

PREPARING THE MENTEE COACH FOR MENTOR COACHING

Making Every Session Count: The LISTEN Framework

Effective Mentor Coaching begins before the session itself.

When the Mentee Coach arrives having listened carefully to their recording, reflected on their coaching and identified what they most want to explore, the session can move beyond general feedback into focused, developmental work.

Preparation also gives the Mentor Coach valuable information about the Mentee Coach's self-awareness. Are they accurately assessing their coaching? Are they underestimating strengths that are already evident? Are they overestimating competence in areas where further development is needed? The comparison between the Mentee Coach's self-assessment and the Mentor Coach's observations can become an important part of the learning.

Why Preparation Matters: The Evidence Base

Structured preparation is not an administrative nicety - it is grounded in established theory on adult learning, reflective practice and mentoring effectiveness.

Reflection and experiential learning

Kolb's experiential learning cycle proposes that learning is generated through a recurring sequence of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). A Mentee Coach who reviews a recording and reflects before the session has already moved through the first two stages independently, leaving the Mentor Coaching session free to focus on conceptualisation and experimentation - the stages where a Mentor Coach adds the most value.

Schön's distinction between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action is equally relevant (Schön, 1983). Coaching itself demands reflection-in-action - thinking on one's feet within the session. Reviewing a recording afterwards is reflection-on-action, and it is this slower, more deliberate form of reflection that builds the pattern recognition a coach later draws on in the moment.

Adult Learning & Andragogy

Knowles' theory of andragogy holds that adult learners are self-directed, bring a reservoir of experience to draw on, and learn best when the material is problem-centred and immediately relevant to their own goals (Knowles, 1980). A Mentor Coaching session built around the Mentee Coach's own recording, their own self-assessment and their own stated focus honours all three principles - it is the opposite of generic, one-size-fits-all instruction.

Deliberate Practice

Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Römer's research into expert performance found that improvement depends not on the volume of practice but on deliberate practice - effortful, focused work on a specific, well-defined element of performance, with immediate feedback (Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Römer, 1993). Inviting the Mentee Coach to identify one or two priority areas in advance is what converts a general listen-back into deliberate practice.

The Working Alliance & Psychological Safety

Bordin's model of the working alliance identifies agreement on goals, agreement on tasks, and the quality of the interpersonal bond as the three factors that predict a helping relationship's effectiveness (Bordin, 1979).

Establishing all three before the session - through the proforma, the focus conversation and the discussion of previous experience - builds the alliance before the clock starts.

Edmondson's research on psychological safety shows that learning behaviour in a team or dyad depends on the belief that it is safe to admit error, ask questions and raise concerns without fear of punishment or embarrassment (Edmondson, 1999). Asking the Mentee Coach in advance what helps them learn, and what to do if they become defensive or overwhelmed, is a direct, practical application of this principle.

Mentoring Functions & Protégé Engagement

Kram's foundational work on workplace mentoring distinguishes between career functions (sponsorship, exposure, coaching, protection, challenging assignments) and psychosocial functions (role modelling, acceptance, counselling, friendship) (Kram, 1985). Mentor Coaching sits closer to the psychosocial and developmental end of this spectrum, which is precisely why relational preparation - not just technical preparation - matters.

A large interdisciplinary meta-analysis by Eby and colleagues confirms that outcomes are not determined by the mentor alone: a protégé's own proactive behaviour - including preparation and self-reflection - is itself a consistent predictor of positive mentoring outcomes (Eby et al., 2013). Preparation is not passive compliance; it is an active driver of the Mentee Coach's own development.

Self-assessment Accuracy & The Power of Specific Feedback

Dunning and Kruger's research shows that self-assessment of competence is often inaccurate, and that the least skilled performers are typically the least able to recognise the gap (Dunning and Kruger, 1999). This is the theoretical basis for treating the comparison between the Mentee Coach's self-assessment and the Mentor Coach's observation as material for exploration rather than simply a means of confirming what the Mentee Coach already believes.

Hattie and Timperley's synthesis of feedback research found that feedback is most powerful when it is specific, addresses the gap between current and desired performance, and is generated collaboratively rather than delivered one-way (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). Timestamped, evidence-based preparation is what makes specific feedback possible.

The LISTEN Framework

Preparation touches several distinct areas - reviewing the recording, identifying a focus, understanding learning style, clarifying the developmental target, drawing on past experience of Mentor Coaching, and shaping the process itself. LISTEN brings these together as a single, memorable sequence for the Mentee Coach to work through before every session.

	STEP	WHAT IT MEANS
L	Listen & Log	Review the recording in full and complete the pre-session self-assessment, noting specific timestamped moments rather than general impressions.
I	Identify the Focus	Share what you most want to explore - one or two priority areas rather than the whole session.
S	Style & Support Needs	Reflect on how you learn best - active experimentation, quiet reflection, visual mapping or discussion - and flag any specific support you need.
T	Target	Clarify the credential level or developmental goal this recording serves - ACC, PCC, MCC, evaluation preparation, or ongoing consistency.
E	Experience	Reflect on previous experiences of Mentor Coaching - what helped you learn, what got in the way, and how you prefer to receive feedback.
N	Negotiate the Process	Come ready to co-create how the session itself will run - where to start, how to move through the recording, and what a good outcome looks like.

L - Listen & Log: Review the Recording First

Before the Mentor Coaching session, ask the Mentee Coach to listen to the recording in full and complete a short reflective review. Encourage them to notice specific moments rather than making broad statements such as “I asked too many questions” or “I did not listen well.” Ask them to record timestamps and identify what happened, what they intended, what they noticed about the client's response and what they might do differently.

This helps the Mentee Coach to develop the capacity to assess their own coaching, rather than becoming dependent on the Mentor Coach to identify every strength and development area. They can send the completed review ahead of the session. The Mentor Coach can then compare the Mentee Coach's reflections with their own observations and use any differences as material for exploration.

A simple pre-session self-assessment proforma

Recording reviewed: _____

Date of recording: _____

Length of recording: _____

Credential level being worked towards: ACC PCC MCC ongoing development

What was the agreed outcome for the coaching session?

What do I believe worked particularly well? *(Include timestamps and evidence from the recording)*

Where did the client appear to think more deeply, gain awareness or make a meaningful shift?

Which questions, reflections or observations appeared to have the greatest impact?

Where might I have influenced, led, interrupted or moved ahead of the client?

What did I notice about my listening?

What did I notice about my use of silence?

What assumptions was I making during the session?

Which ICF Core Competencies do I believe were most evident?

Which competency or competencies would I most like feedback on?

What would I do differently if I coached this session again?

What is the most important learning outcome I want from the Mentor Coaching session?

The Mentor Coach can use this to explore alignment between self-perception and observed practice. The aim is not to catch the Mentee Coach out. It is to strengthen their ability to recognise competency evidence, understand client impact and evaluate their own development with increasing accuracy.

I - Identify the Focus: Ask What They Want to Focus On

A Mentee Coach may want feedback on the whole session, yet this can result in too much information and too little depth. Invite them to identify one or two priority areas. They might wish to explore their questioning, listening, presence, use of silence, partnership, contracting, evoking awareness or support for client growth. The Mentor Coach may notice other important issues and should not ignore them, particularly where ethics, boundaries or significant competency gaps are involved. A clearly agreed focus still helps to create a purposeful and manageable learning conversation.

S - Style & Support Needs: Explore Learning Preferences Without Fixed Labels

A simple learning-preference inventory can offer a useful starting point for discussing how the Mentee Coach likes to learn. It should be used as a prompt for conversation, not as a fixed label or scientific diagnosis.

For example, a Mentee Coach who enjoys active, practical learning may benefit from pausing the recording, replaying a short section and experimenting with alternative responses. They might practise wording a question in several different ways, role-play a key moment or replay the interaction with the Mentor Coach taking the client's role. Someone who prefers reflective processing may benefit from quiet thinking time, written prompts or listening to a section more than once before responding. A visually oriented learner may find competency maps, diagrams, timelines or colour-coded transcripts helpful. Someone who learns through discussion may benefit from thinking aloud, hearing alternative interpretations and exploring the likely impact of different coaching choices.

The most useful question is not simply, *“What is your learning style?”* It is: *“What helps you learn, practise and integrate feedback most effectively?”*

T - Target: Clarify the Wider Development Goal

The Mentor Coach should understand the context surrounding the recording. Is the Mentee Coach working towards ACC, PCC or MCC? Are they preparing a recording for a performance evaluation? Are they seeking greater consistency across their coaching? Are they trying to develop a clearer personal coaching style? Knowing the wider goal allows the Mentor Coach to offer feedback at the appropriate level and avoid treating every recording as an isolated performance.

Useful questions include:

- *“What level are you currently working towards?”*
- *“What would you like to be able to do more consistently?”*
- *“What do you believe is your current developmental edge?”*
- *“How will you know that the Mentor Coaching is helping you progress?”*
- *“What would make this session particularly valuable for you?”*

E - Experience: Explore Previous Experiences of Mentor Coaching

Not every Mentee Coach arrives with positive experiences of feedback. Some may previously have received feedback that felt overly evaluative, vague, contradictory or focused mainly on what was missing. Others may have experienced Mentor Coaching that was highly supportive but insufficiently challenging.

Ask:

- *“What have your previous experiences of Mentor Coaching been like?”*
- *“What helped you learn?”*
- *“What made it harder to learn?”*
- *“How do you prefer to receive feedback?”*
- *“What would you like me to do if you become overwhelmed, defensive or uncertain?”*
- *“What balance of challenge, reflection, demonstration and practice works best for you?”*

This conversation supports psychological safety and gives the Mentor Coach information about how to work responsively without reducing rigour.

N - Negotiate the Process: Co-Create the Mentor Coaching Session

The Mentee Coach can also be invited to consider how they would like the session to be structured. **A possible process might include:**

- agreeing the focus and desired outcome;
- hearing the Mentee Coach's self-assessment;
- reviewing selected moments from the recording;
- identifying competency evidence and client impact;
- exploring strengths and developmental edges;
- practising alternative approaches;
- agreeing one or two experiments for future coaching;
- identifying what will be reviewed in the next session.

Some Mentee Coaches may prefer to begin with their strengths. Others may want to move directly to a particular moment that concerns them. Some may benefit from reviewing the recording chronologically, while others learn more from examining selected themes. Co-creating the process models the partnership expected within coaching itself.

Keep Ownership of the Learning with the Mentee Coach

The Mentor Coach brings experience, competency knowledge and the ability to recognise patterns in coaching practice. The Mentee Coach still needs to remain an active participant in making meaning from the feedback. **Rather than immediately explaining what should have happened, the Mentor Coach might ask:**

- *“What do you notice as you listen back to that moment?”*
- *“What do you think the client needed from you there?”*
- *“What was the impact of your response?”*
- *“What other options were available?”*
- *“Which response feels most aligned with your coaching style?”*
- *“What would you like to practise now?”*

The purpose is not simply to improve one recording. It is to develop a reflective practitioner who can listen to their own coaching, recognise competency evidence, understand client impact and make increasingly intentional choices. When Listening, Identifying the focus, Style, Target, Experience and Negotiating the process are all addressed before the work begins, Mentor Coaching becomes more targeted, collaborative and developmental.



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