



POSITIVE ACORN GROUP MENTOR COACHING COURSE

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The Nature of Mentor Coaching

It is often said that mentor coaching is an opportunity to show someone how good they can be. This is an important point. Rather than viewing mentor coaching as a critique of your ability it may be helpful to see it, thematically, as being about improvement and potential. While it is true that discussion of occasional mistakes do factor into mentor coaching you should not be overly concerned that you are going to be humiliated by harsh and negative feedback.

Researchers Hawkins and Smith (2006) conducted a review of the development of supervision/mentor coaching within the field of coaching. They discovered that high quality mentoring serves 3 core functions:

Practice Development—a chance for mentees to reflect on their own practice and to improve. They can explore new skills, modify habits, and otherwise change their practice and skill set to make it even more effective.

Personal Resource—Here, mentor coaching can be seen as a safe space to discuss emotional aspects of coaching including—but not limited to—self-care, ambivalence, confidence, and other personal matters.

Quality Assurance—This aspect of mentor coaching deals centrally with ethical practice. Here, mentees have the opportunity to discuss decisions, conflicts and quandaries related to professionalism, responsibility and ethical practice.

Take this opportunity to reflect on how important each of these areas are to you.

One last note: Mentor coaching is not for you, the mentee. Mentor coaching is, ultimately, in the service of the client. The reason we improve skills, work to avoid burnout, and strive for ethical practice is so that we can provide the best service possible to clients. Although the lion's share of our discussions will focus on coach development it is important—crucial even—to remember that it is the client we are ultimately serving.



What is Included in Mentor coaching?

Effective mentor coaching should never veer from the central focus on helping the mentee. The process might not always feel comfortable but the mentee should always trust that the mentor coach has the development of the mentee in mind. If there are instances in which the mentee loses trust, or feels a lack of safety that prevents full disclosure, he or she should openly address this issue with the mentor.

Positive Acorn's Group Mentoring (mentor coaching) is, as the name suggests, a *group* format process. It is the mentor's responsibility to create a respectful atmosphere and it is the mentees' responsibility to raise concerns should they arise. This group process is split between a thematic group discussion and coaching observation and feedback sessions. It should be noted that the three foci of coaching mentor coaching listed above—professional development, personal resource, and quality assurance—will be interwoven throughout these discussions. That is, every attempt will be made to ensure that these discussions include some attention to skills development, self-care, and ethical practice.

Thematic Discussion: Each session will begin with a thematic discussion. The themes for the four sessions will be:

Mastering Core Competencies: This discussion will focus on understanding the ICF core competencies from a mastery perspective. In particular, we will be using the comparison table document to distinguish between entry level and masterful use of each skill. Please familiarize yourself with this document before the first session.

The Agenda Balancing Act: It is common in the world of coaching to emphasize the agenda. Standard tropes around agenda include the idea that the “client owns the agenda” and that “the agenda should come from the client and not the coach.” While these are true it might be erroneous to believe that coaches have NO agendas. Do we not harbor a personal agenda to be successful? To serve our clients? In this session, we will discuss the delicate balance between the overt client agenda and the subtle influence of legitimate coach agendas.

Coaching in the Moment: There is a large emphasis placed in our profession on “being in the moment.” In this session, we will discuss high quality listening, improvisation, and other relevant topics.

The Reflective Practice: This final discussion will focus on the importance of reflective practice. Here, we will pay particular attention to ethics, burnout, and on-going improvement.



Coaching Observation and Feedback

The other critical, and perhaps more infamous, aspect of mentor coaching is receiving direct feedback on actual coaching sessions. During our time together, each mentee will receive feedback. Don't worry, we will certainly celebrate what you do right but we want to collectively learn from those less comfortable moments as well. Please do not think of it as an evaluation of right and wrong. Instead, we want to focus on interesting and unusual moments, and instances where the coach had to choose from multiple possible directions, and so forth. These moments will lead to the most fruitful discussions and the most generalizable learning.

How to Listen to a Coaching Session

Listening to another coach's session takes a bit of skill. All of us have our own styles, habits, preferences, and strengths. It is tempting, therefore, to want to listen as if you—yourself—were the coach. This leads to a mental monologue that includes commentary such as “I would have asked about her sister here!” or “Oh! You should be using a metaphor here!” As you listen to other coaches' work try to quiet these internal urges and preferences for coaching directions that are comfortable to you. Instead, try to listen to what is actually happening (as opposed to what you believe should be happening). To accomplish this, focus on the following points and—if you feel it is helpful—take handwritten notes:

The Questions the Coach is Asking. Pay attention to word choice, question length, question content, and the client's reactions to the questions.

The Coach's Presence. How is the coach coming across? Is the coach warm? Confident? Funny? How is the client reacting to the coach's way of being? How would you characterize the back and forth between the coach? Is it like presenters each taking a turn to give a speech? Is it more like a fast-paced tennis match?

The Case. In clinical psychology, therapists are taught to conceptualize the overall case. This includes the client's unique context, motivations, readiness for change, and other important topics that are not always *made explicit*! As you observe, ask yourself “What is really going on here? What is the client not seeing? What is this all about?” These overarching questions sometimes yield insights that extend beyond the specific content of the coaching.