

Ep #60: Coaching and Mentoring for Clinical Professional Development



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Heather Branscombe

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Welcome to *Clinicians Creating Impact*, a show for physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists looking to take the next step in their careers and make a real difference in the lives of their clients. If you're looking to improve the lives of neurodiverse children and families with neurological-based challenges, grow your own business, or simply show up to help clients, this is the show for you.

I'm Heather Branscombe, Therapist, Certified Coach, Clinical Director, and Owner of Abilities Neurological Rehabilitation. I have over 25 years of experience in both the public and private sectors, and I'm here to help you become the therapist you want to be, supporting people to work towards their dreams and live their best lives. You ready to dive in? Let's go.

Hi there, friend. I know it's almost a cliché because I'm seeing a lot of the same sentiment on social media lately, but I really think it's true that it feels like there are 90 days in January and like 10 days in February. They both feel respectively so long and then so quick. Either way, 2024 is well on its way and I wanted to take the time to talk to you about coaching and mentoring as part of your professional development, what the difference is, and why both can be super helpful in creating the impact that you want in your clinical career.

So, having had the opportunity to experience both, I think that many people actually see and maybe even use these terms interchangeably. But I'm here to tell you that they actually can be very different and very powerful. In fact, as I was doing some preparation for the episode this week, I came along this analogy that I really liked. And so I'm going to share it with you later today so that you can better understand, one, the difference, and two, what you may need more of this year to make this year at work even more amazing.

But before I share this with you, I want to make a small ask of you. This podcast is a passion project of mine because I want all clinicians to have the ability to use this kind of tool set as a way to magnify their impact, even if they never

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either work alongside us or with us at Abilities. And one way you can do that is to help me to spread the message.

You can help me specifically in a couple of ways. One, to follow, rate, and review this podcast. I'm here asking you, like every other podcast person will do, because it helps feed the algorithm so that when a clinician is searching for something like this, this podcast will come up.

Second, if you could share this podcast, or better yet, a favorite episode with a colleague of yours, that would be amazing. If you've heard this ask before and meant to do it, but haven't done it yet, that's okay. Let this be the sign that today is the day that you can actually help other clinicians.

If this is your first episode, first, welcome. Thank you so much for listening. And hopefully as you listen, you can decide who of your clinical friends would love to hear more of this kind of information to help them at work. Thank you in advance for all your help and your action here. And with that, let's get back to the episode.

Let's start with the basic definition of coaching and mentoring. Now, again, I know a lot of people use these terms almost interchangeably, but for the purposes of this episode, I want to define coaching and mentoring as two separate forms of professional development. Specifically, I want to highlight how they differ in their approaches, goals, and the nature of the relationship between the two parties involved.

Now, of course, I want to share my bias in that I took about six months, a couple of years ago, doing an intensive program all about coaching. So, of course, having spent that much time in an area, I'm going to have some thoughts about it.

It's no different than some people who say things like, what's the difference between PT and OT or OT and SLP. For those of us who have the training in that or another clinical area, we have that intimate knowledge. And, of course,

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the difference is going to feel massive to us. But it makes sense, from the outside, why this may feel confusing. So let's start with the focus.

The focus of coaching is typically task-orientated and performance-driven. So it really aims to improve specific skills, achieve goals, or overcome obstacles in a relatively short period of time. Whereas the focus of mentoring is generally more of a bigger picture relationship-focused and aims to provide broader career guidance, personal development, and knowledge sharing over a long term.

Now, of course, just like in clinical disciplines, there is, of course, overlap. Coaches can be relationship focused and use that as a tool to help performance. I know that because I do that myself when I'm coaching all the time.

Another way that I like to look at it is that coaching helps you to decide what actually is important to you and what you want to do next, where mentoring can help you to see all of the options available. In that way you can see how coaching and mentoring can actually be super symbiotic.

In the coaching relationship, the coach doesn't actually need to have direct experience, but is often more structured and formal. Coaches may not have direct experience in the coachee's role per se, but they possess experience in specific coaching techniques. It's why my coaching certification, for example, involved six months of coursework, a practicum, and testing to ensure that I had actually mastered those specific techniques.

The mentor-mentee relationship, however, is typically a little more informal and it can involve a shared professional or industry background. Mentors can have experience and expertise in the mentee's field, but not necessarily the skills or expertise on how to help you get to where they are themselves. They share their lived experience as an opportunity to know what's possible. And I love those kinds of relationships because sometimes it's really just helpful to get another perspective.

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Mentors share their experiences, insights, and wisdom. They provide guidance, advice, and support, and they help that mentee navigate their career and their personal development. Those relationships, again, are often longer term, and they may actually even extend over the course of a career and a significant phase of their professional development.

I know throughout my career I have, and I continue to collect, these relationships of these mentors that I can talk to, more so than anything else just about their perspective. Sometimes we'll even interchange the word mentor for like a clinical friend. And I don't know about you, but I have the privilege to have collected a lot of clinical friends along the way, and they're a really valuable part of my career and my progress.

Now let's contrast that to a coaching relationship. So coaches will typically ask more probing questions to help you as an individual discover your strengths, your weaknesses, and your areas for improvement. They will facilitate the person who is being coached in their own self-discovery, and they'll provide guidance and feedback.

Those coaching relationships can be time-bound with a focus on achieving a specific objective or addressing an immediate challenge. So coaching often occurs between individuals of different hierarchical levels within an organization or maybe with external coaches hired for a specific skill development.

So here's my analogy that might help you to solidify the difference. When you are looking to create an impact in your own career and in the lives of your patients or clients through that career, as you navigate your career, you can use a coach's wind and the mentor's North Star to help you to get there.

The mentor helps you to see all the places that they've been, which again allows you to see the possibilities of their career, and then that reflects in your career. They can even tell you about their lived experience, of their travels and how they got there. All of these are super helpful as you choose to navigate your own career.

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A coach, however, gives you that wind through task-orientated and specific skills that you want to have to navigate to that goal. That coach can be through specific clinical skills, for example, or also the mindset skills of understanding your own brain and how to use it most effectively to create what you want.

In summary, coaching is often task-orientated, focused on achieving specific goals, and involves a more formal relationship. Mentoring, on the other hand, tends to be more relationship-focused, providing that broader career guidance and personal development over the long term.

And while coaching and mentoring both involve learning and development, they really do serve different purposes and cater to different aspects of professional growth. Both are amazing, and you absolutely can have both a coach and a mentor in a single person, the key is to decide for yourself what you need more of next and then how you want to get there.

For most of my clinical career, my mentors, again, have come from my work colleagues. And my coaches have come from clinicians that were offering specific clinical courses. Over time, as I was exposed to what coaching could look like and understood the crucial understanding of my own mental health and how I could use my own mental health as a tool to more effectively lead others, that allowed me to use mindset coaching from actual professional coaches all the way to clinical healthcare professionals, like counselors, to help me to understand my own mindset and how that affects my work.

So, what do you need next in your own clinical professional development? How could coaching, mentoring, or both help you navigate your clinical career? Give it a try and please reach out if you get stuck. Yes, I am busy, but the truth is I am never too busy to connect with you. With that, have an amazing week and I will talk to you soon.

If you enjoyed today's show and don't want to worry about missing an episode, you can follow the show wherever you listen to your podcasts. And if you haven't already, I would really appreciate it if you could leave a rating and review to let me know what you think and to help others find *Clinicians Creating Impact*.

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It doesn't have to be a five-star rating, although I sure hope you love the show. I'd really want your honest feedback so I can create an awesome podcast that provides tons of value. To learn more about me and the work that I do, visit my website at www.abilitiesrehabilitation.com/clinicianscorner to download your free getting it all done at work process and to see what I'm up to. Thanks so much.

Thanks for joining me this week on the *Clinicians Creating Impact* podcast. Want to learn more about the work I'm doing with Abilities Rehabilitation? Head on over to abilitiesrehabilitation.com. See you next week.