



Peer Coaching

Program Handbook



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Welcome

We are thrilled that you are interested in participating in the Peer Coaching Program overseen by the Learning Institute. Your Coach/Mentee relationship will contribute to the success and retention of our workforce. We are here to ensure that you have the resources needed to make the most of this important partnership. The contents of this handbook will guide you through the coaching process and act as a resource. Please read it thoroughly to become familiar with the different components of the program.

Overview

There are many kinds of coaching relationships, ranging from informal to formal. An informal coaching relationship usually occurs in a spontaneous format. (Think of times you have been helped by someone more experienced than you without explicitly asking to be coached.) Informal coaching may also occur within the context of other relationships such as a supervisory relationship or even peer relationships. A formal coaching relationship is characterized by its intentionality – the partners in the relationship ask for or offer the coaching, establish goals for the relationship, and make agreements about its nature.

Our program is a formal coaching program meant to help participants develop in their careers. Coaching relationships can occur at all professional levels. The key feature of our coaching relationship is that a more experienced individual helps another achieve his or her goals and develop as a person. The Coach may help the Mentee (the person being coached) develop specific job skills or leadership capacities. The Coach will be an asset to help the Mentee meet their goals and aspirations by sharing their own experiences and tribulations. Here at Stanislaus County we believe that our employees are our biggest asset and giving them an avenue to share information, stories, and lessons learned is how we stay great.

What is Coaching?

In The Odyssey, Odysseus (also known as Ulysses) was preparing to fight the Trojan War when he realized he would be leaving behind his only son and heir, Telemachus. Since the child was young and wars typically dragged on for years (the Trojan War lasted 10 years), Ulysses entrusted Telemachus' care and education to Mentor, his wise, trusted friend.

Today, mentoring (we know it as coaching) is a process in which an experienced individual helps another person develop his or her goals and skills through a series of time-limited, confidential, one-on-one conversations and other learning activities. Mentors also draw benefits from the mentoring relationship. Mentoring is a cost effective and valuable tool for developing our most important asset, our people. A successful mentoring process depends on the partners sharing common goals and expectations, having a commitment to the mentor practice, and giving and receiving trust and respect.

“ In order to be a mentor, and an effective one, one must care. You must care. You don't have to know how many square miles are in Idaho, you don't need to know what is the chemical makeup of chemistry, or of blood or water. Know what you know and care about the person, care about what you know and care about the person you're sharing with. — Maya Angelou ”

Stages of the Coaching Relationship

Like most relationships, coaching relationships progress through stages. Your coaching relationship will likely reflect four developmental stages (outlined below) with each stage forming an inherent part of the next. Please note, there is no strict formula for determining the length of each stage.

- I. Building the Relationship
- II. Exchanging Information and Setting Goals
- III. Working Towards Goals/Deepening the Engagement
- IV. Ending the Formal Coaching Relationship and Planning for the Future

Stage I: Building the Relationship

During Stage I, you will get to know each other and begin to establish trust. During your first meeting (ideally face-to-face), discuss your backgrounds, experiences, interests, and expectations. You will also make agreements about confidentiality and the frequency of contact. During this first stage, it is important to establish a schedule for communicating regularly, whether in-person, by phone, or e-mail.

Stage II: Exchanging Information and Setting Goals

During Stage II, you will exchange more information and set goals for the relationship. Your relationship and trust will deepen. As the coaching relationship unfolds, be attentive to practicing active listening and consistently expressing encouragement.

Stage III: Working Towards Goals/Deepening the Engagement

During Stage III, which is typically the longest, the Coach will help their Mentee work towards achieving his or her goals through conversations, sharing written materials, trying various learning and development activities, and introducing him or her to other colleagues. This is a rich phase marked by openness and trust, meaningful discussion, and application of new insights and approaches. Coaches should try to provide ongoing encouragement at this stage. Coaches

may also feel comfortable enough to challenge their Mentee to think in new ways or approach a problem differently.

This is a good point in the journey to reflect on progress toward goals and on the relationship itself. What kinds of adjustments or changes, if any, are needed in your goals or in your relationship? This is also the stage during which energy in the relationship can wane! Sometimes, the Mentee will feel concerned that he or she is burdening the Coach. Other responsibilities will often compete with your commitment to the coaching relationship. If you haven't heard from your partner, check in with him or her. Take the lead if necessary.

Also take stock of your own time and energy.

Is the partnership working well for you?

Do you need to make some adjustments?

Stage IV: Ending the Formal Coaching Relationship and Planning for the Future

During Stage IV, planning for the Mentee's continued success is balanced with bringing the formal coaching relationship to a close. Partners need to work together to define the types of support the Mentee may need in the future. Coaches may want to connect their Mentee with additional colleagues who can provide benefits other than those provided by you. This is also a good time to explore the Mentee's own interest in one day coaching someone. Adjournment brings closure to the journey. Your final discussion should be dedicated to the following:

- Reflecting on accomplishments, challenges, and progress towards goals.
- What will the Mentee remember most about the relationship?
- What challenges lie ahead for him or her?
- Exploring other types of support he or she may still need.
- Discussing whether the relationship will continue informally and how you will implement that.
- Expressing thanks and best wishes!

Setting Goals

Goals are helpful in coaching relationships because they help to see beyond the day-to-day demands of the position and help to gain clarity on how to get the most out of partners time together. Coaches and Mentees alike are encouraged to discuss their goals and utilize the S.M.A.R.T method. It is also recommended to refer back to the goals periodically as a way of refocusing on future aspirations and measuring progress. Referring to the goals regularly is also a great way to just check in with the Coach or Mentee.

Specific

- Answer the "who, what, when, where, why, how, and which" questions.

Measurable

- Create benchmarks to check your progress.
- Determine how exactly you will know when your goal has been attained.

Achievable

- Make sure that is it realistic to attain the goal within your timeframe keeping other responsibilities in mind.

Relevant

- Does the goal matter? How will it create positive change?
- What will be the impact of reaching the goal?

Timely

- Create a timeframe for the goal to be achieved.
- Have a due date and check-in dates to measure progress.

For the Coach - Benefits

As a Coach, you will have the opportunity to share wisdom and experiences, evolve your own thinking, develop a new relationship, and deepen skills as a Coach.

Both the Coach and the Mentee *give and grow* in the coaching process. You, the Coach, have the opportunity to review your accomplishments and challenges, as a reminder of lessons learned. In sharing your expertise you are leaving a legacy and guiding another's career path. This also gives you an opportunity to review and reenergize your personal career goals.

You, the Coach will get many benefits from this experience.

For example:

- Gain personal satisfaction in helping someone grow professionally.
- Learn from the Mentee.
- Build new relationships.
- Develop your skill as a “teacher”—helping someone clarify their career goals.
- Develop your skill as a “guide” – helping someone navigate the waters of the organization.
- Develop your skill as an “advisor” – helping someone find their strengths and weaknesses.
- Receive recognition.
- Affirm professional competence.
- Create new support networks with other professionals.
- Learn more about other areas within the County.
- Grow from the opportunity to build leadership skills.

Coach Check In

As you reflect on being a Coach, think about who you would like as a Mentee and what you would like to impart to them. This is, after all, going to be a partnership. Use the space provided to write down your thoughts at this point. These questions will help you respond to the questions on the Coach application.

- Do you want someone who seems to be following your same career path?
- Do you want someone who has skills which you have strengths in?
- Do you want someone who has different or similar skills as you?
- Do you want someone who has interest in similar skills and knowledge as you, but does not possess those competencies now?
- Do you want someone who is motivated by upward mobility?

Coach Role and Responsibilities

Development of your Mentee depends on exploring career aspirations, strengths and weaknesses, collaborating on means to “get there,” implementing strategies, and revisiting discussions along the way. You, as the Coach, provide the “light” for the Mentee to follow. Sharing your wisdom and past experiences is what the Mentee looks for from you.

Here are a few roles and responsibilities to guide you in the process:

- Support your Mentee’s development of professional and interpersonal competencies through strategic questioning, goal setting, and planning.
- Create a supportive and trusting environment.
- Agree to, and schedule, uninterrupted time with your Mentee.
- Stay accessible, committed, and engaged during the length of the program.
- Give feedback to your Mentee on the progress of his/her goals, situations, plans, and ideas.
- Participate in the scheduled events for the program.
- Encourage your Mentee by giving them genuine positive reinforcement.
- Provide frank (and kind) corrective feedback if necessary.
- Openly and honestly share “lessons learned” from your own experience.
- Seek assistance if questions arise that you cannot answer.
- Keep discussions on track.
- Respect your Mentee’s time and resources.
- Actively listen and question.
- Serve as a positive role model.



Effective Questioning Tips for Coaches

As a Coach, it can be very easy to want to just jump in and solve your Mentee's problems for him/her. However, your role is to help the Mentee think for him/herself, and to do so, this involves you asking thought-provoking questions. Help your partner self-discover. It might be a little tough to get conversation started when you are first getting to know your Mentee. Asking open-ended questions is a great way to get the ball rolling.

A **close-ended question** is a question that can be answered very simply - generally with just one word, such as 'yes' or 'no'. Example: Do you like ice cream?

Open-ended questions, on the other hand, tend to elicit lengthier responses. They help us ask others about their opinions and feelings and they can often lead the way to deeper conversation. Example: How did you meet your best friend?

Work to be a questioning Coach. Using questions to help your Mentee reflect on their experiences and learn from yours. Being a questioning Coach gives you, the Coach, an opportunity to:

- Uncover additional facts and information about your Mentee.
- Confirm your Mentee's goals, aspirations, and needs.
- Explore strong feeling about situations.
- Define problems and possible solutions.
- Discover your Mentee's commitment to their growth.

EXPLORATORY QUESTIONS TO ASSESS THE REAL ISSUES AND GAIN GREATER UNDERSTANDING:

- What are the most interesting aspects of your job?
- Why did you pick this to concentrate on?
- What do you want to gain?
- What do you want to be known for?
- What do you understand the issue to be?
- What tells you that your assessment is correct? What are other people's perceptions of this issue?
- What assumptions are you making here?
- What other ideas do you have?
- How long has this been as issue?
- What did you learn from past experiences that you didn't expect to learn?
- What are the reasons behind an issue?
- Have you tried to resolve this issue before? Why or why not? If yes, what was the result?
- What choices do you have?
- What progress have you made?
- What other ideas do you have?
- How are you using the things/ideas we've spoken about?
- What results are you looking for?



One of the greatest values of mentors is the ability to see ahead what others cannot see and to help them navigate a course to their destination. – John C. Maxwell



EMPOWERING QUESTIONS TO ASSIST THE MENTEE TO THINK FOR HIM/HERSELF:

- What are the skills you want to develop?
- What strategies come to mind when looking at a situation?
- What do you see as possible solutions here?
- What outcomes are you after here? Are these outcomes reasonable given the circumstances?
- What resources are available to help you move forward?
- What key players do you need help from?
- What forces may help and/or hinder you?
- What other information do you need to arrive at a solution?
- What are the pros and cons of each solution?
- What is the first step you need to take to achieve your preferred outcome?
- What alternative strategies should you develop?
- How will you know you have mastered or successfully enhanced a competency?



Ask more questions to really understand the responses you've been given. Rephrase the answer to ensure you have heard the reply correctly.

Most importantly, ask more questions & give fewer answers. Remember, in this case, those who speak the most, learn the most!

Giving Feedback – Checklist for Coaches

Think of feedback as a teaching/counseling opportunity. Exhibit positive or neutral body language.

Do Use:

- Good eye contact – no scary stares.
- Interested/neutral facial expression.
- Nodding of head to show understanding or agreement.
- Calm tone of voice.
- Even voice volume.
- Sitting slightly forward.
- Relaxed arm and hand placement.

Do Not Use:

- Reduced eye contact, scowling, or narrowing of eyes.
- Tense or aggressive posture.
- Rocking, pen bouncing, hand wringing, or your specific version of nervousness/defensiveness.
- Hands on hips or tightly clenched.
- Arms tightly crossed across chest.
- A blank expression.

According to research, nonverbal (body) language accounts for up to 70% of all communication! It is very important, therefore, to make sure you are sending the right messages to your mentee with your body language.

Lynda.com Resource: Giving and Receiving Feedback



This course covers how to give and receive high-quality feedback. Whether it's with peers, managers, colleagues, team members, friends, or family, the same principles apply across the board.

Tips:

- Don't say "but" or "however," use "Yes, and..." instead.
- Avoid statements that describe someone instead of their actions.
- Ensure feedback is **specific**.
- Give the other person an opportunity to ask questions or share their viewpoint.
- **Listen carefully** not only to the words but to the vocal tones and body language of the speaker.
- Don't become defensive when they share thoughts.
- Don't interrupt when the other person is responding.
- Allow time and privacy for feedback- avoid/minimize distractions, set aside an uninterrupted time for your feedback session.
- **Be honest and realistic** when your Mentee, but do so with an air of optimism.
- Make sure your Mentee knows you believe in them and that you are aware of their efforts and improvements.
- Be patient and polite, coaching is about incrementally laying the groundwork for lasting change.
- Use **"I" statements**. Give examples from your experience.

"I" statements are sentences that start with an expression of your personal opinion or experience. You can only be sure of your own experiences and feelings – never those of others. Using an "I" statement to clarify where your opinions come from ensures that you don't offend anyone by speaking for them. Using "I" statements can be particularly useful during a conflict. Instead of sounding accusatory, which could make things worse; it will help you understand your mentee's perspectives.

Coaching Best Practices

- Think of yourself as a “learning facilitator” rather than the person with all the answers. Help your Mentee find people and other resources that go beyond your experience and wisdom on a topic.
- Emphasize questions over advice giving. Use probes that help your Mentee think more broadly and deeply. If he or she talks only about facts, ask about feelings. If he or she focuses on feelings, ask him or her to review the facts. If he or she seems stuck in an immediate crisis, help him or her see the big picture.
- When requested, share your own experiences, lessons learned, and advice. Emphasize how your experiences could be different from his or her experiences and are merely examples. Limit your urge to solve the problem for him or her.
- Resist the temptation to control the relationship and steer its outcomes; your Mentee is responsible for his or her own growth.
- Help your Mentee see alternative interpretations and approaches.
- Build your Mentee’s confidence through supportive feedback.
- Encourage, inspire, and challenge your Mentee to achieve his or her goals.
- Help your Mentee reflect on successful strategies he or she has used in the past that could apply to new challenges.
- Be spontaneous now and then. Beyond your planned conversations, call or e-mail “out of the blue” just to leave an encouraging word or piece of new information.
- Enjoy the privilege of coaching. Know that your efforts will likely have a significant impact on your Mentee’s development as well as your own.

For the Mentee - Benefits

Coaching is a special **partnership** between two people based on commitment to the coaching process, common goals and expectations, focus, mutual trust and respect.

Both the Coach and the Mentee give and grow in the coaching process. You, the Mentee, can **learn valuable knowledge** from the Coach's expertise and past mistakes. You can increase your competencies in specific areas. You can establish valuable connections with higher level employees. You, the Mentee will get many benefits from this experience.

Here are just a few additional benefits you might consider:

- Have a caring ear to hear your triumphs as well as your frustrations.
- Develop your skill as a "planner" – get a sharper focus on what's needed to grow professionally.
- Develop your skill as a "learner" – get new ways to acquire new skills.
- Develop your skill as a "communicator" – improve your ability to express your expectations, goals, and concerns.
- Learn what it is like to be in a higher level position.
- Get an advocate within the organization.
- Gain knowledge about the "ins and outs" of the organization.
- Get honest feedback.
- Gain practical advice, encouragement and support.
- Develop your communication and personal skills.
- Having someone that helps you to realize your potential.
- Gain access to a professional network.
- Increase self-confidence in technical and soft skills.

Mentee Check In

As you reflect on being a Mentee, think about who you would like as a Coach and what you would like to learn from them. This is, after all, going to be a partnership. Use the space provided to write down your thoughts at this point. These questions will help you respond to the questions on the Mentee application.

- Do you want someone who has gone on the same career path you would like to follow?
- Do you want someone who has modeled the competencies you would like to strengthen?
- Do you want someone who has skills you currently don't have but wish to acquire?
- Do you want someone who will be a good sounding board for your goals?

Mentee Role and Responsibilities

Your **development** depends on exploring career aspirations, strengths and weaknesses, collaborating on means to “get there,” implementing strategies, and evaluating your past along the way. Your Coach will provide the **guidance** for you to follow. Learning from the wisdom and past experiences of your Coach will serve you well and produce great benefits. Here are a few roles and responsibilities to help you in the process:

- Commit to your development.
- Assume responsibility for acquiring or improving skills and knowledge.
- Discuss your individual developmental goals and plans with your Coach.
- Be open and honest on your goals, expectations, challenges, and concerns.
- Actively listen and question.
- Build a supportive and trusting environment.
- Seek advice, opinion, feedback, and direction from your Coach.
- Be open to constructive criticism/feedback and ask for it.
- Come to your meetings prepared with a clear idea of what topics or issues you want to address.
- Respect your Coach’s time and resources.
- Apply what you learn from your meetings back on the job.
- Keep your supervisor informed of the process and your progress.
- Give feedback to your Coach on what is working or not working in the coaching relationship.
- Participate in the scheduled events for the program.

Receiving Feedback—Checklist for Mentees

Think of feedback as a learning opportunity. Exhibit positive or neutral body language.

Do Use:

- Good eye contact – no scary stares.
- Interested/neutral facial expression.
- Calm tone of voice.
- Even voice volume.
- Nodding of head to show understanding or agreement.
- Sitting slightly forward.
- Relaxed arm & hand placement.

Do Not Use:

- Reduced eye contact, scowling, or narrowing of eyes.
- Rocking, pen bouncing, hand wringing, or your specific version of nervousness/defensiveness.
- Hands on hips or tightly clenched.
- Arms tightly crossed across chest.
- A blank expression.
- Tense or aggressive posture.

Paraphrase and repeat back to make sure you understood what was said. Keep doing this until you are clear on the feedback. Say things like...

- What I understood you just told me was.....
- When I you think I.....
- What I hear you say is if I I will.....

Tips:

- Listen carefully and don't become defensive. Do not "think ahead" preparing a rebuttal to a comment, you may miss a very important piece of information.
- Compare this feedback with others you've received.
- Discuss strategies and next steps. Provide possible solutions – you are the captain of your ship.
- Seek follow-up to your feedback session and share your progress with your Coach.

Don't interrupt when the other person is explaining. If you need more information ask for clarification or specific examples.

Tips for Being a Good Listener

ac·tive lis·ten·ing, *noun*

The practice of paying close attention to a speaker and asking questions to ensure full comprehension.

Be an “active” listener. That means doing the following:

- Give your Mentee your undivided attention.
- Stay off your phone, off your computer, and avoid disruptions.
- Hear the person out and avoid interrupting.
- Be aware of your non-verbal cues such as nodding, smiling, and maintaining eye contact.

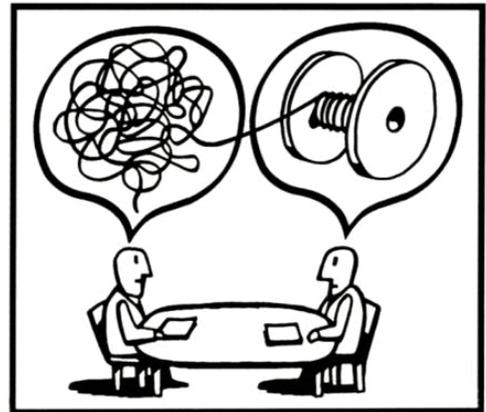
To ensure that you heard the person correctly:

Paraphrase

- “As I understand . . .”
- “So, you’re saying that . . .”
- “Let me see if I got that . . .”

Summarize

- “So, your three concerns are . . .”
- “There seem to be a few issues . . .”
- “So, our main goals this time are . . .”



Lynda.com Resource: Improving Your Listening Skills



This course provides multiple listening strategies to help you manage when you’re not being listened to, how to keep yourself from interrupting, and how to listen to what’s not being said.

Common Challenges for the Relationship

Here are some examples of challenges other Coaches and Mentees have faced and resolved.

Time and energy. The most common challenge by far is finding sufficient time to do all you want to do in the partnership. Despite good intentions, other priorities interfere for both of you.

Solution: Think small rather than large, especially in the beginning. Avoid promising more time than you can deliver. Check in to be certain you are both comfortable with the time you are spending and with the learning that is occurring.

Building trust quickly. With only a few hours of contact each month, it is not easy to build the kind of trust you both would like.

Solution: Other partnerships have successfully used several strategies, such as the following: listen very carefully, and remember what the other has said in the past. Demonstrate your credibility. Keep your promises and commitments -- if any need to be changed, let your partner know immediately and reschedule or renegotiate them. Admit some errors made and lessons learned. Avoid talking negatively about others. Above all, keep the confidences your partner shares with you.

Not being the “expert” on all your Mentee’s needs. Many Coaches find it difficult when they do not have all the answers.

Solution: Explain your role as “learning facilitator” early in your relationship. Tell your Mentee that you will not have all the answers, and you are looking forward to learning together as well as seeking help from others who are more expert on different topics.

Resources

Need a starting block or some inspiration? We've got you covered. Below are different resources that can be valuable to both Coaches and Mentees. Take your pick from Lynda.com course, Harvard Business Review Articles, books or TED Talks.

[Lynda.com](#)

Course: Using Questions to Foster Critical Thinking and Curiosity – 31 minutes

Course: Being a Good Mentee – 55 minutes

Course: Mentoring others – 14 minutes

Course: Life Mastery Achieving Happiness and Success – 2 hour 49 minutes

Course: Communication Foundations – 1 hour 24 minutes

Course: Being a Good Mentor – 1 hour

Course: 360 Degree Feedback – 31 minutes

Course: Coaching Employees through Difficult Situations – 47 minutes

Course: Effective Listening – 1 hour 8 minutes

[Harvard Business Review – hbr.org](#)

Article: The Power of Listening in Helping People Change

Article: 6 Things Every Mentor Should Do

Article: How to Mentor Someone Who Doesn't Know What Their Career Goal Should Be

Article: What the Best Mentors Do

Books

Start with Why by Simon Sinek

GRIT: The Power of Passion & Perseverance by Angela Duckworth

Modern Mentoring by Randy Emelo

Mentoring 101 by John Maxwell

One Minute Mentoring by Ken Blanchard & Claire Diaz-Ortiz

The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way You Lead Forever
by Michael Bungay Stanier

Lean In by Sheryl Sandberg

TED Talks

Video: Forget the Pecking Order at Work – 16 minutes

Video: Why do Ambitious Women have Flat Heads? – 14 minutes

Video: Why Good Leaders Make You Feel Safe – 12 minutes

Video: The Career Advice You Probably Didn't Get – 14 minutes

Video: Why we Have Too Few Women Leaders? – 15 minutes