

Dear Master Coach

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Dear Master Coach:

I became a coach in mid-career after already being known as a subject matter expert in my sector. Now I just want to be available to coach! But many of the people and organizations who hire me know me from my first act--and they keep asking me for advice on stuff. How do I redirect them?

Signed,
Mentor? Coach?

Dear Mentor-Coach:

I've noticed through my years of training and developing coaches, that many of the wise people who express interest in becoming a professional coach are like you—they're already great at something else and they've usually already been called upon in life to be someone's mentor. They come to me for coach training because they don't want to use their SME just to consult, advise, recommend, rescue and nag. They want to learn to coach because they care about developing people.

The story of Mentor comes from Homer's *Odyssey*. Odysseus, King of Ithaca, is preparing to march off to fight in the Trojan War--and ultimately to a wandering ten-year, well, odyssey. Before he leaves, he asks a wise older man to oversee his household and his young son, Telemachus, with a commission to, "Teach him everything you know." The wise older man's name? Mentor.

In the roughly 3000 years since, *Mentor* has joined our vocabulary, coming to mean something like, *A trusted advisor, friend, teacher and wise person who invests time, energy and affection in the growth of another*. And the years are full of legendary mentoring relationships--from Socrates and Plato and the beloved disciples of the religious traditions, to today's well-known [mentoring partners](#)—Maya Angelou and Oprah Winfrey, Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg, Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan, Luther Powell and his son, Colin.

If you've ever had a good mentor, or even a mentor-moment that was rich with personal learning, you know how priceless the relationship or the moment can be.

Now it's the 21st Century and coaching is a thing. It's the world's oldest/newest profession. And some of our very best coaches are like you—ready to use your wisdom and experience to inspire the development of others. Great mentors and great coaches tend to think of their work as co-creating and delivering highly-customized and collaborative, just-in-time learning. And as one who has been

called on through life to be both a mentor and a coach, here's what I know about where the two styles connect in the life of a leader like you:

1. The best mentors and coaches trust in the creativity, resourcefulness and self-responsibility of others, behaving as equal partners and putting a premium on exploration and experimentation (sound familiar?).
2. The best mentors and coaches use their subject matter expertise gently, and only enough to inform their questions and to spark evaluation and learning.
3. And the best mentors and coaches know how to balance advocacy with inquiry.

So. What's the difference? All I know is that when a great mentor learns to coach, and when a great coach generously invests time, energy and affection in the growth of another, the line gets delightfully fuzzy.

So let me practice what I preach: Your question was, "How do I redirect them?" If you started with yourself, and with your view of the compelling advantages of coaching, what would you say to these people who want to learn from you?

They are lucky to have you. Thanks for your question Mentor Coach,

PEB, MC

Listen to Patty's "Dear Master Coach" quarterly 3-4 minute answers at:

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