offer would you like to see for student and newly-qualified midwives?

As I have mentioned already, coaching is already quite widespread within the NHS, most notably through the Leadership Academy's coaching and mentoring hub, which aims to nurture both clinician and non-clinician leaders.

> But I can see a huge benefit in offering coaching to student midwives.

I am aware of the challenges that are being faced by midwives, student and newly-qualified midwives in particular and I'd love to know your thoughts about the ways in which coaching might benefit you, and the sort of coaching platform you'd like to be able to access. Let's see our precious student midwives nurtured, empowered and healthy, so that they can be retained and continue to love the job they do.

References

1. All Things Coaching. ICF. https://coachingfederation.org/about. Accessed December 10, 2022.
2. Core Competencies. ICF. https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/core-competencies. Accessed December 10, 2022.

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1. For You
2. Student Midwife Blog
3. Student Midwives

Tags

1. education

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