



“promoting excellence & ethics in coaching”

ASSOCIATION FOR COACHING

Coaching Supervision Information Sheet

Many coaches, coaching schools and coaching organisations see Supervision as an important component of an effective coaching process. Many organisations build supervision into their work and many coaches are either encouraged or required to have supervision of their coaching work. The Association for Coaching recognises the value of supervision and the following outlines a variety of issues and methods that can be used.

What is Supervision?

Supervision is a formal arrangement for coaches to discuss their work regularly with someone who is experienced in coaching and supervision. The task is to work together to ensure and develop the efficacy of the client work. The agenda for supervision is the coaching work together with the supervisor's reactions and comments. Thus supervision is a process to maintain adequate standards of coaching provision. It is also a supportive process. Supervision has sometimes been called “Super Vision” as a way of demonstrating that it is not restrictive or prescriptive but rather a process for increasing creativity.

In choosing a supervisor, coaches need to assess their position on a scale from newly qualified to very experienced taking into account their own training, philosophy and methods. The setting for coaching may be an important factor. Agencies and institutions may have their own criteria for supervision and provide supervisors from within the organisation. In many instances outside supervision is more appropriate as outlined later in this Information Sheet.

Why Supervision is desirable for the practising coach

By its very nature, coaching makes considerable demands upon coaches who may become over-involved, ignore some important point or have undermining doubts about their own abilities. It is difficult, if not sometimes impossible, to be objective about one's coaching and the opportunity to discuss the coaching work in confidence with a suitable person is invaluable. Good coaching also requires the coach to relate practice to theory and theory to practice. Supervision can help the coach to evolve practice and in this sense is one aspect of continued training.

Through the supervision process, the primary concern of the supervisor is to ensure that the coach is addressing the needs of the client as well as monitoring the relationship between the coach and client to maximise the effectiveness of the relationship. In addition, Supervision is also a way of ensuring that ethical standards are adhered to throughout the coaching process. As a secondary position although Supervision is not concerned primarily with training or line management, it is legitimate for supervisors to encourage and facilitate the ongoing self-development, continued professional development and learning and self-monitoring of the coach.

The Benefits of Supervision can therefore be summed up as follows:

Protection

- Protection of the client
- Protection for the organisation purchasing services
- Protection for the coach

Development

- Opportunity to monitor client work and develop existing/new skills in a supportive environment
- Opportunity for coach's personal development

Ethical Standards

- To ensure coaching applied ethically and effectively

Choosing a Supervisor

The less experience the coach has, the more experience the supervisor needs. Supervisors should be sufficiently experienced and qualified in coaching or in a closely related field for others to have confidence in their professional skills. The precise nature of their profession is less important than their skill in coaching and the rapport with the coach concerned. Ideally the supervisor should have some training and experience in supervision. The main focus of the coach's work should be taken into consideration.

The coach should comprehend fully the training, methods and orientation of the proposed Supervisor. Though at times a coach may prefer to get different insights and perceptions this can be confusing in supervision. As coaches work from different philosophical backgrounds, it is important at an initial interview for the coach to ascertain whether the potential supervisor is someone with whom it will be possible to work with and learn from. Since it is the responsibility of coaches to ascertain the qualifications and experience of the potential supervisor, they should enquire about this before making a formal contract.

Choosing a line manager as supervisor can lead to difficulties, since a conflict of interests may arise between the needs of the organisation (the priority of the line manager) and the needs of the coach. Many organisations will offer in-house supervision (sometimes called managerial supervision) as well as requiring coaches to engage in external supervision. If line management supervision is mandatory then ideally there should be access to other consultative support. Finally, it is essential to bear in mind that ultimately the supervisor must place responsibility for the client over and above responsibility to the coach.

The Supervision contract

It is recommended that a contract with a supervisor of the coach's choice is for a fixed period, subject to review. It may cover such practical arrangements as fees, privacy of venue, length of contact time and frequency of contact.

As a general principle, supervisors should maintain confidentiality with regard to information about the coach and clients. When the initial contract is made, however, there must be agreement about the boundaries of confidentiality with regard to the people to whom the supervisor is accountable. The lines of accountability and responsibility between coach, client, supervisor and organisation need to be very clearly defined.

Both the coach and the supervisor are also responsible for ensuring that they both adhere to whichever Code of Ethics and Practice is issued by the professional body the coach belongs to.

Forms of Supervision

One to One - Supervisor-Coach:

A single supervisor provides supervision for one other coach. Inexperienced coaches need to choose a supervisor who has been a practising coach for a number of years.

One to One - Peer Supervision:

Two participants provide supervision for each other by alternating the roles of supervisor and coach. Normally the time available for Supervision is divided equally between them.

Group Supervision with Identified Supervisor(s):

There are many ways of providing group supervision. At one end of the spectrum the supervisor, acting as leader, will take responsibility for apportioning the time between the coaches concentrating on the work of individuals in turn. At the other end of the range, the coaches allocate supervision time between themselves using the supervisor as a technical resource.

Peer Group Supervision:

Three or more coaches share the responsibility for providing each other's supervision within the group context. Normally they will consider themselves to be broadly of equal status, training or experience. Experienced coaches may at times find peer group supervision sufficient. It is not, however, recommended for trainees or newly qualified coaches. Peers may be reluctant to confront each other and may lack the wider experienced perspective considered an essential ingredient of Supervision. Where a peer group does exist, it is essential there is a clear understanding of where the final responsibility for the clients' welfare rests.

Telephone Supervision

It is not uncommon for a coach to engage in telephone supervision either as the main form of supervision or as an adjunct to a more traditional face-to-face model. Some supervisors also offer group telesupervision sessions.

Email/Postal Supervision

For those who due to location may live in isolated areas Email Supervision with the provision of taped work could prove a useful way of working. However, it would be best if this method was combined with the Telephone Supervision option mentioned above as it is unlikely that the email/postal option would be sufficient on its own.

Some coaches use a combination of these models.

Finding a suitable supervisor

It is recognised that supervisors may be difficult to find. Most professional bodies such as the Association for Coaching (AC), International Coaching Federation (ICF) and European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) are usually able to offer some assistance and may even keep a list of coaching supervisors. Each of these bodies has either a code of ethics and practice or good practice guidelines promoting supervision in one form or another.