



# The State of Coaching and Mentoring

Engage, develop and retain employees through better coaching and mentoring



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# Executive Summary

Let's call it the coaching and mentoring conundrum. It goes like this: although coaching and mentoring are viewed as important talent development practices in most organizations, they are too often held back by a shortage of good coaches and mentors. That is, organizations need a solid *core* of skilled coaches and mentors in order to build a large organizational roster of coaches and mentors *throughout* the organization.

That conundrum is largely why, despite the potential benefits of coaching and mentoring, many organizations are still struggling to get the most out of these powerful talent development practices.

In this report, we take a closer look at this conundrum and at the other factors that fuel and hinder effective coaching. More specifically, we cover the following topics:

- HR professionals' assessments of the importance of coaching and mentoring, both now and in the near future
- the primary drivers of coaching and mentoring, along with key barriers impeding them
- how coaching and mentoring differ from one another
- the competencies, or lack thereof, of today's coaches and mentors
- how well organizations instill a coaching culture
- the use of technology to fuel coaching and mentoring effectiveness
- key differences between organizations that excel at coaching and mentoring and those that do not

## About the Survey

The State of Coaching and Mentoring Survey ran during January and February 2022. We gathered 228 usable complete and partial responses from HR professionals in virtually every industry vertical. Respondents are located all over the world, but most of them reside in North America, especially the United States.

The participants represent a broad cross section of employers by number of employees, ranging from small businesses with fewer than 50 employees to enterprises with 20,000+ employees. Questions for the survey were guided by an independent panel of HR professionals, coaching and mentoring experts who we thank for their invaluable insights.

# Below is a summary of high-level findings

## 1 Coaching and mentoring are important and will get even more so in the near future.

- About two-thirds (65%) agree or strongly agree that coaching is important and 60% agree or strongly agree about the importance of mentoring.
- Asked about the next two years, 64% agree or strongly agree there will be a greater emphasis on coaching, and 62% expect to see a greater emphasis on mentoring.

## 2 Coaching and mentoring have a positive impact on both individual development and organizational performance.

- Eighty-one percent agree or strongly agree that coaching has a positive impact on individual development, and 78% say the same for mentoring.
- Seventy-seven percent agree or strongly agree that coaching has a positive impact on organizational performance, and 72% say the same for mentoring.

## 3 Despite the importance of coaching and mentoring, only a minority say that over half of their organization's coaches or mentors are effective.

- Only 39% say that over half of their mentors are effective/impactful, and just 20% say that more than three-quarters are.
- Only 46% say over half of their coaches are effective/impactful, and just 26% say more than three-quarters are.

## 4 More than half of HR professionals say the coaches and mentors in their organizations lack a high degree of effectiveness in these eight key areas.

- Listening to gain better understanding
- Instilling confidence
- Giving useful feedback
- Helping others develop strategies for meeting their goals
- Guiding conversations toward positive outcomes
- Building rapport and trust
- Asking questions to generate insights
- Holding difficult conversations successfully

## 5 Formal training for internal coaches and mentors is not widespread.

- Only 15% provide training in coaching skills for *all* their internal coaches/mentors, and only 13% do so for mentoring skills.
- Forty-one percent provide no formal training at all in coaching skills, and 52% say the same for mentoring skills.

## 6 More organizations are turning to technology to bolster the efficiency and effectiveness of coaching/mentoring.

- Sixty-eight percent are relying on virtual coaching and/or mentoring to either a large or limited degree, a trend partially fueled by the pandemic.
- Multiple technologies are already being used by many organizations to enhance their coaching and/or mentoring efforts including:
  - goal setting technologies (55%)
  - video capabilities allowing virtual/distance coaching and mentoring (46%)
  - internet-based learning (40%)

## 7 There are some key differences in who does coaching versus mentoring.

- A large percentage of organizations use direct supervisors to do both coaching and mentoring, at 78% and 59%, respectively.
- Colleagues/peers, non-direct managers, and senior executives are more likely to serve as mentors than they are as coaches.
- External coaches/mentors (e.g., those from outside the organization) are more than twice as likely to be deployed as coaches than as mentors.

## 8 Some culture-related factors that influence coaching and mentoring are more prevalent than others.

- Seventy-one percent say employees are encouraged to seek coaching and/or mentoring and 70% say that managers help others grow professionally.
- Sixty-three percent say everyone is supported in reaching their full potential.
- Just 29%, however, say coaches and/or mentors are incentivized for their efforts, including via recognition programs.

## 9 The three most widely cited reasons for using coaching and mentoring programs are:

- To provide guidance to help others realize their potential
- To help create a more diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce
- To prepare a pool of talent to fill future critical roles

## 10 The most prevalent challenges to coaching and mentoring are:

- There is not enough time to devote to coaching or mentoring
- Managers are avoiding difficult conversations
- There is a lack of defined and measurable outcomes
- There is a lack of budget to provide coaching or mentoring

## 11 Companies with a larger percentage of effective coaches/mentors do things differently; they are:

- More than four times more likely than other organizations to say both coaching and mentoring lead to improved individual development
- More than three times more likely to use progress monitoring to facilitate coaching/mentoring
- More than two times more likely to say coaching leads to improved organizational performance
- About two times less likely to say low skill levels of coaches/mentors are challenges



# How Do We Define Coaching and Mentoring?

For purposes of this report, and within the context of the survey itself, we have defined coaching and mentoring as follows:

- **Coaching:** A form of development in which an experienced person, often referred to as a coach, provides a structured and focused interaction with a learner or client (coachee), using tools and techniques to help create positive change for the benefit of the coachee and possibly for other stakeholders.
- **Mentoring:** A relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person via advice, opinions, strategies and policies focused on career or life advancement



# How Critical Are Coaching and Mentoring Now and in the Future?

## **Finding: Coaching and mentoring are still relatively new to many organizations**

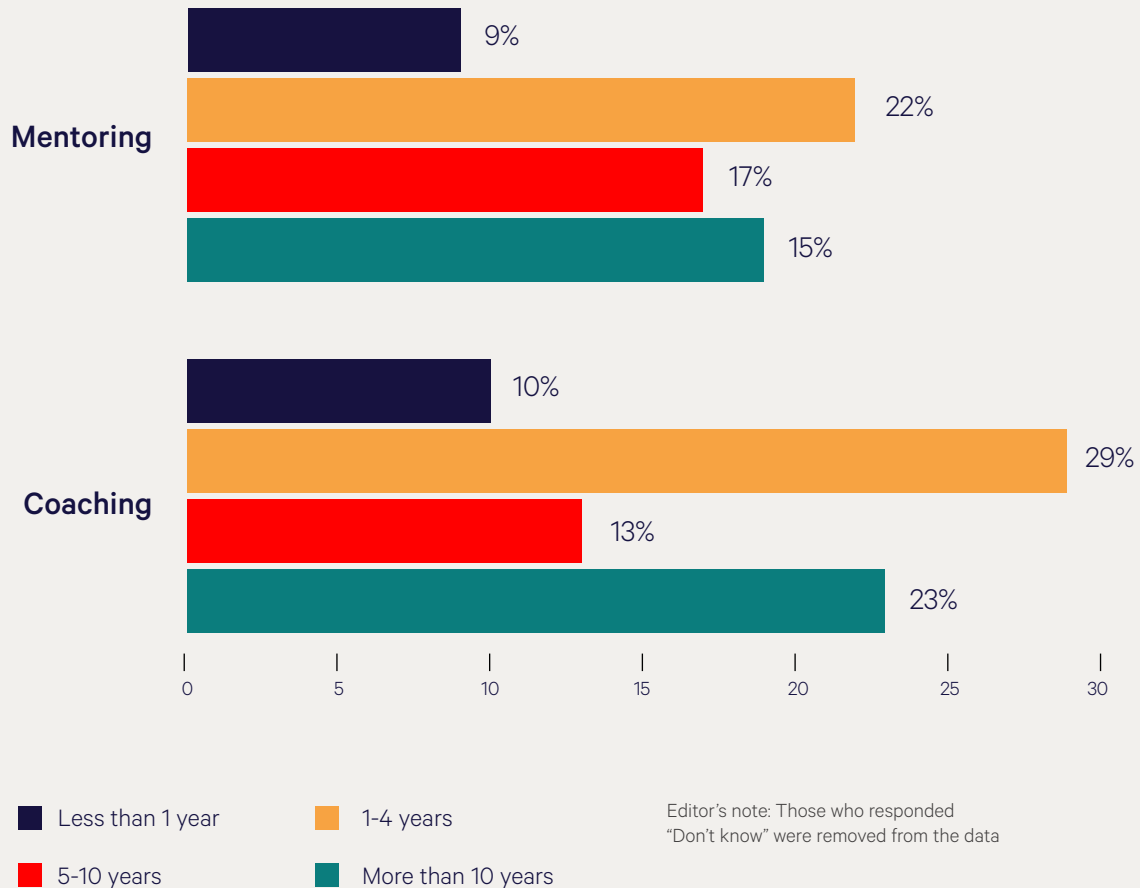
Most organizations have had a coaching/mentoring program in place for several years. Among those with a coaching program, more than one quarter say they have had such a program in place for one to four years. Only 36% have had their programs in place for five or more years.

The length of time mentoring programs have been around is similar to coaching programs. Twenty-two percent have had mentoring programs in place for one to four years, while only 36% report their mentoring programs being in place for five years or more.

In short, there is a wide mix of organizations with newer coaching/mentoring programs and those that have had them in place for longer periods of time. The key question is to what extent length of time impacts program effectiveness. As it turns out, those organizations that report a higher number of effective coaches and/or mentors are three times more likely than those organizations with less effective coaches and/or mentors to have had a program in place for ten or more years. In other words, organizations seem to improve these programs over time, and long-lasting programs seem to provide a great competitive advantage.



**Survey Question:** How long have coaching/mentoring programs existed in your organization?



### Finding: Most view coaching and mentoring as important practices

Close to two-thirds of surveyed HR professionals agree or strongly agree that coaching is an important practice in their organization. Similarly, another 60% feel the same way about mentoring. While this is a clear majority, this leaves about one in five respondents that disagree or strongly disagree that these are important practices in their organizations.

**Survey Statement:** Coaching and/or mentoring are currently important practices in your organization.

Percent responding agree or strongly agree



**Finding: The importance of coaching and mentoring are only expected to increase**

While coaching and mentoring are currently important practices, both are expected to increase in importance over the next two years. Sixty-four percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that coaching will increase in importance, and 62% see a similar increase in importance for mentoring. Some of the reasons for the uptick are discussed below.

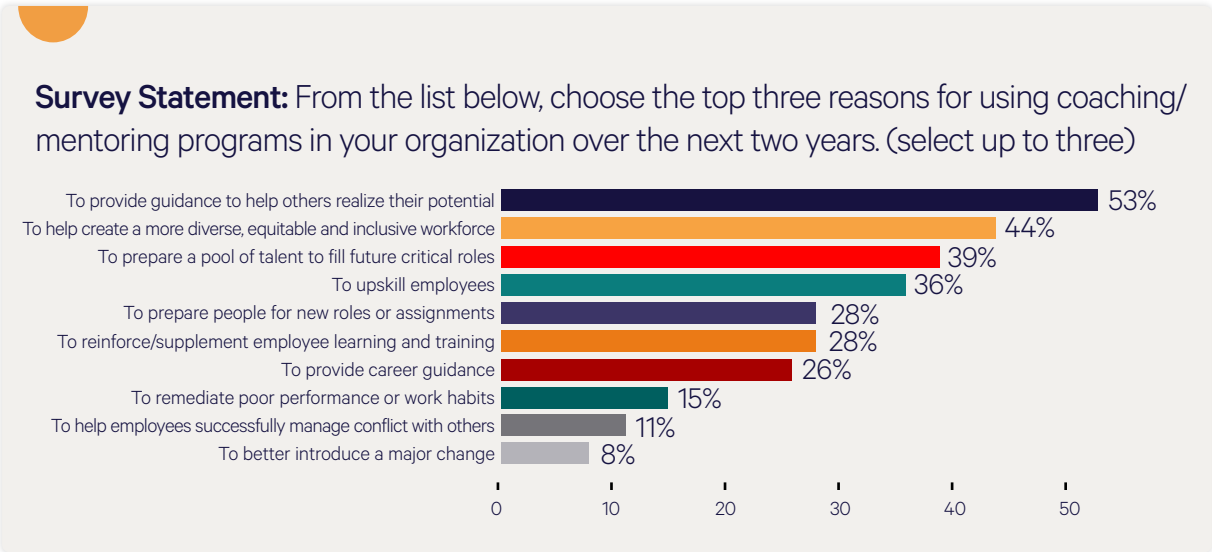


**Finding: The most common reason for using coaching and mentoring is to help others realize their potential**

Respondents were asked to choose the top three reasons (from a list of ten) for using coaching and mentoring over the next two years. “To provide guidance to help others realize their potential” topped the list at 53%, followed by “to help create a more diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce” (44%) and “to prepare a pool of talent to fill future critical roles” (39%).

The diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) category response option is new to the study this year. It has clearly become a critical issue for many organizations.

We found that “to remediate poor performance or work habits” is not commonly viewed as an important reason for coaching/mentoring, chosen by only 15% of the respondents. We should note, however, skillful coaches who constructively handle poor performance and/or work habit problems can sometimes head off disciplinary action and even termination.



# How Has Coaching and Mentoring Changed During the Pandemic?

## Finding: The use of coaching and mentoring rose during the pandemic

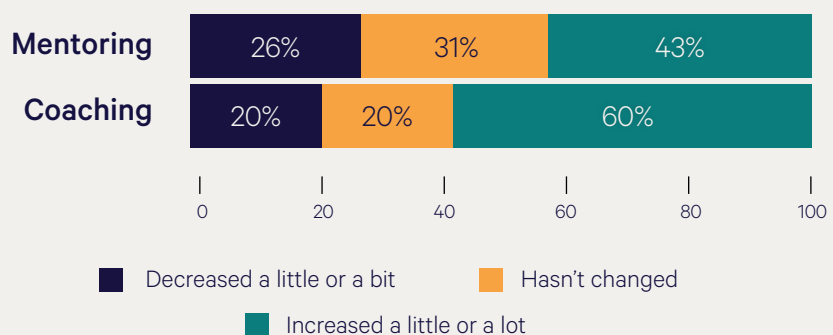
Since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, more than half (60%) of organizations that have coaching programs report the usage of coaching has increased a little or a lot, an encouraging trend. A much smaller percentage (20%) report a decrease. By comparison, only a plurality (43%) say that mentoring has increased, compared to 26% that say it has decreased.

As Nancy Lewis, an expert coach and a member of HR.com's advisory board, puts it: "Coaching should increase during pandemic times. So many people now are facing stress, mental health, and a sense of being overwhelmed and they can't focus on their career/business. Having a coach who has the skills and experience can help them work through those issues, provide coping strategies, and help them re-focus on their career and the business."

Some experts also believe that, during a labor crunch, coaching and mentoring will lead to higher levels of engagement and retention of key employees.<sup>1</sup>

Note: This graph does not include the Don't Know and Do Not Have responses. In the original data, we found that 8% did not know if coaching at increased or not, and 9% did not know if mentoring had. In addition, 12% say that their organization does not use coaching and 15% say it does not use mentoring.

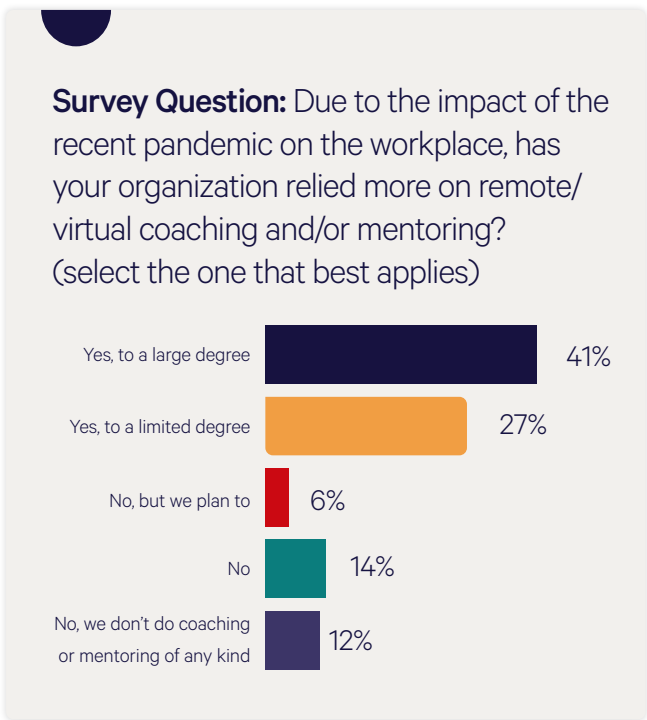
**Survey Question:** Since the start of the pandemic (March 2020), has the usage of coaching and/or mentoring increased or decreased in your organization?



<sup>1</sup>Sahai, K. (2018, January 29). Reducing turnover with a culture of coaching. Forbes. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2018/01/29/reduce-turnover-with-a-culture-of-coaching/?sh=6ddf69a527f8>.

### Finding: A majority of organizations are using virtual coaching and mentoring

The concept of using technology for virtual coaching and mentoring started long before the pandemic, especially in companies with dispersed workforces. With office shutdowns, however, the switch to virtual coaching and mentoring has become more commonplace. In fact, 68% of respondents are using virtual coaching and mentoring to some or to a large extent. While virtual coaching has some limitations when compared with face-to-face interactions, it has offered organizations a way to continue with these critical talent management practices.

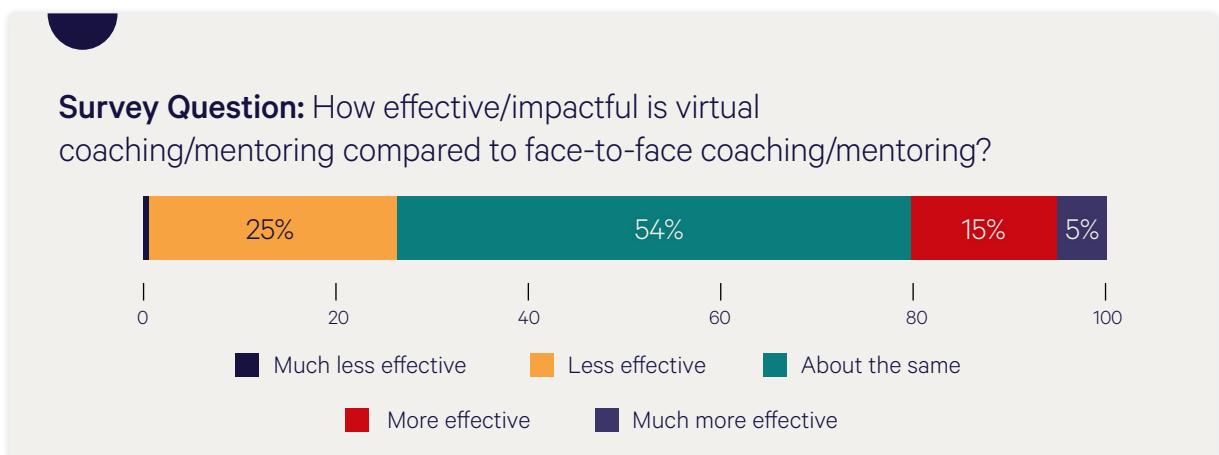


### Finding: About three-quarters of respondents say that, compared to the face-to-face varieties, virtual coaching/mentoring are as or more effective

When we asked respondents to compare the effectiveness of virtual coaching and mentoring to the effectiveness of the face-to-face varieties, we found that 54% say they are equally effective and 20% say virtual coaching/mentoring are more effective. On the other hand, about a quarter (25%) say virtual coaching/mentoring is less effective.

Why do so many view the virtual variety as less effective? Our guess is that inadequate technologies, at-home distractions and the inability to read non-verbal cues may hinder effectiveness at times. Another key difference between virtual and face-to-face coaching/mentoring is spontaneity. Virtual discussion needs be planned and scheduled in advance. It is almost impossible to just “pop-in.”

On the other hand, virtual technology is constantly advancing and people are adjusting to it. We believe that, based on other findings in this report, the improved training of virtual coaches and mentors can help close any perceived effectiveness gaps.



# Are Organizations Building Cultures That Support Coaching and Mentoring?

## Finding: Most organizations have a variety of components of a good coaching and mentoring culture

A coaching culture is one where coaching and mentoring tend to happen frequently, freely, and constructively throughout the organization. It becomes a core value and is characterized by open feedback, a high degree of trust, and honest communication.

The figure on the side shows the ratings of organizations across eight different cultural factors. Most respondents agree or strongly agree that their organization contains seven out of eight of the factors that help build a good coaching and mentoring culture. For example, 71% say employees are encouraged to seek out coaching/mentoring and 70% say that managers help others grow professionally.

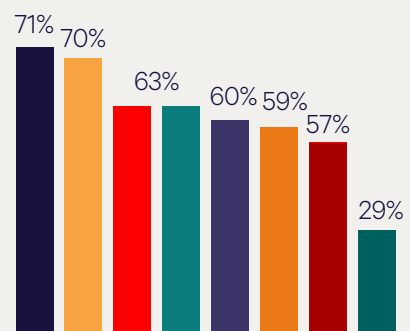
But only 29% say that their coaches and/or mentors are incentivized for their efforts. We suspect there are some understandable reasons for this. For one thing, it can be difficult to tie monetary incentives to effective coaches and mentors. Especially among managers, coaching can be just a part of the job.

At the same time, however, non-monetary incentives and recognition should be given to outstanding coaches and/or mentors. For example, promotions can be based, in part, on a leader's ability to develop strong teams.

### Survey Statement:

Your organization contains the following coaching and/or mentoring culture-related factors:

Percentage agree or strongly agree



- Employees are encouraged to seek out coaching/mentoring
- Managers help others grow professionally
- Everyone is supported in reaching their full potential
- We value both external and internal coaching/mentoring
- Senior leaders are positive role models for coaching/mentoring
- Employees welcome feedback from others
- Employees often give one another constructive feedback and feel safe doing so
- Coaches and/or mentors are incentivized for their efforts

## Finding: The top barriers to effective coaching and mentoring are lack of time and the avoidance of difficult conversations

Another characteristic of a good coaching/mentoring culture, however, is one that prioritizes these endeavors. That means devoting enough time and resources to them.

### Lack of time

Seventy-five percent indicate that there is not enough time to coach or mentor. The time crunch may be exacerbated by increasing spans of managerial control, the desire to “do more with less” and remote working arrangements.

We believe that coaching and mentoring are among the most important jobs of any leader. If coaching/mentoring enhances employee performance, it should free up a leader’s time. While finding time is a challenge, the fact that 48% of organizations report increased use of coaching/mentoring during the pandemic is encouraging.

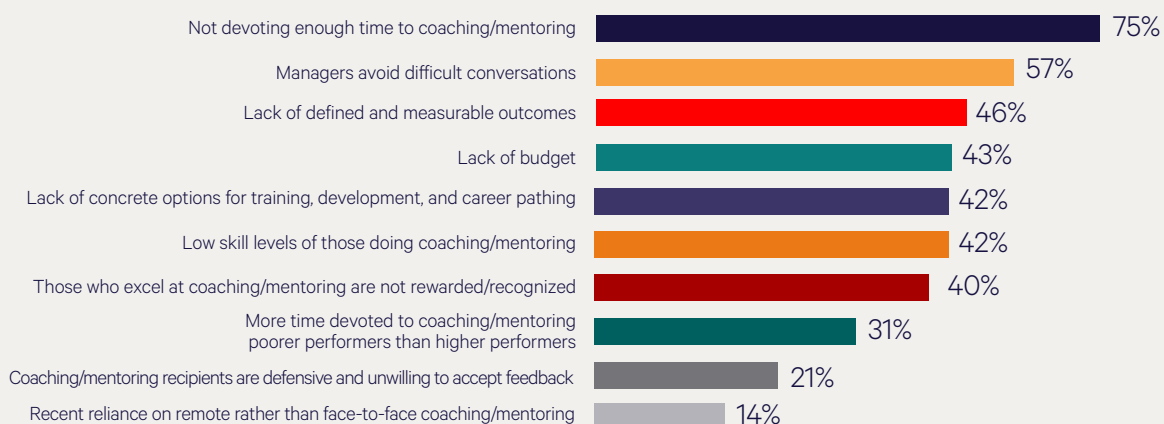
### Avoiding difficult conversations

Another challenge, cited by 57% of organizations, is that “managers avoid difficult and truthful conversations.” It takes a certain amount of courage and exceptional skills to make these conversations successful. When done well, such conversations can strengthen relationships, improve performance, and even lead to positive life changes. When done poorly, however, the results can harm morale and productivity. Therefore, it is understandable that poorly trained managers will often avoid such conversations.

### Lack of defined/measurable outcomes

Forty-six percent cite a lack of defined and measurable outcomes as a barrier. We believe that at the organizational level, the impact of coaching/mentoring should be regularly assessed against a set of goals. These goals could include engagement, retention, “ready-now” talent to fill critical positions as they open, percentage of internal versus external promotions, and the ability to execute on key business priorities. Coaches and mentors should also take the time to understand what their coachees and mentees want and then measure progress against these goals.

#### Survey Question: Which challenges currently hinder coaching/mentoring in your organization? (select all that apply)

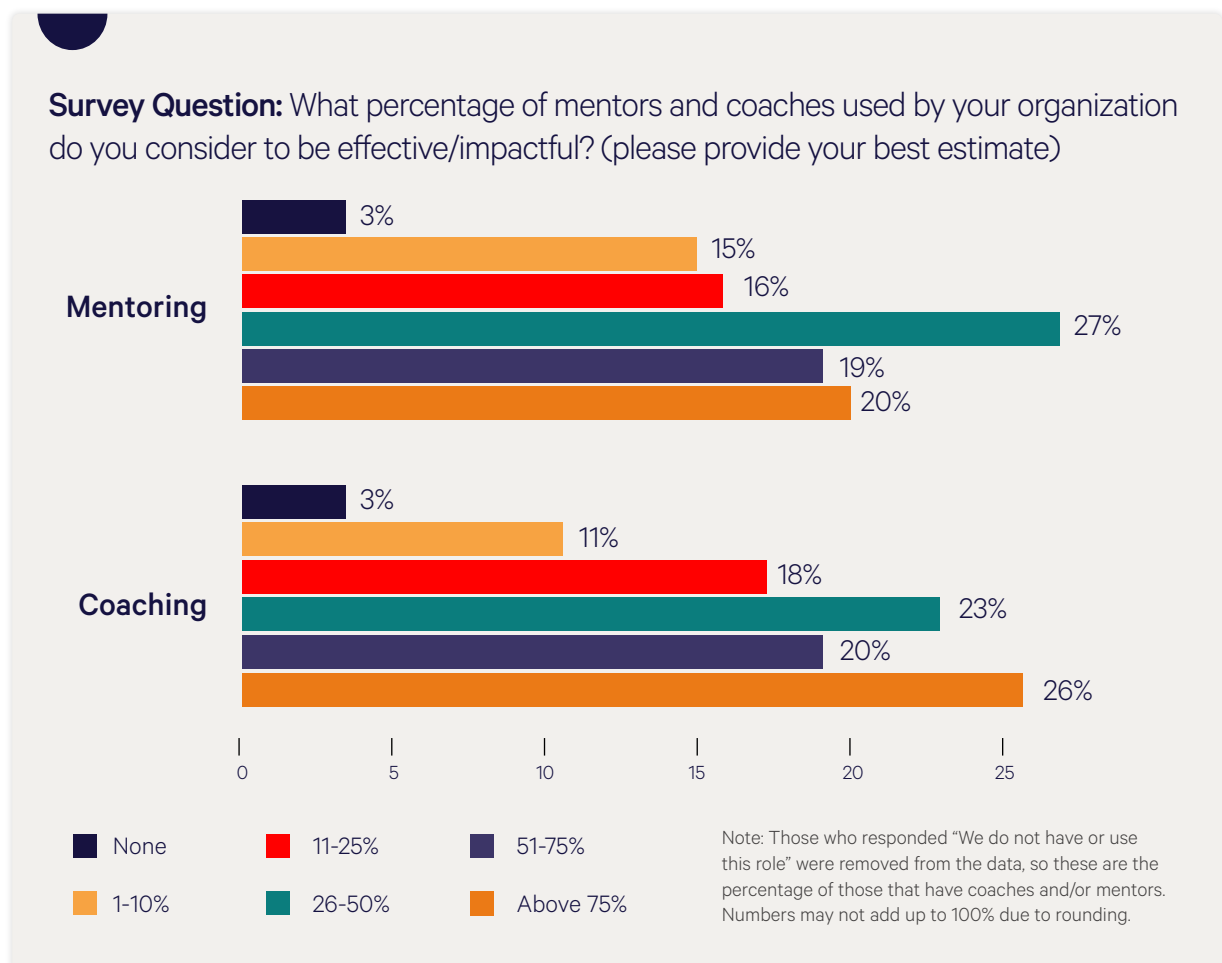


# How Effective Are Coaches and Mentors?

## Finding: A majority say that only half or fewer of their coaches and mentors are effective

The most critical ingredient to successful coaching and mentoring is the effectiveness of those doing it. Yet, organizations have a serious problem here. A majority of HR professionals report that only half or fewer of their mentors and coaches are effective.

Just over a third (34%) of organizations report that one in four or less of their mentors are effective/ impactful. Only 20% feel that more than 75% of their mentors are effective. The effectiveness of those who engage in coaching is equally concerning. Under a third (32%) of organizations consider one in four or less of their coaches to be effective. And 26% consider more than three-quarters of their coaches to be effective. It begs the question: Is poor coaching and mentoring worse than no coaching and mentoring at all?



## Finding: Most also say their coaches and mentors are not very effective in eight important skills areas

Coaching and mentoring require a complex set of interrelated skills. We took a closer look at eight of these skills, asking respondents to rate the skills of coaches and mentors as very effective, somewhat effective or not effective. The chart below shows the percentage saying very effective.

In all areas, fewer than half consider their coaches or mentors to be very effective. The most effective skill area for both coaches and mentors is building rapport and trust, at 41% and 45%, respectively. Instilling confidence was also rated relatively high: 38% of coaches are very effective and 39% of mentors are.

The area where coaches and mentors have the least skills is in the ability to hold difficult conversations successfully, an issue we touch on several times in our research. A mere 28% of HR professionals feel the coaches in their organizations are very effective at this skill, and only 18% believe mentors are.

Respondents view mentors as less effective than coaches in six out of the eight areas. In some cases, these differences are considerable. For example, 39% of coaches are considered very effective at guiding interactions toward positive outcomes versus 31% for mentors. This could be because mentoring is viewed as less formal. Indeed, as we show later in the report, mentors are less likely to receive formal training.





## Finding: Inadequate coaching and mentoring skills are probably linked to inadequate training

Coaching and mentoring tend to be difficult skills to master. For a fortunate few, they may come naturally. For most, however, it takes training, and they are not getting it. Only 45% of organizations agree or strongly agree that their leaders/managers receive specific training in coaching skills, and even fewer (33%) say they've been trained in mentoring.

Mentoring tends to be more of an informal relationship and formal training may be considered less critical. However, offering training does not mean it is widespread. In a parallel question we asked what percent offer formal training to those that do coaching or mentoring. Only 53% provide coaching skills training for some or all of their internal coaches and 43% provide mentoring skills training for some or all of their mentors.



# Who Does Coaching and Mentoring?

## Finding: People in a variety of roles and jobs provide coaching and mentoring

The figure below shows who does coaching and mentoring. Clearly, coaching and mentoring is not constrained to a single role or position and is done by those within and outside the organization. Keep in mind that the finding below indicates who does coaching and mentoring, and not how much they do it.

### On coaches

External coaches are the most cited source for coaching, chosen by 88% of the respondents. They bring valuable skills to the table along with experience and credibility. Many have gone through some sort of certification process. Eighty-six percent cite HR as a coaching resource. As many HR teams are outsourcing administrative tasks, it frees up their time to provide strategic advice and support to both line employees and leaders at all levels. Another frequently cited coaching source, at 78%, are direct supervisors. Leaders in these roles have direct accountability for the performance of their team and a direct line of sight into the needs of their team members.

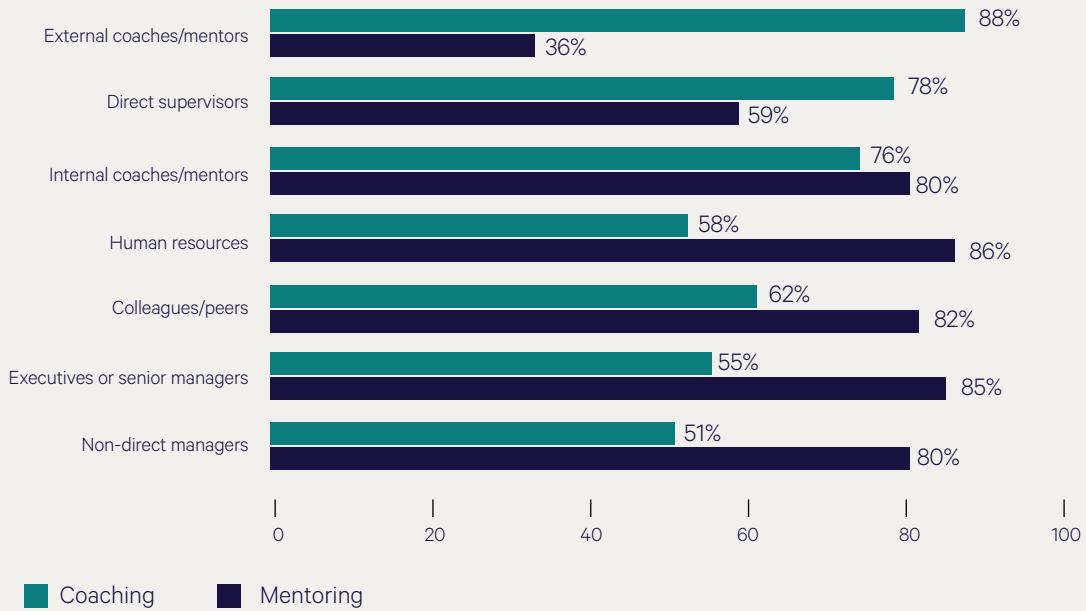
### On mentors

Executives or senior managers and HR are the most frequent sources of mentoring, chosen by 85% and 86%, respectively. Few organizations (36%) rely on external mentors. This indicates that mentoring is done by those usually outside a person's direct reporting line, enabling different perspectives, a longer-term focus, and some degree of confidentiality, all key factors to successful mentoring relationships. It is encouraging to see the use of peers and colleagues serving as mentors. They may be in a better position to give more open feedback, provide a closer view of alternate career paths, and offer support in various areas of expertise.



**Survey Question:** Who does the coaching and mentoring in your organization? (select all that apply)

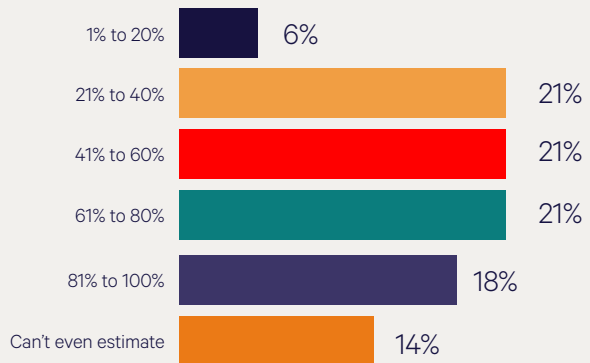
Percent responding very effective



**Finding: Direct managers tend to provide large portions of coaching feedback**

While employees may receive or seek out coaching and mentoring from a variety of sources, they are most likely to get anywhere from 41% to 100% of the coaching feedback from their direct manager or supervisor. These percentages do not include coaching that is part of a formal performance review, which often serves as a good opportunity for coaching. Therefore, we believe direct supervisors should be well trained in offering coaching feedback.

**Survey Question:** On average and outside of regular performance reviews, about what percentage of coaching feedback is provided by an employee's immediate manager/supervisor? (please provide your best estimate)



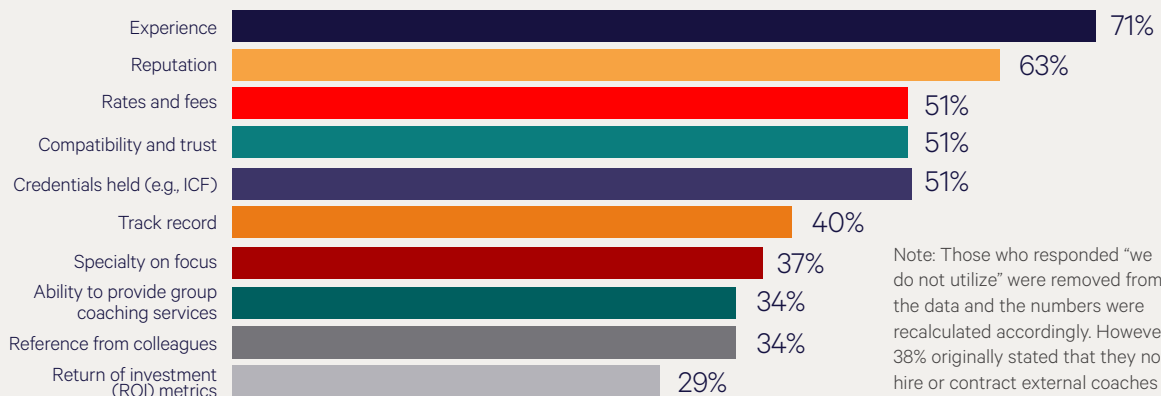
# How Do Organizations Choose External Coaches and Mentors?

## Finding: Experience is the top criterion for selecting external coaches and coaching services

Organizations often rely on external sources to provide some of their coaching. According to IBIS, a leading industry analyst, the size of the U.S. market for coaching services in 2021 was over \$11 billion. There are over 56,000 entities providing business coaching.<sup>2</sup> Among our study participants, 62% hire or contract external coaches or coaching services.

So how do organizations go about sourcing external coaches to ensure a fit with their organization and employees? Experience is the top criteria, chosen by 71% of organizations that contract external coaches. Experience can cover a range of factors such as industry knowledge, the level of previous coaching assignments (e.g., senior executive, line managers, high potentials), and the length of time as a coaching professional. Reputation is the second most frequently selected criteria, chosen by 63% of respondents. In many cases, coaches are chosen based on their reputed success with similar organizations and individuals.

**Survey Question:** What are the main criteria your organization uses to hire or contract external coaches or coaching services? (select all that apply)



<sup>2</sup>Industry market research, reports, and Statistics. IBISWorld. (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.ibisworld.com/united-states/market-research-reports/business-coaching-industry/>

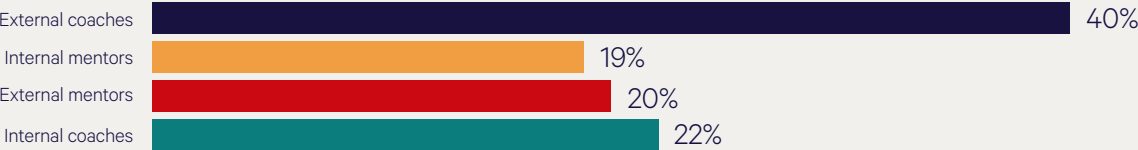
**Finding: External coaches are most likely to have formal credentials**

Most organizations do not require internal coaches and/or mentors to have formal certifications and/or credentials, although such credentials are far more likely to be seen among external coaches. About one in five organizations use coaching certifications/credentialing for internal coaches, internal mentors, and external mentors. Keep in mind, however, that some of those may still provide training for their internal coaches and mentors.

External coaches are another matter. Forty percent agree or strongly agree that their organizations use certifications/credentialing when selecting external coaches. Indeed, there are various organizations that provide certification or formal credentials for executive and business coaching. A few examples are the International Coaching Federation, the Institute for Executive Coaching and Leadership, and the Coaching Training Alliance. Common elements involved in a certification program tend to include rigorous training and real application of skills in a certain number of coaching engagements, some with observation from the certification faculty.

**Survey Question:** Coaches and/or mentors used by your organization hold formal coaching/mentoring credentials such as professional certifications.

Percent responding agree or strongly agree



# How Widespread Is the Use of Technology-enabled Coaching?

## **Finding: Most organizations use some form of technology to enable better coaching/mentoring**

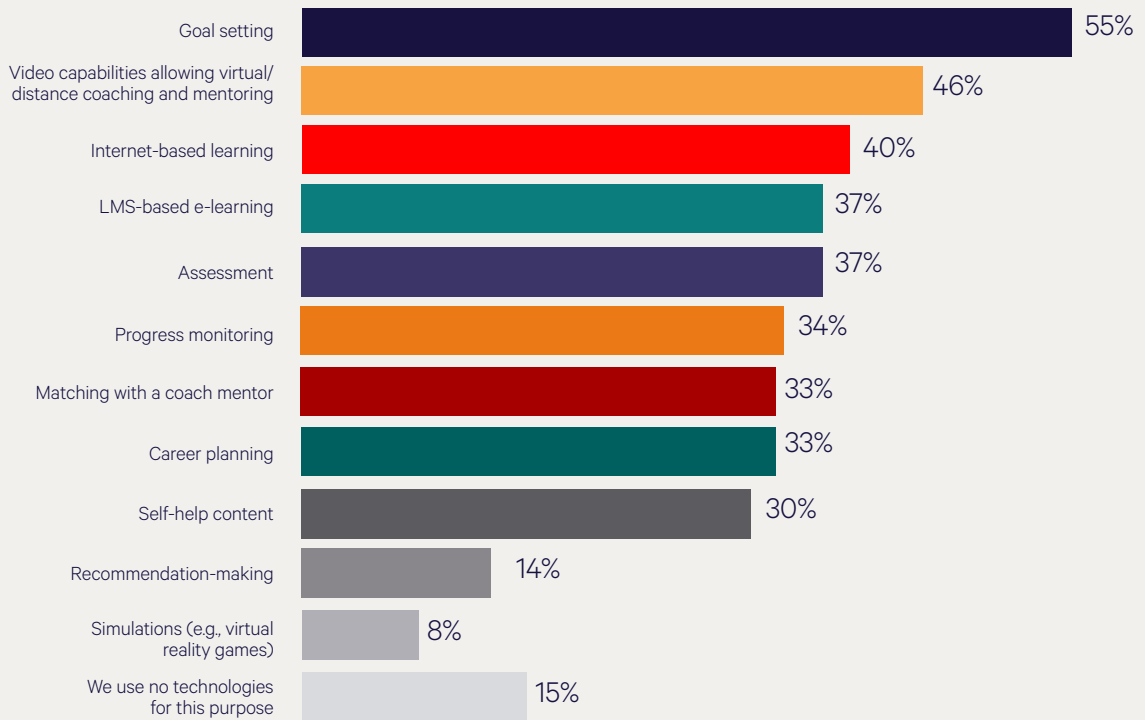
Coaching and mentoring tend to be people-centric pursuits. That said, there are multiple applications that hold the promise of making coaching and mentoring more efficient and effective. Some of these apply to specific parts of the coaching and/or mentoring process while others combine several coaching and/or mentoring components into a single platform.

We asked respondents to rate usage of different coaching/mentoring applications. Goal-setting, the most used application, was chosen by just over half of the respondents. The second most widely cited application, chosen by 46% of respondents, was the use of video capabilities to enable virtual coaching/learning to occur. The use of virtual communication/meeting platforms were a lifesaver during the pandemic, allowing organizations to continue most of their HR programs, including coaching.

Two-fifths of respondents indicate their organization uses some form of internet-based learning. Internet learning has become a prevalent way to deliver all types of training. On the coaching end, internet-based learning provides employees with a way to develop and enhance the skills/knowledge that often are recommended as a part of coaching or mentoring. Following close behind are coaching-related e-learning provided via a learning management system as well as assessments (both 37%).



**Survey Question:** In your organization, which of the following capabilities are provided via technology to facilitate coaching and/or mentoring? (select all that apply)



# Do Coaching and Mentoring Bolster Performance?

## Finding: A majority of HR professionals view coaching and mentoring as a key enabler of performance

We explored the perception of coaching and mentoring based on two outcome variables: individual development and organizational performance. Seventy-eight percent agree or strongly agree that mentoring leads to improved individual development. Eighty-one percent feel the same way about coaching.

There were similar findings for the impact of coaching and mentoring on organizational performance. Seventy-two percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that mentoring leads to improved organizational performance, with 77% feeling the same way about coaching.

These findings support a growing body of research on the key role coaching and mentoring play in bolstering the quality of talent. In the next section of this report, we take a closer look at those practices that relate to better outcomes.





# What Do High Performers Do Differently?

The findings above are based on responses from all organizations. However, we wanted to analyze the relationship between those organizations with highly effective coaches and mentors and those with less effective coaches and mentors. We started by dividing our sample into two groups:

**Low performers (LP):** These respondents say that in their organizations less than half of their coaches and mentors are highly effective or that they do not have these roles or programs at all.

**High performers (HP):** These respondents say that their organizations have coaching and mentoring roles and programs and that at least 51% of their coaches or mentors are highly effective. Moreover, no fewer than 26% of their coaches or mentors are very effective.

Once we separated the two groups, we took a closer look at key differences across multiple coaching and/or mentoring practices. Of course, correlation is not the same as causation. While we cannot state that any practice will lead to success, we do see intriguing relationships that may help organizations forge stronger practices.

## **Finding: High performers place far more importance on coaching and mentoring**

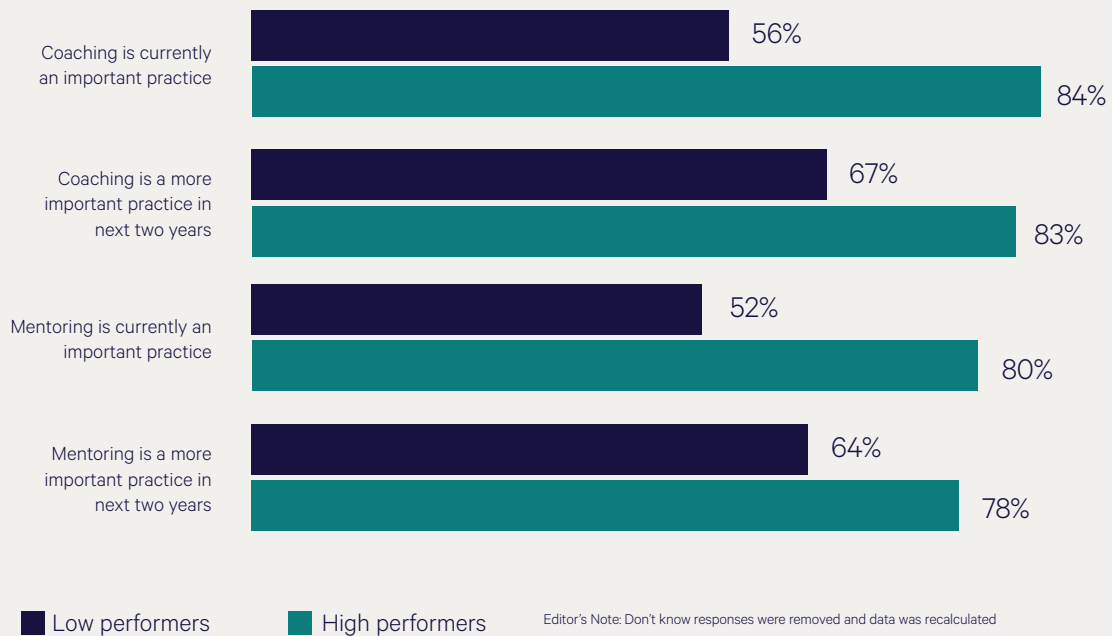
Eighty-four percent of the respondents from the high-performer group of companies agree or strongly agree that coaching is currently an important practice in their organization. Eighty-three percent feel the same way about mentoring.

The low performer group is much less likely to agree or strongly agree that coaching and mentoring are important. Just 56% view coaching as important today and even fewer (52%) see mentoring as important.

We found similar differences when it comes to the intention to place greater importance on coaching and/or mentoring over the next two years. Most high performers (83%) agree or strongly agree that coaching will become more important in the next two years future, and 78% say the same for mentoring. By comparison, 67% and 64%, respectively, of low performers say the same. The importance that an organization places on coaching and/or mentoring sends a message that might lead to a stronger coaching culture and better practices.

**Survey Statement:** Coaching and/or mentoring are currently important practices in your organization and your organization plans to place greater importance on coaching and/or mentoring in the next two years.

Percent responding agree or strongly agree



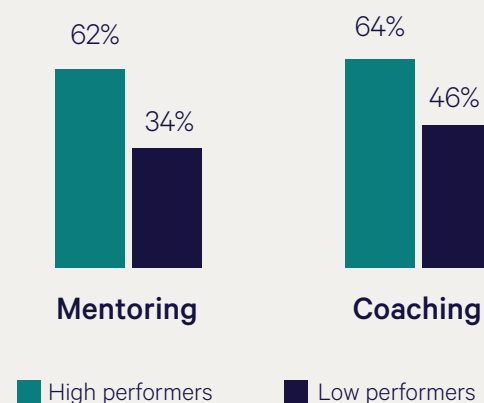
### Finding: Effective coaching and mentoring are linked to formal training

As we might expect, high performers are more likely to train their coaches and mentors. Sixty-four percent of the high performers provide formal training in coaching skills for some, or all, of their coaches. The same is true for only 46% of the low performer group.

Similarly, 62% provide formal training in mentoring skills for some or all of their mentors compared 34% for low performers. The biggest difference in these percentages comes from “all of them” responses. High performers are almost three times more likely than low performers to provide formal training to all of their coaches and/or mentors.

**Survey Question:** Does your organization provide formal training to internal coaches and mentors?

Percent responding yes for some or all of them



## Finding: High performers are more capable than low performers in all specific coaching skills

When we looked across the eight coaching and mentoring skills included in our research, we found that high performers outperform the low performers in every area. The table below looks at these differences for skills among coaches only. However, approximately the same difference between the high and low performer groups apply to skills among mentors as well.

The largest difference, looked at in terms of percentage point difference, is in “listening to gain better understanding” (33 percentage points). In many cases, coaches should spend a lot of the time in a coaching conversation listening and asking questions, not doing the talking.

Other sizable differences between high and low performers are in the areas of:

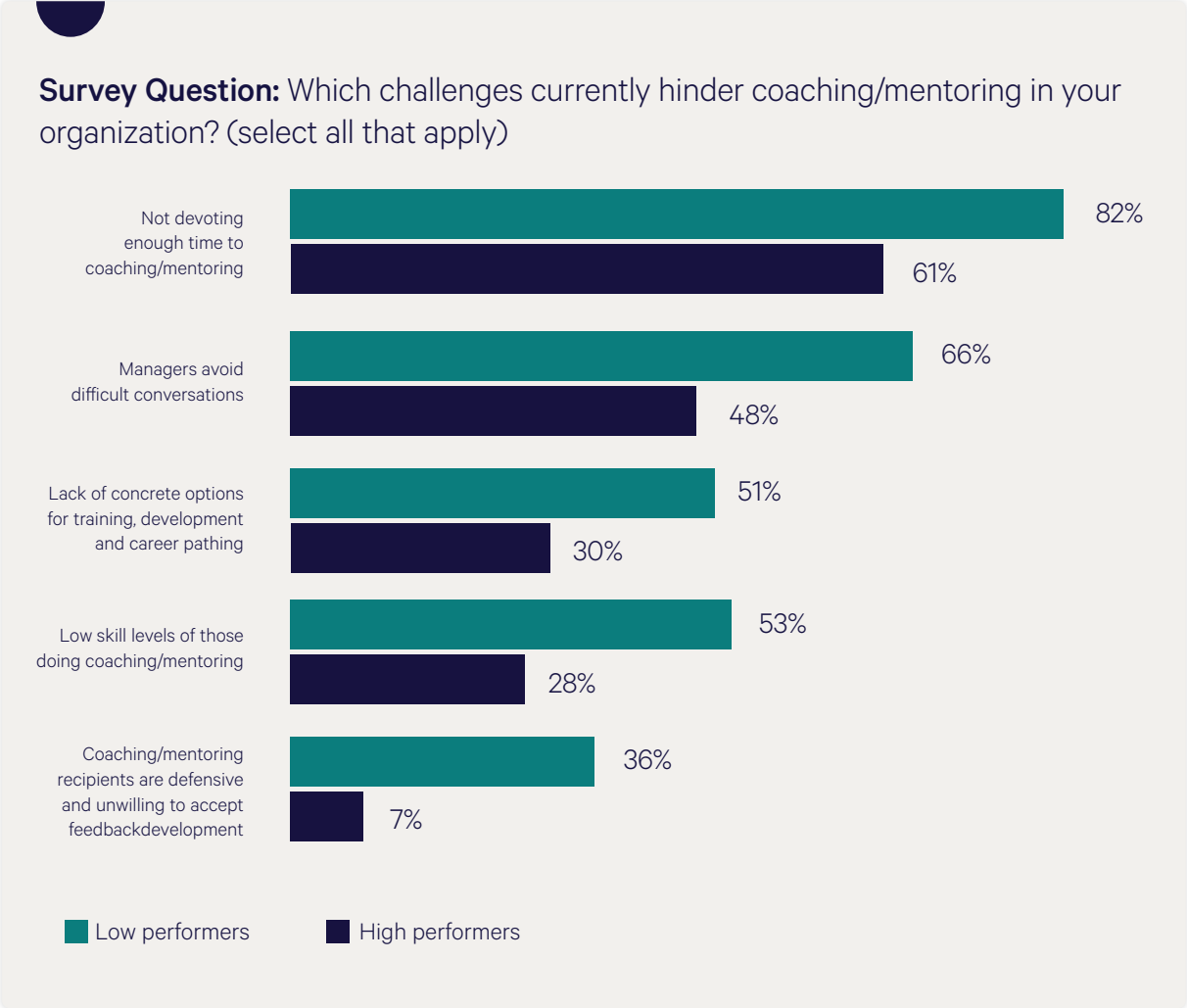
- instilling confidence
- giving useful feedback
- helping others develop strategies to meet their goals

When we did these comparisons, we looked at the percentage that rated their coaches and/or mentors as very effective. It is worth noting that even among respondents from high-performing organizations, only about half feel their coaches are “very effective” in any of the skill areas. This illustrates that many of these high performing organizations could do considerably better in honing the skills of their coaches.

	Coaching High Performer	Coaching Low Performer	Difference in percentage points
Listening to gain better understanding	55%	22%	33
Instilling confidence	54%	26%	28
Giving useful feedback	54%	26%	28
Helping others develop strategies to meet goals	53%	26%	27
Guiding Conversations towards effective outcomes	53%	31%	22
Building rapport and trust	53%	30%	23
Asking questions to generate insights	43%	24%	19
Holding difficult conversations successfully	40%	21%	19

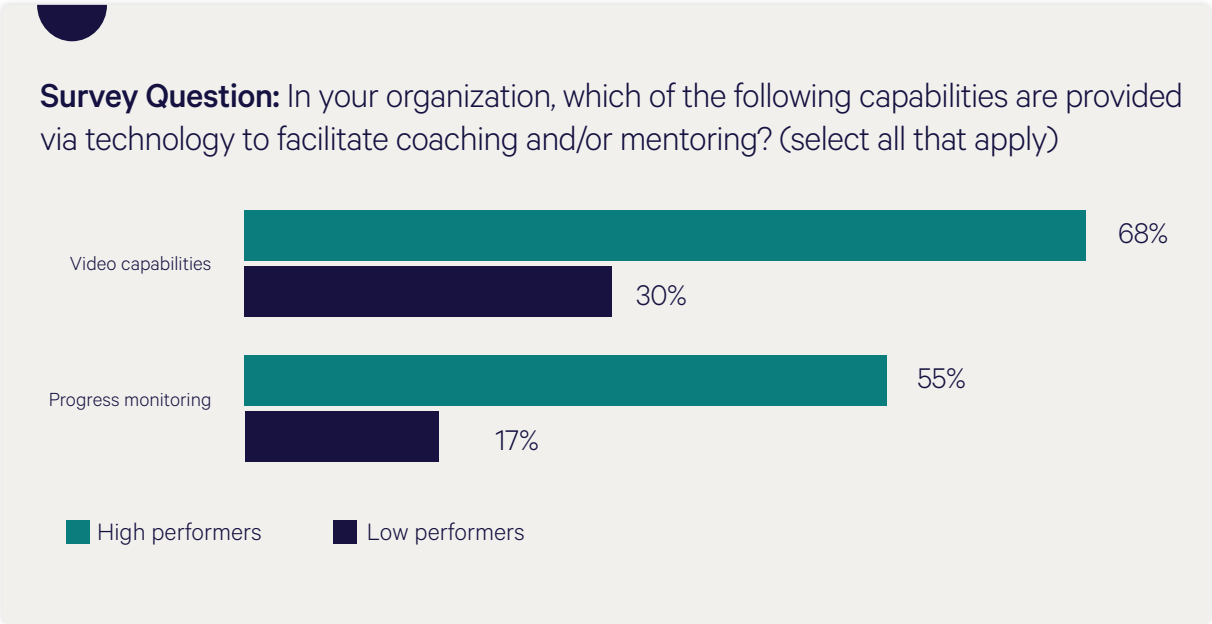
### Finding: High performers experience fewer hindrances to coaching and mentoring

We looked at potential challenges that hinder effective coaching and mentoring. For many of these challenges, high performers experienced the barrier to a lesser extent. Some of the greatest differences are in the figure below. For example, only 48% of the high performer group say that managers in their organization avoid difficult conversations whereas this is 66% for the low performer group.



**Finding: High performers are more likely to make use of coaching/mentoring technologies**

The use of technology to bolster coaching/mentoring efficiency is another area where high performers tend to outpace the low performers. High performers are more likely to be users in all eleven coaching/mentoring applications we included in the research. Two areas particularly stand out. High performers are more than twice as likely to use video capabilities to allow for virtual coaching and mentoring (68% vs. 30%). Similarly, high performers are far more likely than low performers to use coaching/mentoring applications to monitor progress (55% vs. 17%).



## Finding: More effective coaching and mentoring is linked to better individual and organizational performance

We expected that organizations with more capable coaches and mentors would make a bigger organizational impact. As shown in the figure below, the high performer group had a greater influence on both individual and organizational performance compared to the low performer group. For example, 53% of the high performer group strongly agreed that coaching leads to improved individual development versus 11% for the low performer group. There are similarly large differences between the high and low performers groups when it comes to impact of mentoring on individual development (46% vs. 11%).

There are also large differences when it comes to actual organizational performance. Forty-five percent of the high performer respondents strongly agree that coaching leads to improved organizational performance versus 17% for the low performing group.



# Key Takeaways

**1 Nurture the right culture.** Your coaching and mentoring cultures both shape and reflect the overall corporate culture. A successful coaching and mentoring culture tends to have these characteristics:

- the whole organization values coaching and mentoring
- managers at every level have good coaching and mentoring skills
- coaches and mentors have enough time to properly coach and mentor
- people learn from both successes and failures, building a better coaching/mentoring culture over time
- there is a desire to see every associate/employee reach their full potential

An effective coaching culture tends to start at the top. Employees promoted into leadership positions are chosen, in part, on their ability or potential to coach. In a good coaching culture, excellent coaching capabilities cascade down through the ranks of managers, ensuring that the large majority of leaders and managers have solid skills in this area.

**2 Invest in developing coaching and mentoring skills.** Our study shows that managers in many, if not most organizations, suffer from skills gaps in the area of coaching and mentoring. The ability to listen, ask questions that generate insights, and hold difficult conversations with empathy are just a few of the skills that need attention. Honing these skills requires your organization to invest in coaching and mentoring training. These skills need to be developed over time. Providing a course early in a leader's career is fine, but it is just a beginning.

**3 Ensure coaches and mentors can do their jobs in a variety of circumstances and using multiple tools.** Partly as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, more coaching and mentoring have been done using remote technologies such as video conferencing. As the pandemic recedes, organizations are moving to hybrid work arrangements, which may require managers and others to master the skills of coaching and mentoring employees in-person, via remote technologies and using a combination of these approaches.

**4 Protect your investment in external coaching.** Executive coaching is a considerable financial investment. Coaches are often paid \$200 or more per hour. Therefore, your organization should expect a reasonable return. Selecting the right coach for your current senior managers or up-and-coming high-potential leaders is not an easy task. If you decide to select an external coach, there are multiple factors to consider. Dr. Debbie Hedderly, an advisory board member for this research and a highly experienced coach herself, identifies some of these factors, including the background of coaches, their track record, the nature of the assignment, and desired outcomes. Industry experience, references, and accreditation from an association such as the International Coaching Federation also come into play. There are two other factors that we think trump all others. First, how do the personalities, styles and values of the coach and the potential coachee match up? Second, what is the receptivity of the employee to an outside coach and their willingness to learn from that coach?

**5 Elevate your coaching/mentoring initiatives with technologies.** Over the past decade, the use of coaching/mentoring-related solutions has risen. Such solutions have the potential to reduce the cost of coaching, reach larger portions of your employee base, and to improve coaching skills. Most executive coaching certification organizations have moved their offering to virtual platforms. There are also a host of coaching/mentoring platforms that help facilitate aspects of the coaching process such as handling scheduling, tracking progress, setting goals, matching coaches and mentors to coachees and mentees, and making developmental recommendations based on needs. Some technologies combine multiple coaching functions into a single platform, sometimes with the help of artificial intelligence capabilities.

**6 Focus coaching and mentoring on elevating performance.** Although an organization may use coaching to help address an issue related to an employee's poor performance, we believe that the goal of either coaching or mentoring must be to focus on building existing strengths. That is, these development approaches should be used to help employees realize their fullest potential and to prepare them for success in a new assignment, job, or longer-term career. Great coaching conversations are often 80% listening and 20% telling, not the other way around. Employees should leave a coaching/mentoring discussion with new insights, enhanced self-confidence, and higher levels of job engagement.

**7 Use coaching and mentoring to fuel successful change.** Working life has changed drastically over the past two years for many employees. To ensure anxiety and stress are kept low, consider using coaches and mentors to assist with managing organizational changes. Roles may be shifting in an organization and may require new skills. The frequency of effective coaching and mentoring during periods of intense change will go a long way to ensuring successful outcomes.



**8 Expand your internal coaching and mentoring networks.** Identify excellent people who have an interest in coaching and mentoring assignments. Then make sure they have the proper training and experiences to become good coaches and mentors. Carefully match them up with potential coachees or mentees who are eager for the experience. Some companies match new employees with a “buddy” as part of their onboarding process. Another idea is to provide opportunities for coaches and mentors to meet potential coachees and mentees so relationships can form more naturally. The best techniques for matching coaches and coachees may vary by need and corporate culture.

**9 Consider less traditional coaching practices.** For example, the concept of “reverse coaching” has begun to take hold wherein a lower-level employee with special skills coaches a more senior person. Informal peer coaching, wherein peers at the same level of the organization coach one another, has become more popular over the last decade. Another idea is group coaching, in which coaches work with individuals in groups. Similarly, team coaching is when one or more coaches works with a team to establish their collective mission, vision, strategy, and more.



# About Together

Together empowers organizations to accelerate their employee learning and development through mentoring programs. With 1-on-1, peer, and group mentoring, we enable organizations to level up their employee development initiatives.

Organizations leverage mentorship programs to:

- Support [diversity, equity, inclusivity, and belonging initiatives](#)
- Prepare [high potential employees](#) to take on leadership roles
- Build communities of well-trained and [experienced managers](#)
- Set up new hires for success with [buddy programs](#)
- Build meaningful connections between your [remote employees](#)

HR and L&D teams love Together because our platform offers the best user experience for employees. They don't need to learn or download a new tool because our web-based platform integrates with existing email and calendar systems to make it as easy as possible to build meaningful mentoring relationships.

Each program is fully customizable, allowing administrators to white label their program with a custom URL and branding. Together's platform includes session agendas and resources that provide employees with cues and steps to support mentors and mentees at each stage of their development. In addition, Together's dedicated Support Team provides guidance every step of the way.

## Some of our customers include



Want to see how we can help you  
bring your mentorship program to life?

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