

Coaching and Mentoring

By: Michael A. Crumpton

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Abstract:

Professionals in all walks of life must find their way and navigate through the political, bureaucratic, and sometimes actively difficult parts of a professional career. Having a coaching and/or mentoring program can provide a healthy construct for organizational growth and value through the continuous improvement of the individuals involved. This is seen as an emerging trend in academic libraries as the complexities of higher education grow and suggest the need for librarians operating at a higher level to warrant the attention that coaching and mentoring can provide.

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Article:

Professionals in all walks of life must find their way and navigate through the political, bureaucratic, and sometimes actively difficult parts of a professional career. Having a coaching and/or mentoring program can provide a healthy construct for organizational growth and value through the continuous improvement of the individuals involved. This is seen as an emerging trend in academic libraries as the complexities of higher education grow and suggest the need for librarians operating at a higher level to warrant the attention that coaching and mentoring can provide.

The value of coaching

The concept of coaching has been around for a long time and can be most identifiable related to sports and physical fitness best practices. Coaching as a concept related to overall career development practices continues to have value in the workplace as a management tool due to unique factors driven by Societal changes. This would include the end of traditional "job for life" positions to changing stakeholder needs, a reduction of formal apprenticeship-type programs for training, and a rise in a performance-led culture of employment.¹

Coaching can be associated with experiential learning in the sense that learning takes place with the help of facilitation of another individual; that is, the coach. Coaching can engage different types of learning such as experiential, active learning, goal-based learning, and proficiency enhancement for the benefit and development of adult learning or professional in particular.² For professional coaching activities, these high forms of engagement should align with what is relevant to the learner, who could be defined as new to the profession, changing positions, or seeking to grow.

Libraries have moved away from traditional positions that can be expected to continue unchanged. The reality is that libraries are in a model of change and coaching strategically helps an organization respond to these changes. It is a process that requires time and multiple interactions.³ Library leaders should think about coaching more as a tool for developing their organizations across changes in their technology, process, and service models while improving performance and building a leadership bench. All coaching is not about problem solving but about improvement to individual and organization performance.

Ruth Metz recommends that libraries should become more purposeful about the application of coaching on a broad scale. Leaders can authorize and influence the development of a coaching system in their organizations that supports the learning and development of individuals and the organization. A coaching program can in turn be integrated into ongoing systems such as organizational learning, performance management, and leadership development. Integrating coaching wisely into the organization begins with intentionality and an understanding of organizational need.

Elements of Coaching

Coaching and mentoring are together in this chapter because most academic libraries have more than one employee type. This means that from a professional development point of view some employees need to be coached while some need to be mentored, and there is a difference. In this context, coaching becomes about improving performance, either individually or within a team environment, and mentoring is concerning the achievement of goals and objectives such as professional activities like scholarly works or providing service to an academic community.

Coaching programs should be focused on moving employees from thinking just about themselves and what affects their responsibilities to looking at broader aspects of the organization and how their job duties contribute to the overall success of the organization. This involves finding or training good effective coaches who are willing to invest in the effort of coaching for the good of the larger organization.

Good coaches are members of the organization who can take an objective approach to work being performed and apply informed suggestions for improvement. This includes building relationships with the people being coached in order to gain positive buy-in on changes to be made. Characteristics of good coaches include the following:

- Having a positive attitude
- Displaying enthusiasm for the organization
- Being supportive of others and respectful in return
- Being someone who builds trust
- Being goal oriented and conveying the importance of goals
- Being knowledgeable, focused, and experienced

- Being observant of changes made and feedback from interactions
- Being willing to be assertive as needed but patient with the learning process⁴

A good coach is also a motivator of others. Determining how to connect the needs of the organization to personal attributes such as learning how people feel about their need to achieve or how their contribution matters can build those relationships quicker and make them stronger. Related to this are strong communication skills driven by emotional intelligent traits, nonverbal sensitivities, and active listening skills. Good coaches are approachable and know how to challenge their charges with the appropriate questions or inquires to offer strategic thinking options.

Coaching programs must also have a purpose with goals and objectives clearly defined. Within the program, ground rules and guidelines should be established to maintain perspective and a clear direction that a program should follow in order to be considered successful. Coaches should be problem solvers but also should be teaching others how to problem-solve within their specific area--thus the opportunity for improved performance through understanding a process for making effective changes.

Some forms of coaching can lead coaching into training type situations, which is mostly task driven in nature. This is where a coach needs to understand the task at hand, break down the details of the task into segments that aren't too overwhelming, and demonstrate and then allow the trainee to do it themselves. Applying rewards and creating the opportunity for trainees to feel a sense of accomplishment helps reinforce what was learned.

Formally identifying coaching activities can provide strong organizational support for those recruited as coaches but also being coached. An organizational culture that rewards both those making the effort to be coaches and the successful benefactors of those being coached will greatly expand an organization's strength and influence with stakeholders. Academic libraries have turnover with staff and student workers, as well as changing duties and tasks based on technology changes or process and policy changes.

How coaching is accomplished makes the difference in its success or failure. Coaches that build relationships with those being coached or trained, as well as focusing on good communications skills, will provide the greatest success. Great coaching that encourages learning from within, through the simulation of coaching activities, will be long lasting.⁵

When coaching become mentoring

In an interview with Paul MacCartney, the chief learning officer at MentoringcliQ, he draws the difference between coaching and mentoring as such: coaching is about functional skills, and mentoring is about leadership, networking, communication, and teamwork.⁶ Thus there should be distinction in coaching and training functions versus developing a mentoring program for personal development and organization sustainability.

Mentoring takes skill building beyond skill development and/or training and moves personal development into organizational understanding or savvy, professional accountability through associations and foundations and can provide a career path or focus for advancement and long-term development. While academic libraries have many university resources available to them, it is appropriate to develop programing and organization around the specific development of librarians and other professionals within the organization to better understand librarianship and the contribution being expected and made for the larger institution and the profession.

Many of the professional associations at national, state, regional, and even international levels have formal programs for providing librarians and library staff with opportunities to engage with each other and learn more about the organization and the profession. Expectations of a mentoring experience might include the following:

- Evaluation- The evaluation of the mentee by the mentor is debatable given the nonjudgmental nature by which most people view being mentored. However, there is value in mentors at least having a role in a mentee's evaluation to coach for improved performance.
- Academic expertise- Academic proficiencies are gained over time and this becomes part of the knowledge and experience that mentors should be sharing with mentees. Much of these skills come after graduation from library school and can be critical to future success.
- Career guidance- Recognizing that although making career recommendations for a mentee might not be in the best interest of the individual organization, it can benefit the profession by providing experience into the field overall.
- Psychosocial support- Mentees need and expect their mentor to provide emotional support and feedback as well as indoctrination into the workplace's culture. This is where having emotionally intelligent mentors makes the biggest difference.
- Role model- By being a good role model, a mentor allows mentees to observe and form their own opinions of professional behavior and how to interact with others. This also requires strong emotional intelligence skills to be successful.⁷

Academic libraries can create mentorship programs that structure outcome-based activities for the protégé or mentee to have a forum for professional elevation or career trajectory. Such a program provides a structured approach with time bounds and success metrics included to guide a formal process within the organization. Within this structure mentees identify their individual needs to address while mentors can focus attention on organizational needs and consistencies.⁸

Formal programs can have specific organizational purposes or provide an open forum for the career interest of the mentee. This is particularly important for subject interests that are in high demand, such as science-related subjects and engineering librarianship models that have a high recruiting aspect with minimal qualified candidate availability.

The University Libraries at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro developed a mentoring program to mentor tenure-track librarians by tenured librarians. MacCartney identified top elements to include in a mentoring program: have a purpose, select a mentor carefully, and create a structure in which it should operate.⁹ Appendix 1 outlines the infrastructure of the program, including the designation of a mentoring coordinator who manages the process.

This has proven successful in helping tenure-track librarians succeed in obtaining tenure. Having the structure in place, as well as a coordinator—someone ensuring the program moves forward—has been critical to its success. Appendix 2 is an example of programming that takes place in the execution of the program, providing involvement by everyone.

Developing a mentoring culture

Beyond formal mentoring programs that have a specific purpose is the opportunity for an organization to have a culture in which mentoring occurs on its own and shared information or collaboration is welcomed and nurtured. Providing a venue in which mentoring can occur is important for succession planning and preparing the next generation of librarians for serving in these vital academic roles that are valued by their institutions.

Peers can be a valuable commodity in having a mentoring culture, and those relationships between peers must be built to have a broad influence on an organization.¹⁰ Having a peer network and providing rewards along the way help establish and build on those relationships in a way that formal programs could fall short; that is, having a closer personal connection.

Ultimately the development of transformative mentoring networks as described by Paulo Freire in his critical works on education can offer mentoring teams the opportunity and vision to develop rich learning skills, regardless of status of hierarchy between mentor and mentee.¹¹ This moves these relationships into more positive and better-grounded learning experiences for both persons involved.

Coaching and mentoring are important elements to a successful academic library as they can help develop relationships and drive a collaborative organizational culture. Formally or informally, programs developed around coaching needs for skills building can increase operational efficiencies. Programs create career advancement and development opportunities for mentoring individuals, and finding potential future talent also helps an organization have sustainable talent moving forward.

Appendix 1

The University Libraries' Mentoring Program

1. The University Libraries' Mentoring Program is designed to provide untenured librarians with an opportunity to explore issues regarding their development as a librarian, both at UNCG and in the profession, with a mentor who is a tenured librarian.
2. The mentoring program is available to all professional librarians on the tenure track.
3. Participation in the mentoring program is encouraged but is not required for reappointment, promotion, or tenure.
4. Time spent mentoring is considered a library service for both the mentor and the mentee and should be reported on the ALFA as such.
5. Open communication will always be maintained among the mentoring coordinator, the mentor, the mentee, and the mentee's immediate supervisor.
6. All participants in the mentoring program agree to maintain absolute confidentiality.
7. Possible things for mentoring pairs to discuss:
 - a. Tenure process and tenure package preparation
 - b. The libraries' strategic plan, organization, and culture
 - c. Professional issues and challenges
 - d. Publication and presentation opportunities
 - e. Socializing and small talk is also a perfectly acceptable use of mentoring time.
8. Expectations for mentoring pairs include the following:
 - a. Planning. The mentor and mentee should
 - i. Go over the mentee's goals together and discuss how you might work together to meet them

- ii. Establish frequency, time, and venue of meetings, and observe the schedule
 - iii. Reflect regularly on progress and whether changes need to be made
 - b. Regular meetings
 - i. The mentoring coordinator will prompt pairs if they are not scheduling or attending meetings
 - c. Investment of time (at least one hour per month)
- 9. Clarity of purpose, goals, and expectations
 - a. Mentoring does not equal friendship.
 - b. Mentors are not expected to publish with or present with mentees.
 - c. Mentees are not expected to do work for their mentors.
 - d. No-fault termination of mentoring relationship is permitted if things don't work out.

Role of the Mentor

1. Meet with assigned new faculty member early in the semester and discuss the ground rules of the program.
2. Share background, skills, and experience with your mentee.
3. Provide ongoing guidance and support on the promotion and tenure process, including helping the new faculty member with his/her tenure package. Begin early and check in often, but remember that preparation of a successful tenure package is the mentee's responsibility. Encourage the mentee to discuss conflicting advice on his/her tenure package with you and members of the P&T committee.
4. Help the mentee make connections on-campus and/or in the community and with others in the field; introduce them at professional meetings, nominate them for committees, and so forth.
5. Give advice on how to prioritize workload, time management, and job responsibilities.
6. Discuss publication and presentation opportunities. The mentor should help the new faculty member identify, assess, and take advantage of opportunities. You may write or present with the new faculty member, but this is not an expectation of the mentoring program.
7. When appropriate, invite the mentee to meetings that may be of interest to his/her career.
8. Encourage professional development activities and attend some of them with your mentee.
9. Refer to appropriate personnel to assist with issues that you do not feel comfortable or qualified to deal with.

A good mentor is

1. Available, approachable, and a good listener
2. Creative in his/her approach to problems
3. Upbeat and positive about the University Libraries and UNCG
4. Supportive of the mentee and genuinely pleased when the mentee does well
5. Tolerant; accepting of differences
6. Able to set challenges for the mentee but at the same time is patient

7. Able to recognize when the relationship is not working and seek solutions

Role of the Mentee

1. Map out personal goals and identify specific needs the mentor could address.
2. Share background information, skills, and experience with your mentor.
3. With your mentor, set up regular meeting times and observe them.
4. Work with your mentor to develop a plan to work on achieving your goals together.
5. Understand that you have control of your career and that your success depends on you, not on your mentor.
6. Be honest and speak up if you feel the mentor/mentee relationship is not working and seek a productive solution with your mentor.

A good mentee

1. Has a positive attitude
2. Is willing to work
3. Is open-minded and open to suggestions
4. Respects the time constraints of the mentor
5. Appreciates the investment that the mentor is making in their success

Appendix 2

Mentoring Program Lunch 'n' Learn Series

The Lunch 'n' Learn series is a schedule of brown bag lunches that will feature speakers and group discussion on a variety of topics of interest to librarians new to the profession or new to UNCG. The goal of the series is to provide an opportunity for continuing education in the responsibilities of academic leadership, as well as a chance for all participants to share their observations and experiences.

The lunches are open to all mentees and mentors currently enrolled in the program and any others who find a particular topic interesting. Lunch will be provided by the libraries.

Suggested topics:

- Information on Preparing Effective Presentations
- Publishing Opportunities
- Obtaining Grants
- Preparation of Documents for Reappointment and Tenure
- Reappointment and Tenure Policies and Regulations
- Involvement in Professional Associations and Other Groups
- Faculty Governance at UNCG and Getting Involved on Campus

Notes

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