

# David Clutterbuck, Mentoring and Coaching:

A Commentary

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## INTRODUCTION

Consider the following quotation, attributed to Frederick Buechner: “Vocation is where your deepest passion meets the world’s greatest need.” What strikes me the most when I reflect on the work of David Clutterbuck so thoughtfully reviewed by Simon Jenkins is David’s passion for mentoring. David is not only highly influential as a thought leader in mentoring and prolific as an author, but also possesses a deep expertise in implementing his ideas as a consultant. Indeed, the world needs mentoring, not only to develop leaders in for-profit organizations, but also to address society’s greatest challenges. It is my great pleasure to write a commentary on David Clutterbuck’s contributions to mentoring as his work has served as a source of inspiration for me over many years.

In this commentary, I will provide a reflection on several of David’s ideas about trends in mentoring. I am hopeful my questions and thoughts inspired by these trends will inspire others to engage in further dialogue.

## CAN WE ALL GET ALONG?

This question was famously posed by Rodney King in response to the 1992 Los Angeles riots that were incited as a result of racial injustice.<sup>1</sup> The question, “Can we all get along?” and the occurrence of the LA riots invited me into the practice of mentoring. This question echoed for me again as I reflected upon several of the trends identified in Clutterbuck’s body of work. In response to the riots, in 1993 *The Los Angeles Times* created a summer jobs training program for high potential, at-risk urban youth. As a doctoral student, I was asked to provide advice regarding setting up a mentoring program and specifically address whether

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<sup>1</sup> King’s excessive beating by Los Angeles police officers was unofficially video-taped. Rodney King was African-American and the police officers were White. The tape was widely disseminated and became a flashpoint for the simmering racial tensions in Los Angeles. In March 1993, the responsible police officers were judged in court to be “not guilty” of using excessive force on Rodney King. This perceived lack of justice amidst the police and judicial system led to an outcry of public sentiment and the eruption of widespread riots in Los Angeles. Approximately 50 people died and several thousand people were injured as a result of the March 1992 Los Angeles riots. It is important to note that King’s quotation is often misquoted as “Can’t we all just get along?” In fact, “can we all get along?” is the correct quotation.

race mattered in pairing high-school student protégés with their professional mentors at *The Los Angeles Times*. More specifically, I was asked to research and recommend whether student protégés should be paired with same or different race mentors. This research resulted in one of my earliest academic publications [1] and more importantly enabled me to discover my own calling to learn about mentoring that continues to this day.

The question, can we all get along? resonated for me again when I reflected upon the following trends identified by Clutterbuck in Jenkins' article which I have paraphrased below:

- (2) To retain high potential employees, it will become increasingly necessary to provide both coaching and mentoring.
- (9) The education and accreditation of mentoring program coordinators will become increasingly necessary.
- (16) The professionalization of mentoring, such as a mentoring academy, for those who wish to practice as mentors will be more important.
- (17) The accreditation of mentoring programs will continue to evolve. It is important to note that Clutterbuck has served as the advisory chair for the International Standards for Mentoring Programmes in Employment (p. 148-150).

As I reflect on the importance of both mentoring and coaching to a professional's development, I wonder why can't scholars and practitioners in mentoring and coaching get along? In other words, there have been volumes written about both mentoring and coaching and there is general agreement that these functions are both similar and quite different from one another. Yet, I believe there is much to be gained if there were greater collaboration between experts in these two areas where the similarities and synergies could be explored. For example, there is a great deal to be learned from the professionalization of coaching that could apply nicely to mentoring. Coaching provides formal education through institutes, certifications, and widely accepted standards of practice. However, as a frequent consultant to U.S. organizations to develop mentoring programs, I am often struck by the lack of formal education, standards, or certifications that exist for those who mentor. It should be noted that David Clutterbuck has made significant strides towards developing these sets of standards in Europe, but we are woefully behind in the United States.

Moreover it would be beneficial for organizations to have formal, universally accepted mechanisms to share mentoring best practices and avoid duplicative efforts. I often wonder if the prevalence of bad mentoring and failed formal mentoring programs are perhaps due in part to the lack of standards for mentoring. In fact, there is a robust and growing body of research on toxic mentoring and poor mentoring practices [2, 3]. There are some basic standards and practices that everyone should agree on with mentoring, particularly with regard to youth. Sadly, consider the recent cases of the Boy Scouts of America that failed to implement basic screening and standards for pedophiles who served as scout masters and preyed upon the youth they were supposed to be mentoring. Indeed, much organizational trauma and private unhappiness for individuals could be avoided with better education, accreditations, and standards of mentoring practices. Executive coaches gain cachet with adherence to certifications and standards—perhaps mentors need to do the same.

In the same sense, the question, can we get along? also resonates as we consider the lack of collaboration among experts in mentoring from different fields such as business and education. I was struck by footnote one (p. 142) in Jenkins' article citing Ehrlich's literature review who noted that while Kathy Kram's work on mentoring is pervasive in the mentoring

business literature, her work on mentoring is virtually non-existent in the educational mentoring literature. Often mentoring researchers in business and education ask parallel questions and yet we do not frequently cross the divide by exploring each other's work. In fact, when I began my own work in e-mentoring at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the business literature on technology and mentoring basically did not exist. In contrast, the educational literature provided me with rich ideas and inspiration that I used to develop ideas about e-mentoring in business [4-6].

## **CONCLUSION**

There is a great deal of valuable future work to be done that can benefit individuals and organizations if we can indeed get along and work together. First, I recommend that future researchers would be well advised to review the synergies between mentoring and coaching so that unnecessary duplicative work could be avoided. Second, a set of mentoring best practices and standards could be developed and shared among formal mentoring program providers who might belong to a network of organizations. Like coaching, we need to cross the divide between academics and researchers and develop a set of best practices. Third, I recommend that an integrative review of the literature be conducted exploring the commonalities and best practices in mentoring and coaching across disciplines such as education and business. Fourth, there are many professions that have well developed mentoring approaches and standards. Sharing these across learning boundaries such as those between teaching and nursing would be highly beneficial. Finally, we need greater opportunities for disseminating best practices, approaches, standards, and synergies globally as well. Along those lines, I will end with my sincere appreciation for this opportunity to engage globally and I look forward to more opportunities to “get along” together in the future.

## **REFERENCES**

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