

# Sharpening Your Saw

Enhance your coaching excellence through mentor coaching

By Amoráh Ross, MCC

One of my greatest sources of professional joy is in working as a mentor coach partnering with coaches who choose to challenge themselves to heighten their coaching skills. Supporting their expansion, witnessing their unique approaches, and serving as an additional observer of the numerous choice points available within any given coaching session is a reciprocal process of learning and growth.

Readers of Steven R. Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* will recognize the concept of "sharpening the saw." Most professions require that practitioners regularly engage in activities that will enhance their skill set and expertise, and coaching is no exception. As an example, the International Coaching Federation (ICF) requires a total of 40 hours of continuing education every three years for re-credentialing purposes.

Mentor coaching is a process of partnership for observation, reflection and enhancement of the skill sets and competencies inherent in professional coaching. Just as earning a credential and/or a certificate in coaching distinguishes the profes-



sional coach from the person who merely 'hangs out a shingle' as a coach, regularly engaging with a mentor coach attests to a coach's dedication to their own professionalism and excellence.

From my many years serving as a mentor coach, trainer of coaches and credentialing assessor, I've discovered that to embark on a satisfying journey with a mentor coach, there are several things to consider.

## Training and Experience as a Mentor Coach

Just as there are people who call

themselves a coach without having a certificate or credential in coaching, there are those who call themselves a mentor coach without specific training in this specialized area of expertise. As you interview potential mentor coaches, requiring these elements of their experience and training are key:

- Graduate of a coach-specific learning program – Ensures they have a comprehensive grasp of the coaching skill set and its application.
- Holds a current credential from a reputable credentialing organization, e.g. ICF, IAC or EMCC – At-

tests to their proven demonstration of coaching competence; carries with it a pledge to adhere to best practice standards via a Code of Ethics, etc.

- Has completed training in the assessment of coaching competency and skills – Listening for and providing feedback regarding coaching competency and skills is an additional skill set on top of proficiency as a professional coach; these skills can be obtained by:

- Serving as a trainer of coaches and/or a mentor coach within a coach-specific training organization;
- Assessing coaching applicants for a credentialing organization such as ICF, IAC or EMCC; or
- Graduating from a mentor coach training program that is specifically designed to impart this additional skill set as an advanced training for professional coaches.

### Approach to the Mentor Coaching Process

Just as each professional coach is unique in their application of the coaching competencies and skill set, so too are mentor coaches unique in their approach to mentoring. Once you've identified the training and experience of a mentor coach, the next points that are important to clarify include:

- Is there an organized and comprehensive mentoring program structure that provides a clear pathway for working together?
- Does the written mentor coaching agreement and relationship setting conversation allow you to provide input regarding what works for

you and doesn't work for you in receiving feedback?

- How does the mentor coach intend to engage with you; is it an equal partnership of colleagues or a hierarchical approach of a senior profes-

- Inspire trust and confidence?
- Explore fully with you what you want to achieve?
- Support you in establishing your unique measure(s) of success?
- Have the ability to provide di-

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sional working with a junior one?

- What are the ways in which the mentor coach will listen to your coaching? (Via recording, by being an observer to a live coaching session, a combination of both, etc.).
- How will the mentoring feedback be delivered? (E.g., verbal, written, a combination).

### Finding a Fit

As part of the interviewing process, it's important to make sure there is a good fit between you and your mentor coach in much the same way you would seek a fit in hiring a personal coach. Does the mentor coach:

- Use language that is clearly understandable?
- Allow you an equal voice in assessing your skill level and next edges for growth?

rect, concrete feedback that honors and respects your unique style and preserves your self-confidence?

- Balance their feedback with what you're doing well as well as co-creating with you the areas in which you want to improve?
- Effectively invite you to stretch your skills beyond what you may think possible?

As you look ahead to the possibility of 'sharpening your saw' in partnership with a Mentor Coach, I hope you'll find these tips to be helpful to your process. There is a great deal of satisfaction available in working with another professional to be even better at what you do. May you reignite your passion for your work and be inspired by striving ever forward on your journey to your next level of coaching mastery.