

The State of Coaching & Mentoring 2020

Boost individual and organizational performance in today's challenging times



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Executive Summary

“A good coach can change a game. A great coach can change a life.”

~John Wooden,
former UCLA Basketball Coach



Coaching and mentoring have been among the most used and, at times, misused talent management practices for decades. At their best, these practices help individuals realize their potential and propel their careers. For organizations, they can expedite the building of a strong talent pipeline, foster a culture of collaboration and innovation, and enhance performance. Yet, despite the enormous potential of effective coaching and mentoring, many organizations fail to get it right, leading to disengaged employees, turnover, and unrealized potential.

In this report, we take a closer look and what fuels and hinders effective coaching and mentoring, potential best practices, and what the future holds.

This research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, so responses indicate the views of human resources (HR) professionals fully aware of related problems and uncertainties. Indeed, one question specifically focuses on coaching and mentoring practices where working remotely has become more common. Given other priorities, it would be easy to focus on initiatives other than coaching and mentoring. Yet, we would argue that to successfully navigate uncertain and turbulent times, it is needed more than ever.

Coaching and mentoring fuel learning, prepare our workforces for the future, and enhance the performance of organizations. With the advent of ever-changing business models, remote work environments, and a higher bar for meeting employee expectations, coaching and mentoring might become even more critical. And, as we face the massive business disruptions due to Covid-19, coaching and mentoring will play a key role in keeping our workforces motivated and engaged during unprecedented times.

About the Survey

The "State of Coaching and Mentoring" Survey ran during March and April 2020. We gathered 295 usable complete and partial responses from HR professionals in virtually every industry vertical. Respondents are located all over the world, but most of them reside in North America, especially the United States.

The participants represent a broad cross section of employers by number of employees, ranging from small businesses with fewer than 50 employees to enterprises with 20,000+ employees. Questions for the survey were guided by an independent panel of HR professionals, coaching and mentoring experts who we thank for their invaluable insights.

To learn more about how the coaching and mentoring landscape is changing, we surveyed 295 HR professionals. The topics we explore include:

- The importance of coaching and mentoring, now and in the future
- The primary drivers or objectives of coaching and mentoring, along with barriers to effectiveness
- How coaching and mentoring differ from one another
- The effectiveness of leaders across a range of coaching and mentoring skills
- How well organizations instill a coaching culture
- The use of new technologies aimed at fostering more effective and scalable coaching
- Key differences between those organizations that excel at coaching and mentoring versus those that do not



Below is a high-level summary of major findings:

Major Finding: Coaching and mentoring will increase in importance over the next two years.

- Fifty-six percent agree/strongly agree on the current importance of coaching while a slightly lower percent (50%) agree/strongly agree about the importance of mentoring.
- Asked about the next two years, 47% agree/strongly agree there will be a greater emphasis on coaching, and 49% expect to see a greater emphasis on mentoring.

Major Finding: Despite the importance of coaching and mentoring, few organizations say that more than half of their coaches or mentors are highly effective.

- Only 33% say that more than half of their mentors are highly effective, and a mere 10% say that more than three-quarters are highly effective.
- Only 28% say that more than half of their coaches are highly effective, and just 13% say more than three-quarters are highly effective.

Major Finding: In most organizations, coaches and mentors lack a high degree of effectiveness in seven key areas.

- Both coaches and mentors are *least* likely to be very effective in the area of “holding difficult conversations effectively,” though coaches tend to be better than mentors at having such conversations.
- Most coaches and mentors also lack high effectiveness in the areas of “instilling confidence” and “listening to create better understanding.”

Major Finding: The pandemic will fuel an increase in technology to bolster the effectiveness and reach of coaching.

- Seventy-two percent report their organizations will, to “some degree” or a “large degree,” make use of virtual/remote coaching in light of the pandemic.
- Multiple technologies are already being used by organizations to enhance their coaching efforts including:
 - ▶ internet-based learning (48%),
 - ▶ assessments (47%), and
 - ▶ video capabilities allowing virtual/distance coaching (37%).

Major Finding: There are some key differences in who does coaching versus mentoring.

- A large percentage of organizations use direct supervisors to do both coaching and mentoring: 50% and 44%, respectively.
- Colleagues/peers, non-direct managers, and senior executives are significantly more likely to serve as mentors than they are as coaches.
- External coaches/mentors (e.g., those from outside the organization) are more than twice as likely to be deployed as coaches than as mentors, and they are most commonly selected as those who coach in organizations.



Major Finding: Some culture-related factors are more prevalent than others.

- The most prevalent factors are that:
 - ▶ employees are encouraged to be mentored (68%) and coached (63%),
 - ▶ multiple L&D initiatives are made widely available (66%),
 - ▶ managers help others grow professionally (65%).
- It is rare, however, for internal mentors and coaches to be incentivized for their efforts, including via recognition programs.

Defining Larger and Smaller Organizations

We divided our total sample into two groups. We deem organizations with 999 or fewer employees “smaller” and those with 1000 or more employees as “larger.”

Major Finding: There are three widely-cited reasons for using coaching and mentoring programs:

- to provide guidance to help others realize their potential
- to prepare people for a new role or assignments
- to prepare a pool of talent to fill future critical roles

Major Finding: Four hindrances to coaching and mentoring are most commonly cited:

- not enough time to devote to coaching due to other priorities (73%)
- managers are avoiding difficult conversations (59%)
- coaching and mentoring is done too infrequently (49%)
- low skill levels of those doing coaching/mentoring (43%)

Major Finding: Among organizations with coaches, about half do not provide formal training in coaching skills.

- Fifty-one percent do not provide formal training in coaching.
- Twenty-nine percent provide formal training for select groups.
- Only 20% provide formal training for everyone who does coaching.

Major Finding: Coaching and mentoring have a positive impact on both individual development and organizational performance.

- Seventy-one percent agree/strongly agree that coaching has a positive impact on individual development and a similar percentage say the same for mentoring.
- Sixty-eight percent agree/strongly agree that coaching has a positive impact on overall organizational performance, and the percentage for mentoring is identical.

Major Finding: Companies with a larger percentage of effective coaches/mentors are more likely than other organizations to:

- attach greater importance to coaching and mentoring
- provide formal training in coaching and mentoring skills
- view coaching as having a strong positive impact on individual as well as organizational performance



How Critical is Coaching and Mentoring?

Finding: Coaching and mentoring programs are still new to many organizations

Among those with knowledge of their programs, 74% of respondents indicate that their organizations have coaching programs and 77% indicate they have mentoring programs.¹ Among those with a coaching program, 56% say they have had such a program for four years or less, and only a quarter say their organizations have had their programs for more than ten years. Among those with a mentoring program, 47% say they have had such a program for four years or less, and 24% say their organizations have had their programs for more than ten years.

In short, there is a good sample of organizations with relatively new coaching and mentoring programs and a good sample of those that have had programs for more than a decade.

Differences between larger and smaller organizations

Larger and smaller organizations are similar in the length of time they have had coaching programs in place. However, there are considerable differences when it comes to mentoring. Larger organizations are far more likely to have a mentoring program in place for a longer period. Twenty-nine percent of the smaller company respondents have had a mentoring program in place for five years or more, compared to 49% for larger companies.

¹ Eleven percent of respondents did not know if their organizations have coaching programs and 10% did not know if their organizations have mentoring programs. Among those with knowledge of their programs, 26% of respondents indicate that their organizations do not have coaching programs and 23% indicate they do not have mentoring programs. The answers of those who said their organizations do not have mentoring and coaching programs and do not have mentors and coaches were removed from the rest of the survey because they would not be able to respond to questions about the details of their programs.

Defining Coaching and Mentoring

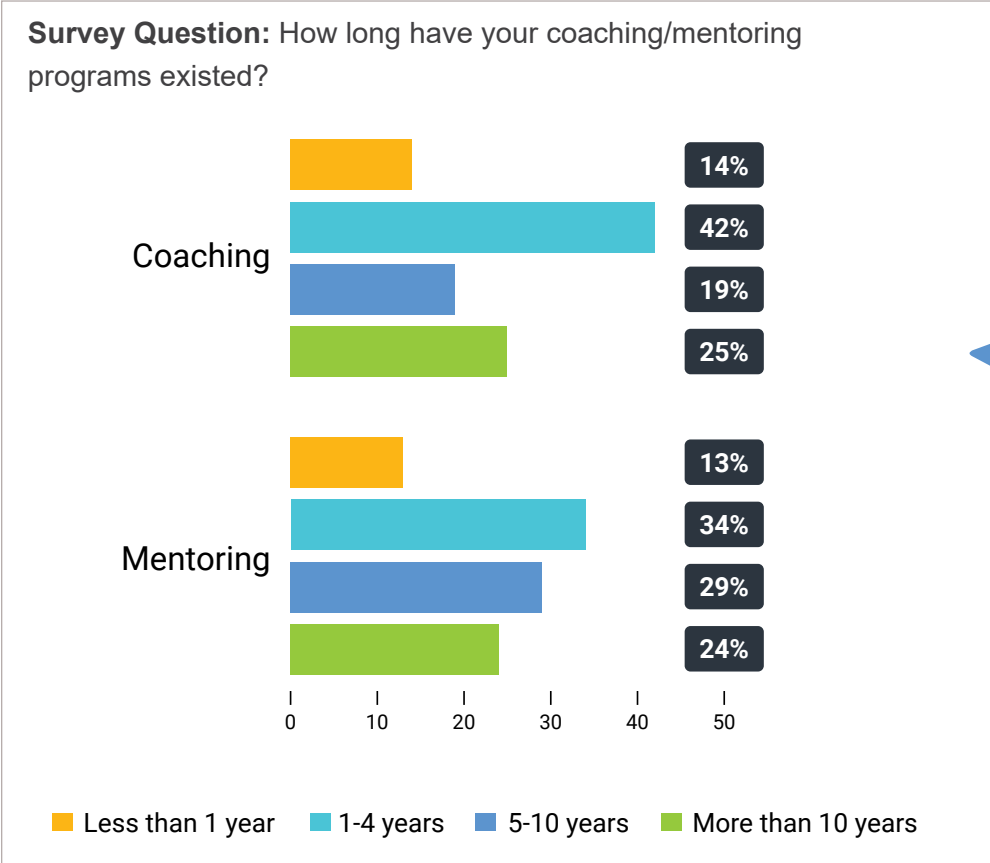
To help guide respondents, our survey included short definitions.

Coaching:

A form of development in which an experienced person, called a coach, provides a structured and focused interaction with a learner or client (coachee), using tools and techniques to help create positive change for the benefit of the coachee and possibly for other stakeholders.

Mentoring:

A relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person via advice, opinions, strategies and policies focused on career or life advancement.



About a quarter of organizations have had coaching and mentoring programs for more than a decade

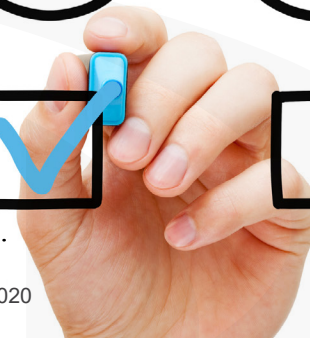
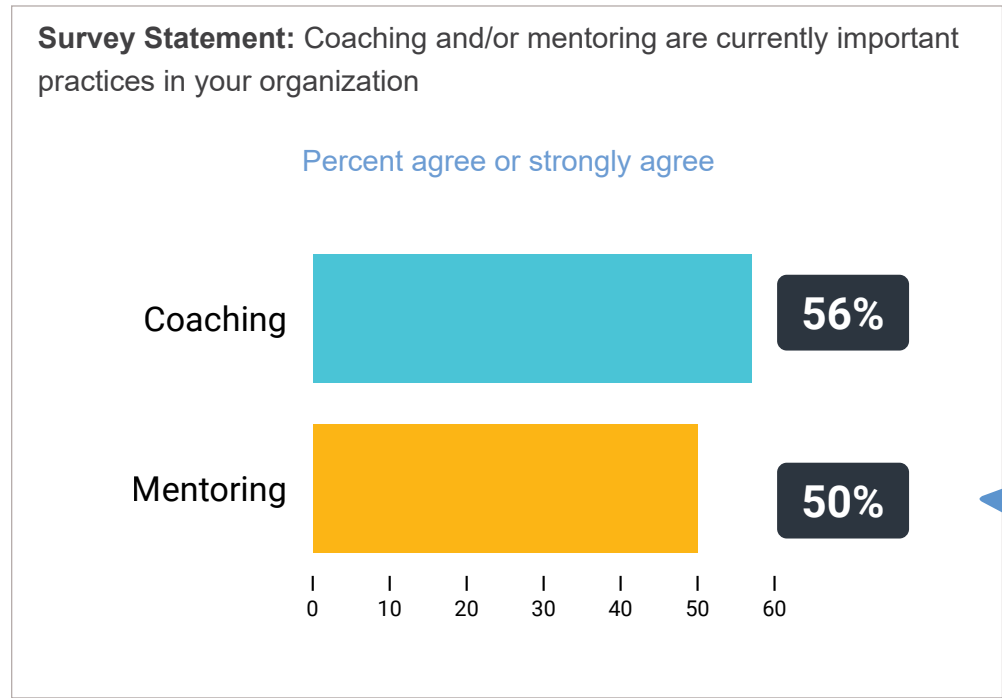
Note: 'Don't know' and 'We do not have these programs' have been removed from this graph.



Finding: Well over half believe coaching is currently important

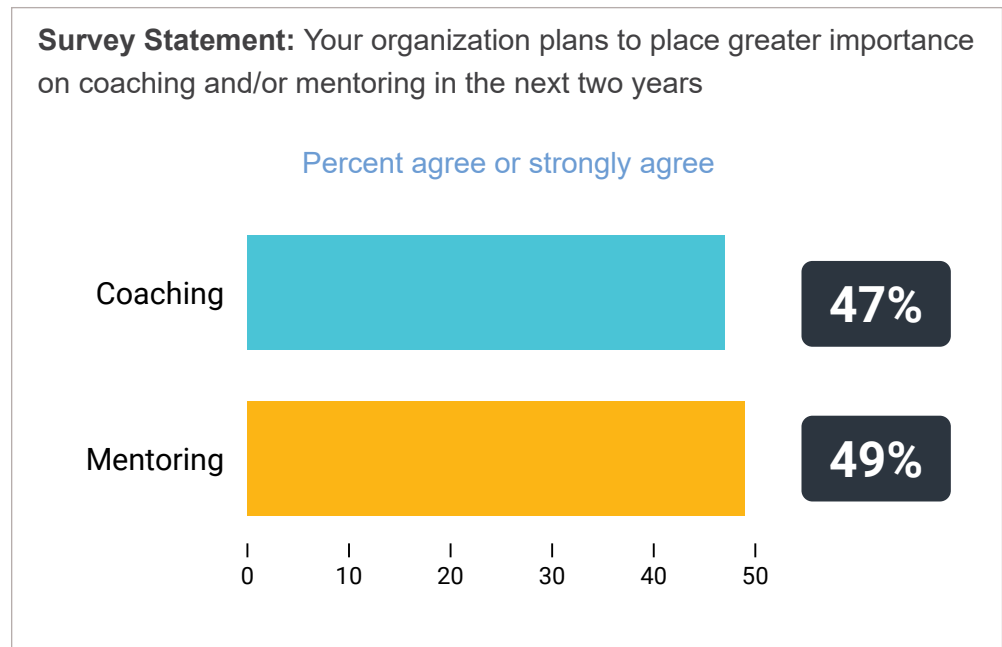
Fifty-six percent either agree or strongly agree that coaching is currently an important practice. However, only half feel the same way about mentoring. If we add those who responded “somewhat agree,” we see that 81% agree to some degree that coaching is important, and 77% feel the same way about mentoring.

On one hand, it is heartening to see how many respondents view coaching and mentoring as important. On the other hand, we find it disappointing that so many respond in the somewhat important and disagree categories, while only about a quarter strongly agree that these are important practices.



Finding: Just under half of organizations will attach greater importance to coaching and mentoring in the future

Forty-seven percent plan on placing a greater emphasis on coaching over the next two years. Forty-nine percent will do the same for mentoring. These findings could be driven by the need for coaching in the younger and less experienced workforce, the increasing pace of change, and currently, the need for more encouragement and support during the massive uncertainty associates are facing in light of the recent pandemic and economic downturn.



What Are the Top Reasons for Using Coaching and Mentoring Programs?

Finding: The most widely-cited reasons are helping associates reach their full potential and preparing them for the future

When asked to indicate the top three reasons for using coaching and mentoring in the future, “providing guidance to help others realize their potential” topped the list at 58%. The second and third most widely-cited reasons are tied: “preparing a pool of talent to fill future roles” and “preparing people for new roles and assignments,” each chosen by 49% of respondents. These are all positive, forward-looking uses for coaching and mentoring that should lead to increased employee engagement and organizational future readiness.

We found that “handling performance issues” is viewed as a less important reason for coaching and mentoring. Only 30% singled out “remediating poor performance or work habits” as one of their top reasons for coaching and mentoring. While less strategic and shorter-term than the top three reasons discussed above, performance coaching remains important. Skillful coaches who can turn around a performance issue can head off disciplinary actions and even termination. All too often, team performance can be jeopardized by “one bad apple.” At the same time, many performance issues could have been avoided in the first place if coaches focused on preparing people for success rather than waiting for a performance issue to arise in the first place.



Survey Question: Of the list below, which three will be the top reasons for using coaching/mentoring programs in your organization in the future? (select up to three)



Only 28% believe that one of the top reasons for using coaching/mentoring programs is to provide career guidance



Are Organizations Instilling a Coaching Culture?

Finding: Evidence of strong coaching cultures is mixed

A coaching culture is one where coaching and mentoring happens frequently and freely throughout the organization. It becomes a core value, and it is characterized by a high degree of trust and honest communication.

We explored eight factors related to a strong coaching culture. On a positive note, 68% of HR professionals agree or strongly agree “that their organizations encourage employees to be mentored,” and 63% say the same about encouraging employees to be coached.

Two-thirds agree or strongly agree that “employees are offered a range of L&D activities,” one key to employee development cultures. High ratings also went to “managers help others to grow professionally.”

HR professionals are less likely to say that senior leaders serve as positive models for coaching and mentoring (54%) or that everyone is supported in reaching their full potential (50%). And, relatively few state that coaches and mentors are incentivized either via financial rewards or through recognition.

We believe that, though it may be unusual or difficult to tie financial rewards to internal coaching and mentoring, it makes sense to explore other ways to recognize outstanding internal coaches and mentors. After all, these are an invaluable set of skills, and leaders/managers who do perform them well should be encouraged. We believe such encouragement and recognition can become one aspect of a strong coaching culture.



Survey Statement: Your organization contains the following coaching and/or mentoring culture-related factors

Percent agree or strongly agree



Nearly two-thirds of organizations say they have adopted four key culture-related factors

What Are the Most Prevalent Barriers to Effective Coaching and Mentoring?

Finding: The top barriers to effective coaching and mentoring are a lack of time and the avoidance of difficult conversations

Insufficient Time

Seventy-three percent indicate that there is not enough time to coach or mentor due to other priorities. Closely related to insufficient time is the notion that coaching and mentoring sessions occur too infrequently, cited as a barrier by 49%.

We can sympathize with such responses. After all, increasing spans of control and ‘doing more with less’ places pressure on time to coach. On the other hand, we believe that coaching and mentoring are among the most important jobs of any leader. Moreover, there is always the option to bring in external coaches. Even more to the point, if coaching/mentoring enhances employee performance and builds workers’ competence, it should free up a leader’s time.

Insufficient time may also be attributed to an absence of structure in coaching and mentoring programs. Seena Mortzavi, CEO of Chronus, a provider of mentoring and coaching solutions, puts it this way: “One of the biggest barriers to effective mentoring or coaching is lack of structure. When a program does not have clearly defined objectives and expectations, it’s not clear to the participants. It’s too easy for this critical function to fall down the priority list.”

Avoiding Difficult Conversations

Another widely-cited hindrance (59%) is that “managers avoid holding difficult and truthful conversations.” We believe that the only thing worse than having a difficult conversation is not having one at all. If the difficult conversation is around a performance issue, not acting will have a negative impact on all team members. But when done well, it can strengthen relationships, improve performance, and even lead to positive life changes.



Alice Pescuric, Executive Coach and Talent Management Consultant, who has spent much of her career coaching organizational leaders, puts it this way: “One of the biggest challenges facing an external coach is a leader and culture that do not provide and value candid feedback. While this can be due to a lack of skills, more often than not, the root cause is a manager’s lack of willingness to confront and be held accountable for providing developmental feedback. When the leader and external coach work in partnership with the coachee, the results are growth and development for the individual and the organization.”

Lack of Skills Among Managers

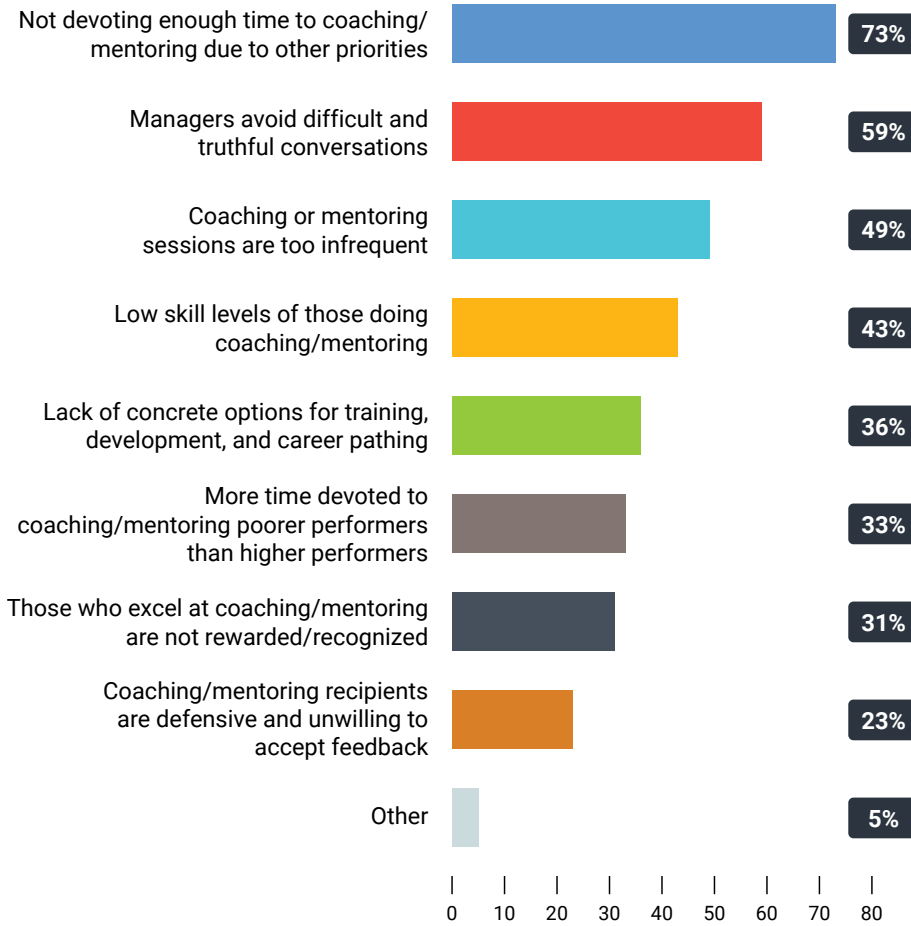
Forty-three percent cite low skill levels of managers as a barrier to effective coaching. Later in the report, we take a deeper dive into this critical challenge, including the specific coaching/mentoring skills that are scarcest.

Differences Between Larger and Smaller Organizations

Do larger and smaller organizations differ in any of these areas? Yes, there are three areas of considerable difference. Respondents from larger organizations are more likely than those from smaller ones to report that insufficient time for coaching/mentoring is a barrier (79% vs. 71%). They also report greater concerns about devoting too much time to poor performers (39% vs. 31%) and about lack of rewards and/or recognitions for those who excel at coaching/mentoring (38% vs. 27%).



Survey Question: Which challenges currently hinder coaching/mentoring in your organization? (select all that apply)



Nearly half believe coaching or mentoring sessions are too infrequent

Who Actually Does Coaching and Mentoring In Organizations?

Finding: There are key differences in who does coaching and mentoring

The figure below shows the differences between those who serve as coaches and those who are mentors. Some of these differences are considerable and serve to highlight how the two practices differ.

On Coaches

External coaches (52%) and direct supervisors (50%) are the most commonly cited sources for coaching. External coaches often bring valuable skills, experience and objectivity to the role. These coaching relationships are often arranged on a fee-basis with professionals.

Direct managers, in contrast, are largely accountable for team performance and have a direct line of sight to their team members. We believe that direct managers should be responsible and accountable for coaching, but that they require the right skill sets in order to be effective in this area.

On Mentors

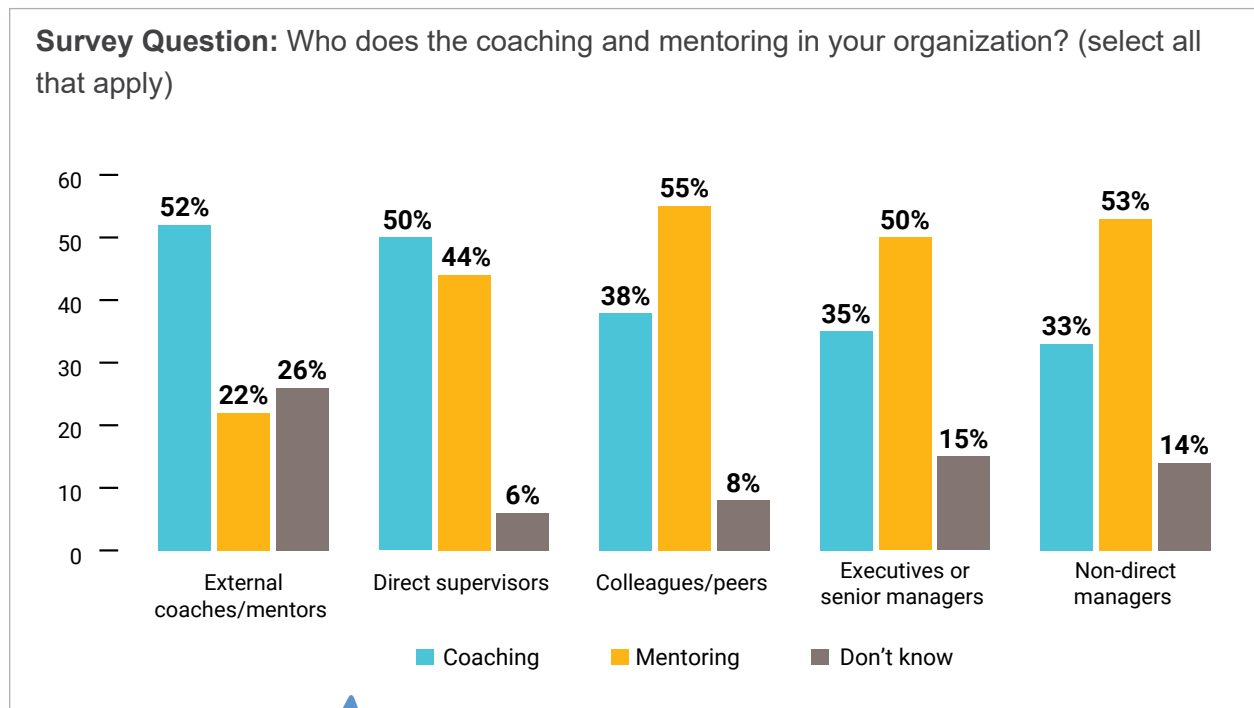
Colleagues/peers, non-direct managers and executives/senior leaders are most likely to serve as mentors. Mentors are relatively unlikely to come from outside the organization. Just 22% of organizations say external personnel serve as mentors.

Mentoring tends to be done by those outside of a person's direct reporting line. This enables a relationship that provides different perspectives, a longer-term career focus, and confidentiality—all of which are keys to successful mentoring.



Differences Between Larger and Smaller Organizations

The sources of coaching and mentoring are similar between larger and smaller companies. However, there are two interesting differences. Larger organizations are also less likely than their smaller counterparts to use executives/senior managers as coaches (32% vs. 38%), but more likely to use them as mentors (54% vs. 43%). Interestingly, larger organizations are slightly less likely to use outside sources for coaching when compared to smaller organizations (49% vs. 56%), but they are more likely to use outside sources for mentoring (27% vs. 16%).



Half of organizations say external coaches and direct supervisors conduct coaching

Finding: Experience is the most important factor in hiring external coaches or coaching services

The market for professional coaching is enormous, with some past estimates exceeding a billion dollars within the U.S. Outside coaching often falls into two categories: business and executive. While there is often overlap, business coaching focuses on functional or business areas like sales or financial. Executive coaching tends to focus more on personal leadership and career issues. It is estimated that there are more than 50,000 external coaches, many accredited by institutions like the International Coaching Federation.²

How do organizations go about selecting external coaches? The figure below shows the top five criteria for selecting external coaches or coaching services.

Experience is the top criterion, chosen by 43% of respondents. Organizations seek out coaches with a strong track record of successful engagements. Given both the cost of external coaching and the senior-level visibility, it is not the time to “roll the dice.” Reputation is the second most frequently chosen criterion. In many cases, external coaches are selected based on their reputed success with other individuals or organizations. Reputation is followed closely by two criteria: compatibility/trust and rates/fees. The fact that rates and fees are only the fourth most cited criterion suggests that organizations tend to prioritize quality, as inferred by experience and reputation, over cost.

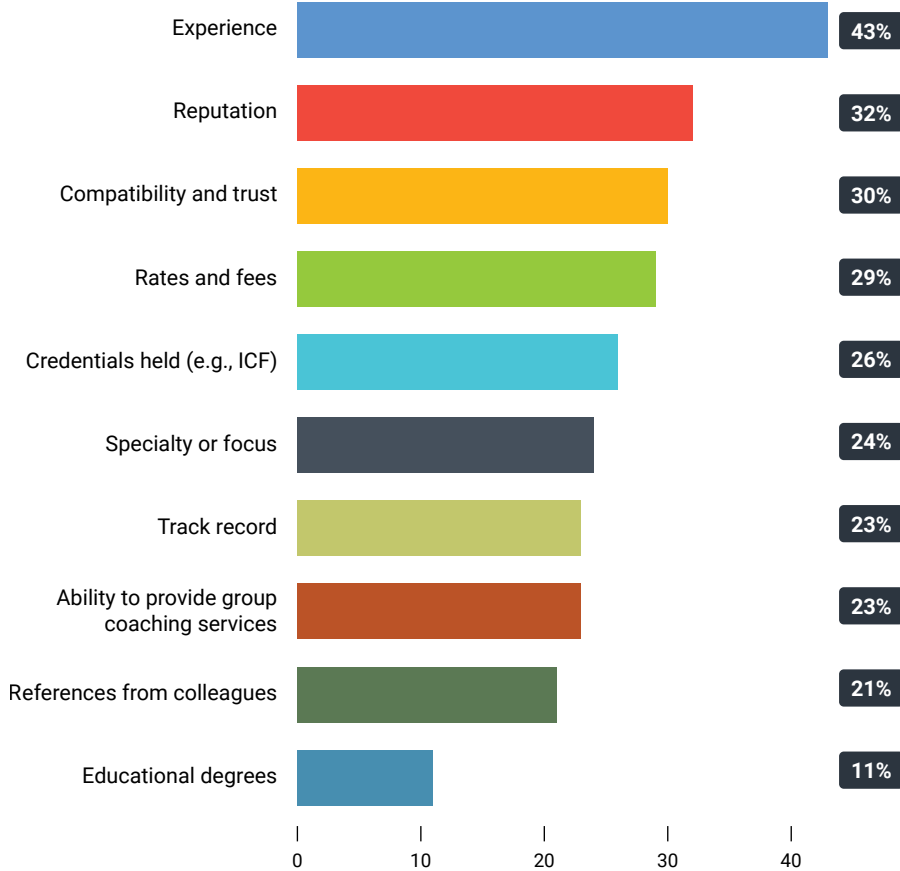
The fifth most widely cited criterion is credentials, cited by 26%. Many external coaches hold professional coaching credentials from independent, third-party associations and educational institutions. These organizations use a rigorous training process and practicums before certification is awarded which helps ensure higher levels of coaching skills and professionalism.

Although credentials can also be viewed as a signal of quality, the less tangible and official quality of “reputation” seems to be even more highly esteemed.



² Olubiyi, M. (2019). *Current Information on The Size of The Life Coaching Market*. Retrieved from <https://coachestrainingblog.com/becomeacoach/size-of-the-life-coaching-market/>

Survey Question: What are the main criteria your organization uses to hire or contract with external coaches or coaching services? (select all that apply)



Reputation, compatibility and trust are common criteria for selecting coaches



How Effective Are Coaches and Mentors?

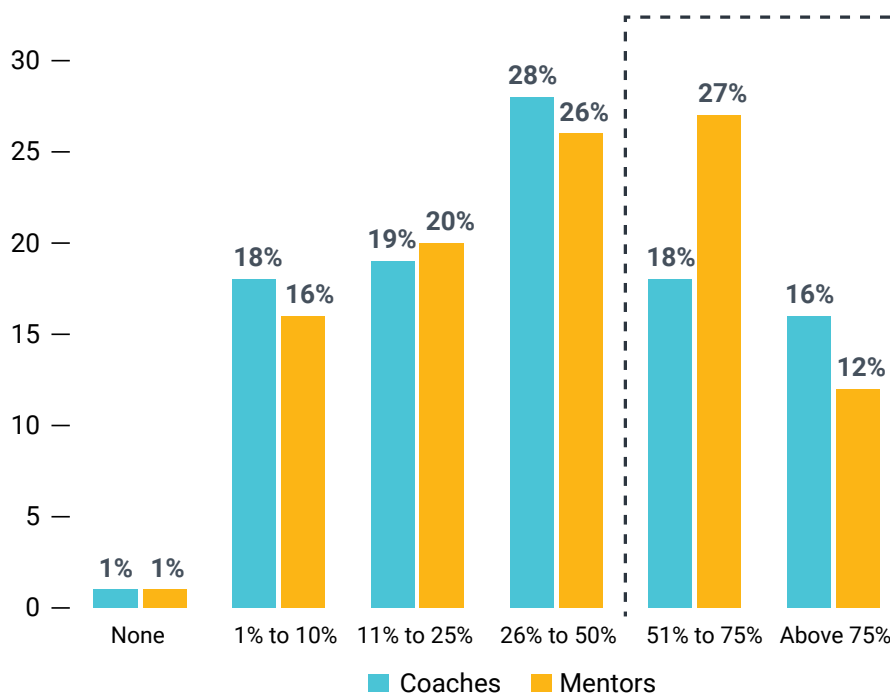
Finding: Few believe that most of their coaches and mentors are highly effective

The most critical ingredient of any coaching and mentoring initiatives is the effectiveness of those doing it. Yet, among organizations that have coaching roles, only 34% say that more than half of their coaches are highly effective, and just 16% say more than three-quarters of their coaches are highly effective. Among those with mentoring roles, only 39% say that more than half of their mentors are highly effective, and just 12% say more than three-quarters of their mentors are highly effective.

The bottom line is even among those with coaching and mentoring roles in their organizations, the large majority believes that half or fewer of their coaches and mentors are highly effective.



Survey Question: What percentage of mentors and coaches in your organization do you consider to be highly effective? (please provide your best estimate)



Only 34% say that more than half of their coaches are highly effective

Editor's Note: This graph does not show responses from those who stated that their organizations do not have coaching or mentoring roles. Sixteen percent say their organizations do not have coaching roles, and 15% say they do not have mentoring roles.

Finding: Few believe that their coaches and mentors are very effective in seven key areas

Only a slim minority of HR professionals feel their coaches and mentors excel in seven key areas. In fact, no more than 34% of HR professionals believe that coaches or mentors are very effective in any of these areas.

Overall, coaches are better than mentors at skills such as asking questions to generate insights (33% versus 24%), holding difficult conversations (22% versus 12%), and helping others to develop strategies to meet their goals (31% versus 25%).

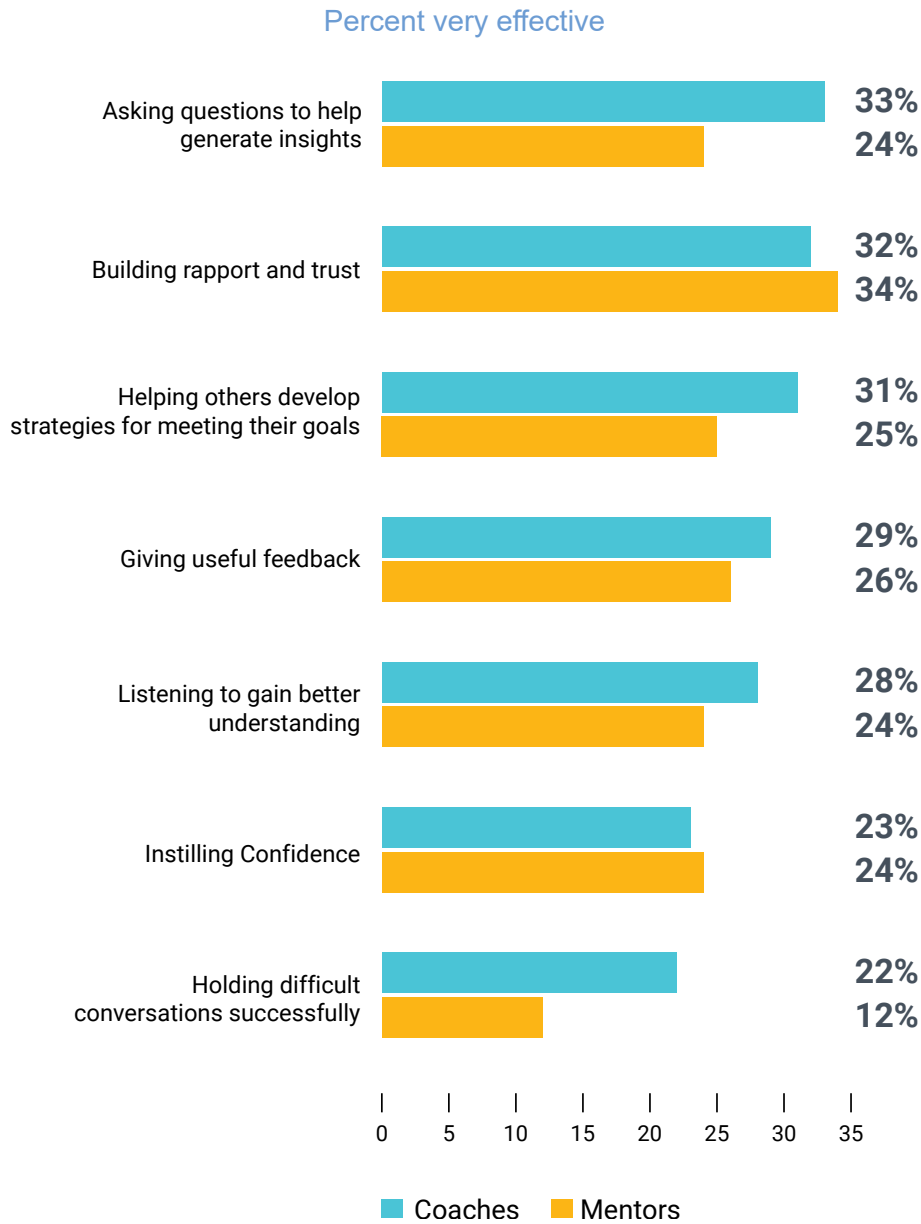
Generally speaking, mentors are seen as less skilled than coaches. There are only two areas where mentors are viewed as marginally better than coaches: instilling confidence and building rapport and trust.

Overall, the scarcest skill is the ability to successfully hold difficult conversations. It is especially important that direct supervisors be able to hold such conversations.

One of the most useful skills is the ability to ask questions that can help generate insights. As Dr. Deborah Hedderly, an Associate Professor at Roseman University puts it, “When we stop and ask a question and give a person the opportunity to offer a solution or even clarify the problem, they are learning, becoming more effective, and gaining self-confidence.”



Survey Statement: In your organization, how effective are the following skills of your coaches and mentors?



Coaches and mentors are least likely to be able to effectively and successfully hold difficult conversations

Finding: Most organizations do not provide formal training in either coaching or mentoring

As noted previously, few organizations believe a majority of their coaches and mentors are very effective, so it is disturbing that many organizations do not provide training in coaching and mentoring skills. About half (51%) fail to provide formal training for coaches and 58% fail to provide it for mentors.

We consider this a potentially dangerous finding. Coaching and mentoring both involve learning a complex set of skills over time. A bad coach or mentor could do considerably more harm than good to another person's performance and career

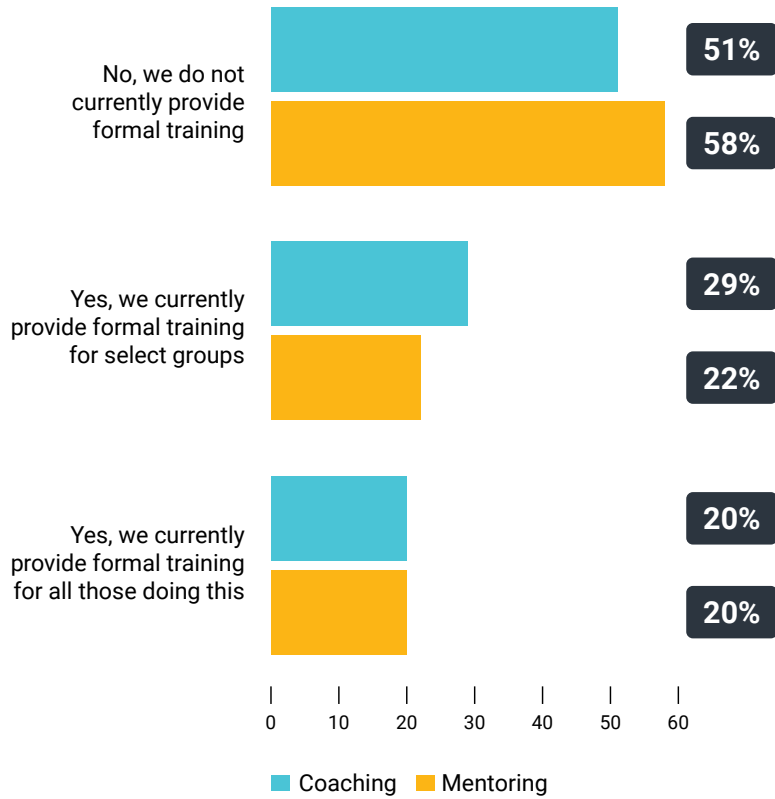
Differences Between Larger and Smaller Organizations

Training is an area where larger and smaller organizations differ considerably. Larger organizations are much more likely to provide coaching skills training. Sixty percent offer training to all or some of those doing coaching versus 38% in smaller organizations. The same differences show up for mentoring. Fifty-two percent of larger organizations provide training to all or some of their mentors, compared to 33% of smaller organizations, a 19-point difference!

Since both sizes of organizations tend to view coaching and mentoring as important, we assume these differences are due to other factors. Perhaps smaller organizations have fewer internal resources devoted to building and delivering coaching and mentoring programs. Also, those organizations that rely heavily on external coaches may assume that such coaches are already well trained and even accredited by a third-party professional organization.



Survey Questions: Does your organization provide formal training in coaching and/or mentoring skills?



A mere 20% provide formal training for coaching/mentoring

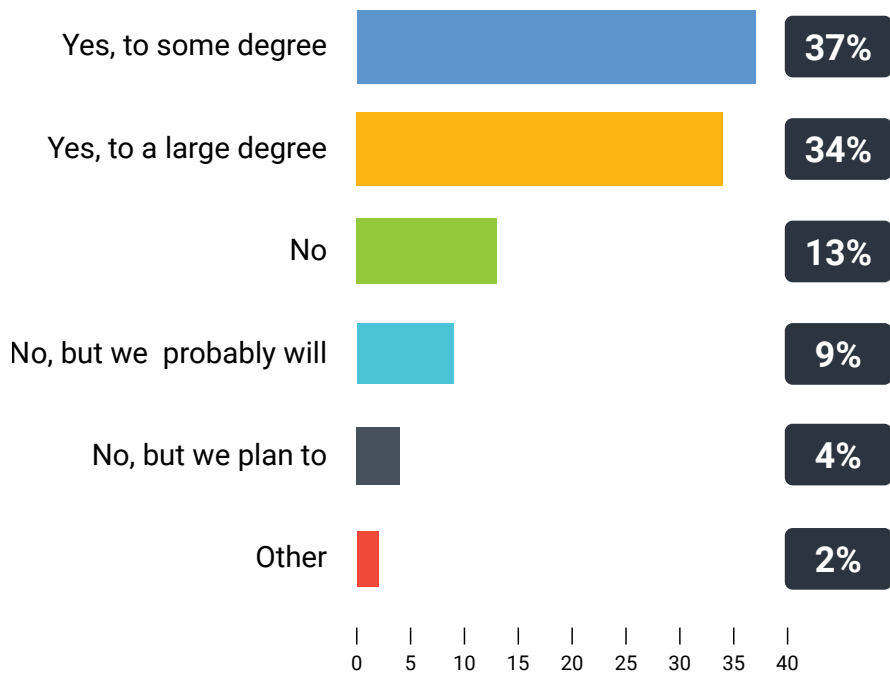


How Is Workforce Technology Impacting Coaching and Mentoring?

Finding: The pandemic is fueling greater usage of virtual coaching

Seventy-one percent of organizations are, to some extent or a large extent, relying on remote/virtual coaching and mentoring in light of the current coronavirus pandemic. It is likely these solutions were in place long before the crisis but are becoming more prevalent as many organizations have embraced remote work to keep employees safe from contagion.

Survey Question: Due to impact of the recent pandemic on the workplace, is your organization relying more on remote/virtual coaching and/or mentoring? (select one)



Seventy-one percent say the pandemic is leading to more remote coaching and mentoring in their organizations

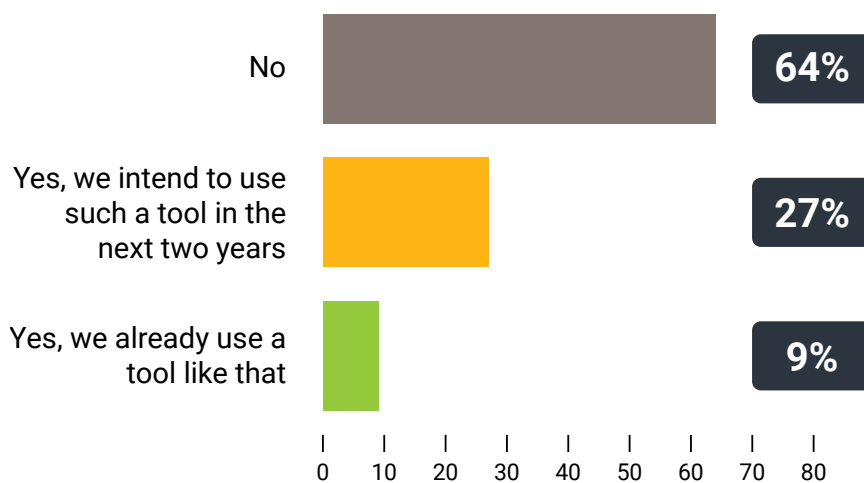


Finding: So far, few organizations are embracing AI for coaching

Only 9% of organizations are currently using an AI-based tool to enhance their coaching efforts, and most (64%) have no intention of doing so. However, more than a quarter (27%) intend to adopt such a tool over the next two years.

While in the early stages, several apps already exist that make use of AI. For example, AI can help predict the specific development needs of coachees and provide advice that is targeted to these needs. Chatbots and other applications provide “automated” virtual coaching (e.g., ask a question and get an answer or advice). Most argue that while AI can facilitate more effective coaching, it cannot totally replace humans.

Survey Question: Do you use, or intend to use, an artificial-intelligence-based tool able to gauge employee coaching needs and then offer suggestions aimed at those needs?



Only about one-quarter say that they intend to use an AI-based tool to improve coaching in the next two years



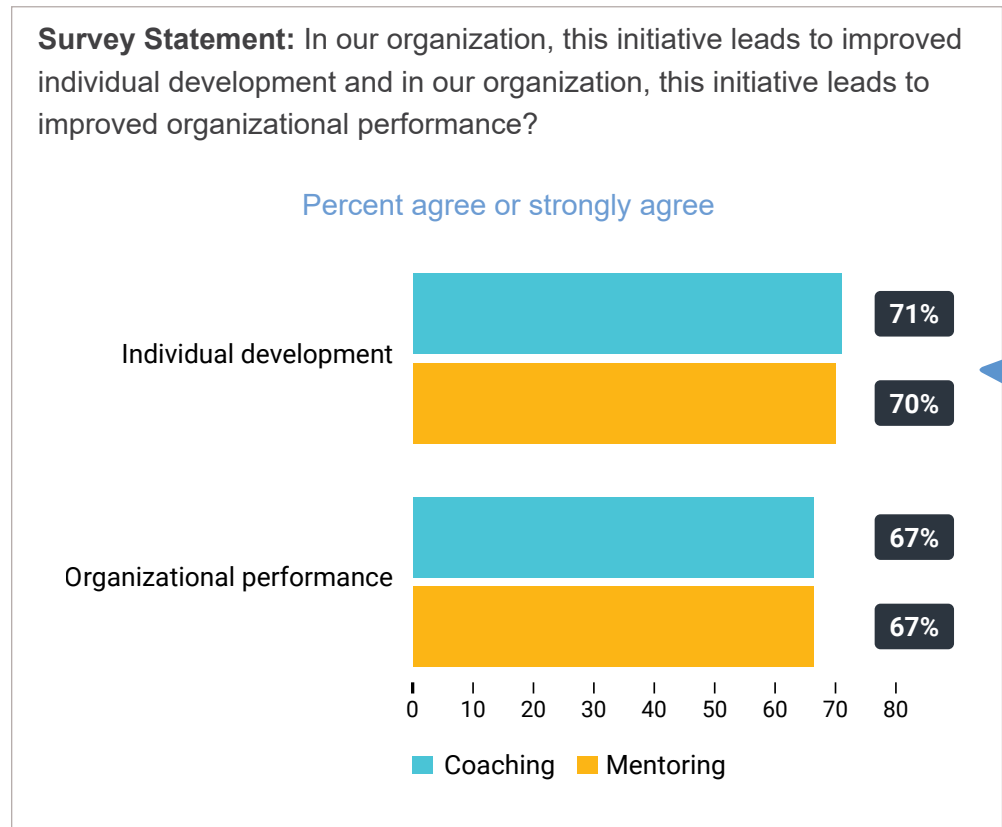
Does Coaching and Mentoring Bolster Performance?

Finding: A large majority of HR professionals view coaching and mentoring as a key enabler of performance

We explored perceptions of coaching and mentoring on both individual development and overall organizational performance. Seventy-one percent agree/strongly agree that coaching leads to improved individual development; 70% feel the same about mentoring.

Similarly, 67% agree/strongly agree that coaching leads to improved organizational performance, with the same percentage feeling the same way about mentoring.

These findings support the proposition that coaching and mentoring plays a central role in effective talent development.



Practices Linked to a Greater Chance of Success

How Do We Classify High Performers?

The findings above are based on responses from all organizations. However, we wanted to take a closer look at the relationship between those organizations with highly effective coaches and mentors and those with less effective coaches and mentors. We started by dividing our sample into two groups:

Low performers (LP): These respondents say that in their organizations less than half of their coaches *and* mentors are highly effective and/or that they do not have these roles and/or programs at all.

High performers (HP): These respondents say that their organizations have coaching and mentoring roles and programs and that at least 51% of their coaches *or* mentors are highly effective. Moreover, no fewer than 26% of their coaches *or* mentors are very effective.

Of course, correlation is not the same as causation. While we cannot state that any particular practice will definitely lead to coaching and mentoring success, we do see intriguing relationships that may result in greater success.



What Do High Performers Do Differently?

Finding: High performers place far more importance on coaching and mentoring

Eighty-three percent of the respondents from the high performer group of companies agree or strongly agree that coaching is currently an important practice in their organization. Seventy-four percent feel the same way about mentoring.

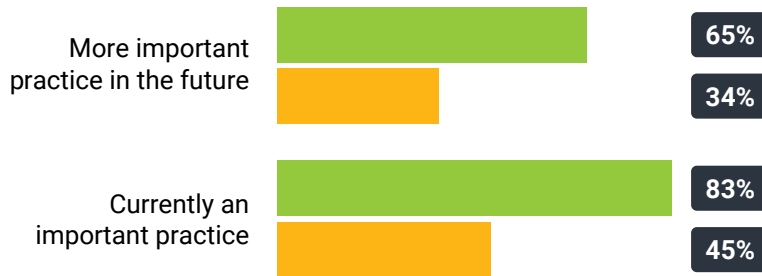
The low performer group was much less likely to view coaching and mentoring as important. Just 45% view coaching as important today and even fewer (39%) see mentoring as important.

We found similar differences when it comes to the intention to place greater importance on coaching/mentoring over the next two years. Most high performers (65%) agree or strongly agree that coaching will become more important in the future and 63% say the same for mentoring. This compared to 34% and 35%, respectively, for the low performer group. The importance that an organization places on coaching/mentoring sends a message that leads to a stronger coaching culture and better practices.

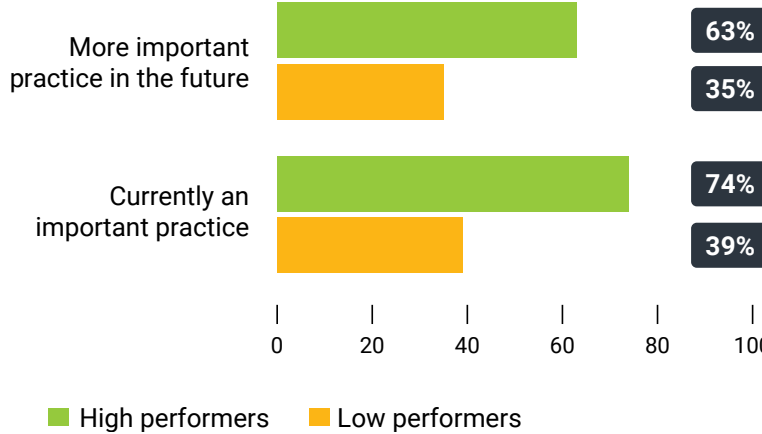


Survey Statements: Coaching and/or mentoring are currently important practices in your organization and your organization plans to place greater importance on coaching and/or mentoring in the next two years

Coaching



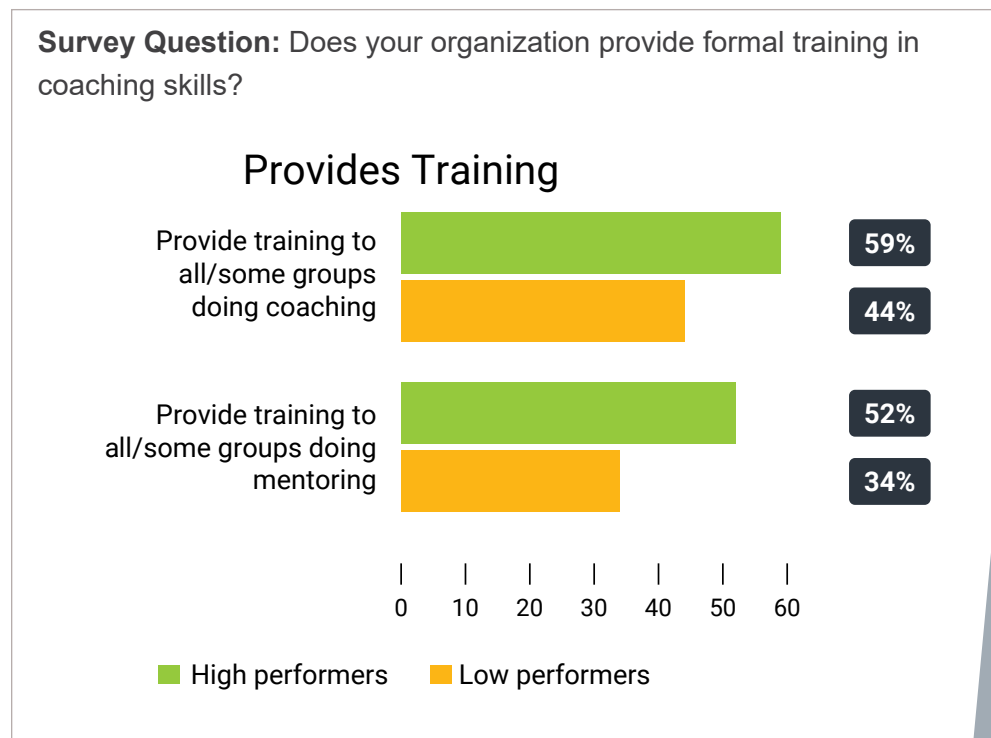
Mentoring



Note: Percent of organizations that agree/strongly agree on the current and future importance of coaching/mentoring

Finding: Effective coaching and mentoring are linked to formal training

The criterion for dividing our respondents into two groups, high and low performers, was based on their perception of the effectiveness of their coaches and mentors. We would then logically assume that high performers would be more likely to train their coaches and mentors. The figure below supports this proposition. High performers are more likely than low performers to provide training to all or select groups doing coaching. And, they are also more likely to provide training to those doing mentoring.



Finding: High performers are more capable than low performers in all specific coaching skills

When we looked across the coaching skills included in our research, we found that high performers outperform the low performers in every area. The largest difference, looked at in terms of percentage points, is in the area of “instilling confidence” (34 percentage points). As every manager knows, it can be challenging to provide constructive feedback and critiques while also building up the confidence of their direct report. Yet, this is an essential balance to strike for any good coach.

Other sizable differences between high and low performers are in the areas of:

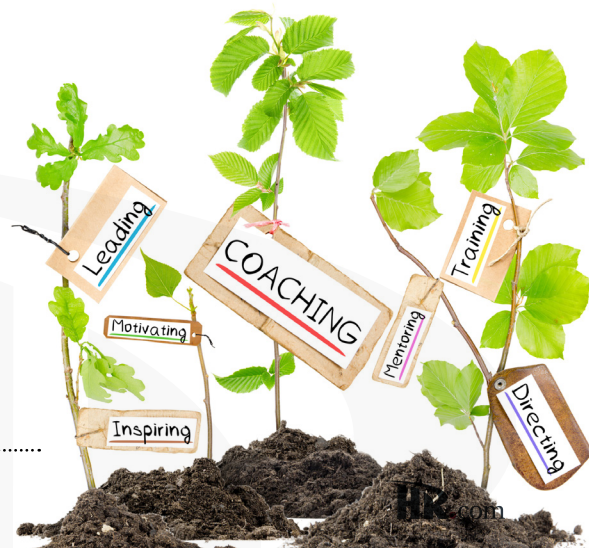
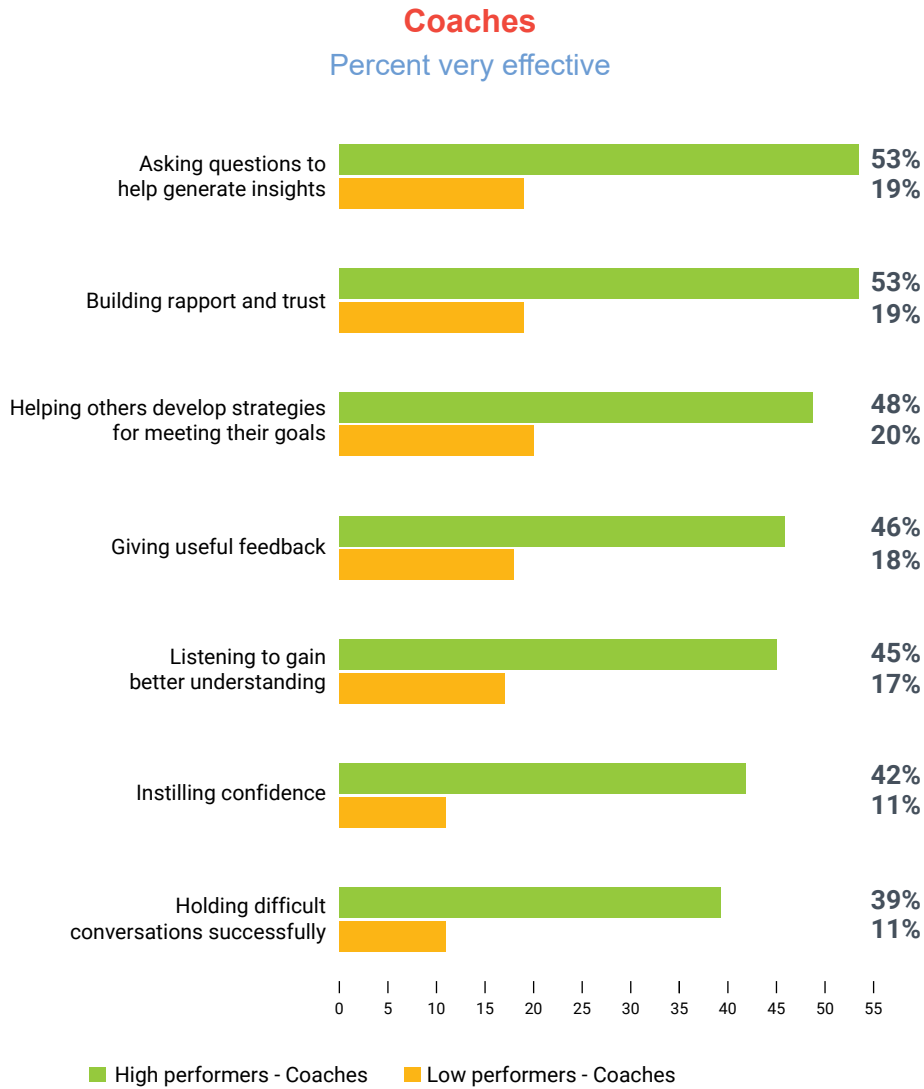
- asking questions to generate insights
- building rapport and trust
- holding difficult conversations

As we noted earlier, the ability to hold successful difficult conversations is among the scarcest of ability among coaches and mentors alike, but it is probably more important for coaches than mentors since they are more likely to be director supervisors. It can be particularly difficult to have successful tough conversations even while building rapport and instilling confidence.

We must note, however, that even among respondents from high performing organizations, relatively few feel their coaches are “very effective” in any of these areas. This illustrates that even many of these organizations could do considerably better in honing the skills of their coaches.



Survey Question: How effective are the following skills of your coaches?



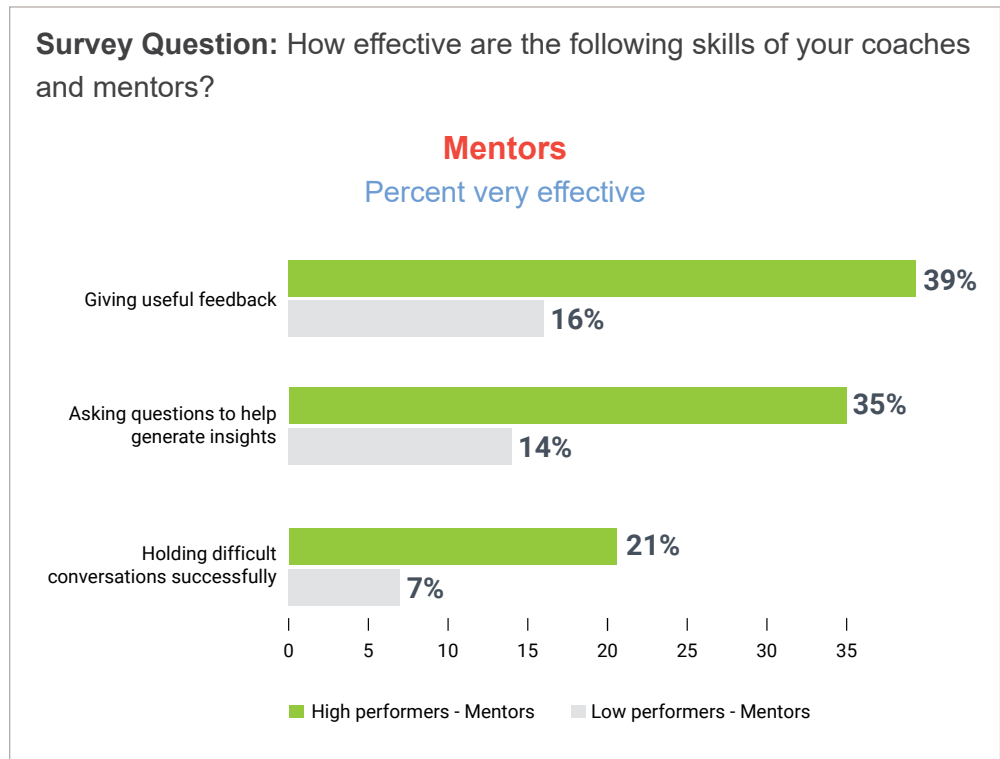
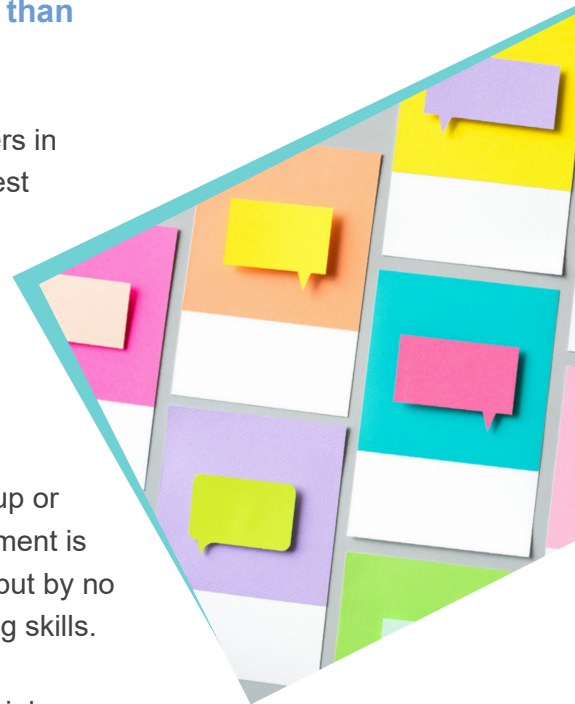
Finding: High performers are considerably more capable than low performers in three key areas related to mentoring

When we looked at the differences between high and low performers in terms of mentoring skills, we found few differences. The three largest differences were in the areas of:

- giving useful feedback (23 percentage points)
- asking questions to help generate insights (21 points)
- holding difficult conversations (14 points)

While we are focusing on differences between the two groups in effectiveness, it is important to point out, that regardless of the group or specific skill, there is not a single skill where considerable improvement is not needed. In other words, the high performers might look better, but by no means are they a shining light when it comes to coaching/mentoring skills.

As occurred with coaching, relatively few of the respondents from high-performing organizations feel their mentors are “very effective” in these skills areas. This shows that many of these organizations could do considerably better in honing the skills of their mentors.



Finding: More effective coaching and mentoring links to better performance

We expected that organizations with more capable coaches and mentors would make a bigger impact on performance, reinforcing the importance of both practices. As shown in the figure below, the high performer group reported a greater impact on both individual and organizational performance compared to the low performer group. For example, 89% of the high performer group agree or strongly agree that coaching leads to increased organizational performance versus 54% for the low performer group, a 35-point difference! There are similarly large differences between the high and low performers groups when it comes to impact on individual development.





Top Takeaways

Given the research findings in this report, below are some key suggestions for how organizations might become more successful in fostering better coaching and mentoring programs.



1

Strongly consider continuing with coaching and mentoring even amid the pandemic. With pandemic-related budget limitations and workforce reductions, it would be easy to put coaching and mentoring on the backburner. However, if it can be done safely, coaching and mentoring might pay even higher dividends during the Covid-19 crisis. After all, when done well, coaching and mentoring are excellent communication practices at a time when more communication is essential. During a crisis, employees have a greater need to know they are valued and have an opportunity to share their fears and concerns. Moreover, coaching and mentoring can be excellent ways of teaching key skills on a just-in-time basis—skills that might be difficult if not impossible to teach via elearning or other conventional platforms.

2

Leverage virtual and remote technologies. Virtual technologies provide a platform for your coaches and mentors to reach employees anywhere in the world at lower cost and safer distances. Related tech-based programs that can facilitate mentoring and coaching may include assessments, as well as tools that track progress against goals and reinforce learning/career development content. Moreover, we believe that employers will increasingly leverage AI to match employee needs and career aspirations with “automated” and tailored coaching content.

3

Embed coaching and mentoring in your culture. Where you find organizations with cadres of effective coaches and mentors, you will likely discover a strong coaching culture. Employers create such a culture by putting a high value on mutual trust, demonstrating openness to feedback from top down and bottom up, recognizing those that excel at coaching and mentoring, and learning from both mistakes and successes. A sign of a strong culture is managers and leaders who are constantly engaged in coaching or mentoring conversations. It is one of their most important roles and lack of time is really no more than an excuse.

4

Coach for success. Managers often jump into a coaching role when an employee could have handled a task or assignment in a better way. While this is an important reason to coach, it is reactive. Consistent with our research, leaders should be encouraged to coach those with high potential and/or those facing challenges such as new jobs. The goal is to be proactive in helping people succeed.

5

Invest in developing coaches and mentors. Our research reveals that most organizations need a higher proportion of effective coaches and mentors. One reason for this is a lack of training. Within an organization, coaches and mentors must develop skills in reflective listening, creating insights, and guiding rather than telling. Don't assume these skills come naturally or all at once. Organizations with more effective mentors and coaches are also more likely to train coaches and mentors.

6

Exercise careful due diligence in choosing external coaches. The use of external coaching services can have enormous benefits. But the cost can sometimes be high and there is considerable variation in quality. Look for accreditation from an organization such as the International Coaching Federation. Keep in mind, however, that certification is only one criterion for selecting coaches. Look for those with the right experience and reputation as well as those who are most compatible with the needs of your organization and individual. There are multiple ways to match coaches with both organizational needs and different personalities and one size does not fit all.

7

Expand your internal coaching and mentoring networks. Identify excellent people who have an interest in coaching and mentoring assignments. Then make sure they have the proper training and experiences to become good coaches and mentors. Carefully match them up with potential coachees or mentees who are eager for the experience. Some companies match new employees with a “buddy” as part of their onboarding process. Another idea is to provide opportunities for coaches and mentors to meet potential coachees and mentees so relationships can form more naturally. The best techniques for matching coaches and coachees may vary by need and corporate culture.

8

Consider less traditional coaching practices. For example, the concept of “reverse coaching” has begun to take hold wherein a lower-level employee with special skills coaches a more senior person. Informal peer coaching, wherein peers at the same level of the organization coach one another, has become more popular over the last decade.



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