

To Train Christian Leaders, Compare Coaching and Classroom

George Patterson & Galen Currah

To multiply healthy churches or cell groups, educators provide coaching as well as classroom training, according to current needs. When to do either becomes apparent by comparing the two training methods as they relate to a large number of factors.

1. Physical Factors

Time Required

Coaching as Jesus and Paul did it takes time. Just as newborn babies need personal attention, coaches train new leaders of new flocks as long as they need it.

Classroom schedules, degrees and semester calendars determine times and duration of training.

Location and Seating

Coaching can take place wherever participants can face one another and interact.

Classrooms are designed for one-way communication.

Sessions and Schedules

Coaching sessions are often separated by several days, depending on travel distances, with reading and fieldwork done between sessions.

Classrooms force students to adapt their lives and schedules to fit a program's requirements.

2. General Acceptance and Enrollment

Acceptance by Theological Educators

Coaching by theological educators has limited acceptance, although it is increasing.

Classrooms accept monologues as the norm for teaching.

Enrollment

Coaches train potential leaders who meet biblical qualifications for 'elders', offering pastoral training to anyone whom God has given the pastoral gift.

Classrooms enroll single youths that meet academic standards but are too immature to meet a biblical requisite for shepherding elders. They lack the respect of mature heads of families.

Size of Group

Coaches keep their groups small enough to listen and respond to each trainee.

Classroom teachers normally seek the largest possible attendance.

3. Relationships

Relationships between Instructor and Student

Coaches normally show loving care; Paul shed tears for new leaders in training.

Classroom instructors' main concern is how well students grasp the subject.

Relationships between Students

Coaching encourages interaction between trainees; students work and travel together.

Classrooms allow interaction only for occasional questions and to keep order.

Relationships with Churches

Coaches train leaders as an integral part of normal church life.

Classroom teaching is often isolated from the rest of the Body of Christ.

Relationships with the Larger Community and Society in General

Coaches keep trainees in touch with events that affect their work, and deal at once with them.

Classrooms in an institution tend to shield students from outside influences.

Trainer's View of Trainees

Coaches view learners as active workers, kept busy shepherding and serving.

Classrooms give more attention to scholarship.

Formality

Coaching can be informal or formal, and as firmly structured as any academic course. Coaching immediately applies what one learns, which requires stronger discipline than the classroom.

Classroom formality has a fixed approach to training that emphasizes cognitive content and standard examinations.

Organizing

Coaching requires participants to serve in harmony as a team, mainly with churches.

Classroom education takes place in departments and specializes, isolating gift-based ministries.

Churches' Part in Developing Curriculum and Training

Coaching lets churches be the training arena; curriculum is integrated with dynamic church life.

Classroom training in seminaries or Bible Institutes usually requires only perfunctory participation with churches.

Teamwork

Coaching. Trainers view team ministry as the New Testament norm.

Classroom instructors seldom teach as a team, and seldom require teamwork by students.

4. Recognition of Student's Work

Acknowledging Achievement

Coaches recognize pastoral achievement; learning is evaluated by results in ministry.

Classroom instructors praise students who do well on tests and acknowledge good grades with diplomas, degrees, certificates or public honors.

Motivation

Coaches help trainees yearn to serve Jesus and His Church, obeying Him lovingly (John 14:15).

Classrooms spawn competition for top grades and honors. Unfortunately, competition leads to rivalry, which Scripture lists along with murder, drunkenness and adultery!

Professional Recognition

Coaches value results rather than formal credentials.

Classrooms lead to paid positions and offer widely accepted credentials.

5. Objectives, Commitments and Responsibility for Training Leaders

Vision

Coaches aim for the results the apostles had; where they mentored leaders, churches multiplied.

Classroom educators aim for academic excellence and increased enrollment.

Students' Commitment

Coaches' trainees commit to a shepherding ministry from the outset of their training.

Classroom students commit to completing units of study or degree programs.

Teacher's Commitment

Coaches listen to learn what a student is doing with his church or ministry, to detect current needs and opportunities, and train accordingly, advising, assigning reading and modeling skills.

Classroom teachers are more concerned with students' grasp of specific material.

Who Benefits

Coaches help inexperienced leaders begin or expand ministry.

Classrooms serve those who seek mastery of vast amounts of systematic knowledge.

Doctrinal Integrity

Coaching is common in *movements* growing out of evangelism, fervent faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit's power and devotion to the Word of God. Their only common false doctrine is new believers' legalism; grasping God's grace requires maturity and knowledge of His Word.

Classrooms in institutions have, historically, bred the most destructive false doctrines.

Leadership Expected of Trainees

Coaches evaluate leadership from a church's view, and consider trainees to be leading only when they get folk to do edifying activities — not simply teaching.

Classrooms confuse leading with teaching; as a result, few church members become active.

Multiplication of Churches, Cells and the Mentoring Process Itself

Coaches train in a way that trainees can imitate and pass on at once, training others who train still others.

Classrooms rarely relate instruction to church multiplication; the result is *sterile* churches.

Adaptation to Political and Economic Conditions

Coaching. A third of the world's people have little or no access to institutional pastoral training and pastors must be mentored in secret.

Classrooms often require 1) affluence to afford campuses, salaries and tuition, 2) enough prior education to handle intensive courses, and 3) flocks that can afford professionally trained clergy.

Source of Income

Coaches normally do not seek income from coaching, but see it as a pastoral duty.

Classroom instructors often view teaching as the main duty of a salaried Christian leader.

Primary Responsibility for Training New Pastors

Coaches urge shepherding elders to take the responsibility to train new leaders.

Classroom faculty assumes primary responsibility for training Christian leaders.

6. Teaching Methods and Equipment

Criteria for Using Technology

Coaches model skills that others imitate and pass on, using only equipment available to trainees.

Classroom instructors seek the latest technology that budgets allow.

Teaching Style

Coaches model pastoral skills and character on the job, interacting with students as they mature.

Classrooms prefer lecture, seldom encouraging extensive interaction.

Teaching Procedures

Coaches model skills and enable discussion that includes these actions:

Pray for guidance and power to carry out plans.

Listen to each student report on fieldwork and people's needs.

Plan what students or churches will do in the next week or two.

Review studies done.

Assign new studies. Normally these correspond to a student's plans.

Classroom instruction follows research and subject mastery, lesson objectives and organizing material. It seldom aims to help students pass it on immediately to others.

Preparation of Teaching Content

Coaches' main preparation often takes place *after* listening to a student's report, to deal with current needs of a student's church, or ministry opportunities.

Classroom. Instructors prepare class material and outlines beforehand.

7. Applying Teaching Content and Order of Presentation

Application of What Is Taught

Coaches expect immediate application to a new leader's life, family, society or flock.

Classrooms expect application but not immediately.

Curriculum Taxonomy and Order in which Items Are Taught

Coaches integrate teaching content with church, community or family *activities*, teaching truths as the need arises. Coaches list truths under action verbs, balancing action and abstraction.

Classrooms list truths logically under titles with static nouns, clustering similar concepts.

Scope of Focus

Coaches integrate different disciplines to develop persons, projects or church bodies.

Classrooms focus on a specific area, well-defined in analytical terms, at any specific time.

Holistic Ministry

Coaches relate education to a variety of current field ministries.

Classrooms tend to focus on one area of cognitive truth at a time.

Method of Selecting Content

Coaches let trainees choose instruction from diverse sources, as needs require.

Classrooms follow rigid, linear curriculum outlines that leave little room to flex

8. Materials and Sources

Use of Materials

Coaches use any relevant material, and let new leaders select options that edify their people at their current stage of development.

Classroom assignments follow textbooks written specifically for the subject, limiting options.

Authority and Foundations

Coaching builds on the foundation of obedience to Jesus above all else. He tells His followers in Matthew 28:18-20 to make disciples *by teaching them to obey His commands*.

Classrooms often consider the foundation of theological education to be knowledge of the written Word, expressed in propositions.

Use of Scripture

Coaches view the Bible, especially the New Testament, as God's manual to evangelize, organize, conduct worship, relate to other congregations, train leaders and deploy missionaries.

Classrooms employ the Bible mainly as a source of content for teaching.