

OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS, LLCSM

Coach, Mentor, & Sponsor: Similarities and Important Distinctions

CLARIFYING TERMS

COACH

Helps coachee develop a plan for their ongoing development

- ◆ Provides support and space for coachee to own their development
- ◆ Maintains boundaries and expectations of the coaching engagement

The coachee will establish realistic goals, work toward planned milestones, and produce significant results.

MENTOR

Shares areas of professional expertise with protégé/mentee

- ◆ Models for mentee the importance of dynamic personal and professional networks
- ◆ Shares specific professional expertise with mentee

The mentee will learn from the mentor and be able to strategically integrate advice into their professional development plan.

SPONSOR

Creates and is proactive in maintaining a viable workforce/team planning strategy

- ◆ Creates environment for formal and informal development to occur
- ◆ Acts as subject matter expert demonstrating, instructing and guiding employees

Employees have an appropriate level and variety of “regular” and “stretch” assignments to ensure the ongoing development of their skill-set.

Among leaders and across industries there is general agreement that coaching, mentoring, and sponsorship are important leadership functions. The terms, however, are often used interchangeably. Definitions abound with varying degrees of agreement between sources.

Clarity about these strategies can provide a roadmap of the types of developmental support available to employees from leaders. This knowledge can be leveraged to engage employees in processes to monitor their own improvement and engage in their overall career development.

One benefit of clarifying these terms is to establish a baseline of meaning resulting in clearer expectations for each role. That baseline can also assist in identifying current skill-set strengths of leaders as well as areas for potential improvement.

Leaders, for example, may possess skills in several of these areas, yet consistently rely on only one in their daily interactions with employees. Over time, there is the potential for overuse of a particular approach. The result could be similar to the adage if the only tool in one’s toolbox is a hammer eventually all opportunities and problems will be treated like nails.

Optimal Development Partners, LLC (SM) approach is not “one-size-fits all” but is applicable for all leaders and organizations. The following Quick Assessment is intended as a “starting point” template for consideration and reflection.

Our consultants are available for a complimentary consultation, please call and schedule a time to review this information today: 480.945.2629.

Quick Assessment

Although most leaders have the capacity to serve as a coach, mentor, or sponsor, it can be helpful to consider if one approach is more comfortable, natural, or favored from the others. Having a clear idea of the general qualities associated with each role can encourage greater flexibility within a leader's style as well as aid in ongoing leadership development efforts.

Using the following five-point assessment, select one answer for each question, a key is provided at the bottom of the page for your consideration and reflection. If your response is "it depends" try to think of a specific recent example to focus your responses.

When trouble-shooting with a member of my team, I prefer to

- A. Openly brainstorm options with the individual
- B. Provide advice based on my experience
- C. Clear obstacles or barriers to ensure success

If I need to delegate a stretch-assignment to a member of my team, I would likely

- A. Openly present the entire opportunity to the entire team in order to gauge interest and motivation
- B. Break the task down into manageable pieces and then assign specific elements to individuals who were "ready" for a new opportunity
- C. Assign the task to my "go to" person who is ideal for these types of opportunities

I view employee development plans and performance reviews as

- A. Something that we revisit regularly throughout the year with the employee in the "driver's seat"
- B. My responsibility to oversee, check-in, and gauge progress against pre-determined milestones
- C. A roadmap for direction, however, I constantly keep my eye out for new opportunities that will evolve during the year

If a member of my team is "off track" and I need to provide performance counseling, I would probably

- A. Point out what I see and ask the employee how they will address my concerns and in what timeframe
- B. Point out to the employee the various options available to get back-on-track and solicit buy-in
- C. Point out that if they want to be considered for a new opportunity, they need to show consistency

One word that would best describe my style would be

- A. Guide
- B. Advisor
- C. Champion

TOTAL YOUR SCORE

A's _____

B's _____

C's _____

If you had more A's, chances are you lean toward a coaching mindset: you likely tend to focus on guiding others in finding their own solutions. A word of caution, however: some individuals may not be "coachable" and you could find you spend a great deal of time with little impact or improvement.

If you had more B's, chances are you may lean toward a mentoring mindset: you likely focus on your expertise in order to provide advice. A word of caution, however: some individuals may not require or benefit from your ability to "fix" or find solutions, they may have a fine solution that is simply different from yours.

If you had more C's, chances are you may lean toward a sponsor mindset: you likely focus on your ability to leverage broader organizational structures in order to be an effective champion. A word of caution, however: some individuals may not be comfortable with your vision for their career yet no know how to share that with you.

All three approaches have strengths and drawbacks, the important point is to develop and maintain a flexible perspective to best meet the situational needs of your team members and the ever changing nuances of your organizational environment.