



## **ASSOCIATION FOR COACHING**

### **COACHING SUPERVISION: ANALYSIS OF SURVEY FINDINGS**

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#### **Introduction**

This report presents the findings of an online Association for Coaching (AC) questionnaire based survey which was carried out in 2007. It went out to members of the AC who are professional coaches, coaching/training providers, and corporate coaches. The database for distribution comprised 1800 members, and 300 responded ie a response rate of 17%.

In the findings which follow, direct quotes from respondents are presented in italics, and respondents are described as Coaches. As not all Coaches answered every question, the number of respondents is given where it differs from 300.

This analysis is presented in three sections to reflect the key areas explored in the survey:

1. General views about Supervision
2. Direct experience of those in Supervision, and
3. Supervisors' views and experiences.

#### **1. General Views about Supervision**

##### **Language**

The Association for Coaching is currently using the term 'Coach Mentor/Supervisor' to define the process where coaches and mentors reflect on their practice. Almost three quarters of respondents (73%), said that this term works for them. However in their comments many suggested that this was unnecessarily cumbersome, and that the more simple 'Supervisor' or 'Coach Supervisor' would be better, with a minority suggesting 'Coach Mentor'. This point was also reflected in answers to a question about the words they currently use to describe this reflective practice, when almost all (98%) said 'Supervision', followed by 'Coach Supervision' (89%) and 'Coach Mentoring/Supervision' (87%).

For a small minority, the term Supervision has negative connotations as it "*implies a production line*", and "*control and direction*", or suggests "*someone who catches you doing the wrong thing*".



## Benefits of Coach Mentoring/Supervision

| <b>Benefits of Coach Mentoring/Supervision</b>                          | <b>Rank Order</b> |
|---|-------------------|
| <b><i>Provides a basis to learn and develop (95%)</i></b>               | <b>1st</b>        |
| <b><i>Provides a place to discuss ethical issues/concerns (93%)</i></b> | <b>2nd</b>        |
| <b><i>Offers a trusting and open relationship (78%)</i></b>             | <b>3rd</b>        |
| <b><i>Offers maintenance and sustainability of practice (76%)</i></b>   | <b>4th</b>        |
| <b><i>Offers opportunities to increase our creativity (74%)</i></b>     | <b>5th</b>        |

As can be seen above, the top two benefits of Coach Mentoring/Supervision are providing a basis for learning and development, and in having an opportunity to discuss ethical issues, and these were identified as benefits by almost all respondents. Offering a trusting and open relationship, and offering maintenance and sustainability of practice were highlighted as benefits by over three quarters of respondents. The fifth area of benefit was offering opportunities to increase creativity.

On their learning, Coaches commented that Supervision is important in providing “a *place to be challenged in a supportive way*”. It is an opportunity to discuss areas of difficulty experienced, to gain from another’s experience, and to examine intervention techniques. It enables Coaches “*to reflect on challenges and navigate improvement*”, and to “*develop increased awareness of blind spots, triggers and blockers*”.

Coaches suggested that Supervision provides protection for both clients and for themselves. For clients, this process demonstrates a commitment to high standards of practice, provided quality control, and helps ensure “*safety in practice*”. It also “*helps keep my coaching clean (so that) my own issues do not get in the way*”. For Coaches, Supervision provides emotional support, and enables them to gain a perspective such that it “*helps me see the wood from the trees*”. It also contributes to developing their identity as a coach, provides a check on coach burn-out, and helps them “*let go of being too attached to coachee issues*”.



## **Choosing a Coach Mentor/Supervisor**

Coaches were asked about the skills, competences and experience they would seek in choosing a Coach Mentor/Supervisor. The top ten areas which they consider to be important or highly important are given below.

| <b><i>Top Ten Coach Mentor/Supervisor Competences</i></b>                              |            |
|--|------------|
| <b><i>Ability to support and challenge</i></b>   | <b>99%</b> |
| <b><i>Upholds the ethical standards of the membership organisation</i></b>             | <b>89%</b> |
| <b><i>Awareness of the importance of developing use of self as a resource</i></b>      | <b>87%</b> |
| <b><i>Willing to offer new models/ideas in line with my devt needs</i></b>             | <b>85%</b> |
| <b><i>A practising coach</i></b>   | <b>84%</b> |
| <b><i>Someone who takes a holistic approach (eg work and personal)</i></b>             | <b>78%</b> |
| <b><i>Knowledge of a range of coaching models</i></b>                                  | <b>74%</b> |
| <b><i>Membership of a professional coaching body</i></b>                               | <b>69%</b> |
| <b><i>Flexible in the way they support ie face to face/phone/ Individual/group</i></b> | <b>68%</b> |
| <b><i>Understanding of how systems and people operate within organisations</i></b>     | <b>65%</b> |

It is striking that almost all Coaches believe it is important or very important to have a Supervisor who is able to support and challenge them, and who upholds ethical standards. Also important is the Supervisor's technical expertise in coaching eg that s/he can offer new models and ideas as appropriate to development needs, is a practising coaching, knows about a range of coaching models, and is a member of a professional coaching body. Supervisor flexibility is valued eg utilising a holistic approach which includes both work and personal issues when appropriate; and also practical flexibility eg so that a range of communication methods could be considered including face to face discussions, telephone, group.

In their comments, many Coaches indicated that a Supervisor should have undertaken professional training for their Supervision role, and some suggest there should be "*supervision for the supervisors*". An array of interpersonal skills were identified by Coaches as being desirable in their Supervisors. They include having emotional intelligence, being effective at building rapport, listening well, being approachable and self aware, and having "*empathy, friendliness and great learning experiences*". Supervisors should themselves have a strong desire to learn and develop, and be "*willing to share growth benchmarks and stories*". It was indicated that Supervisors should have the ability to "*give advice, and not sit on the fence*", and should be able to challenge and stretch the individual, using "*strong feedback skills and honesty*" to ensure that formative feedback is realistic and adds value. A sense of humour is also important so that the Supervisor is "*human and professional at the same time*". In summary a Supervisor should be able to "*connect, and push the learning zone*".



## **Supervisor Qualities**

Just over two thirds of respondents answered the question about the essential qualities for a Supervisor. Their responses were as follows:

### ***Supervisor Qualities (T = 213)***

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b><i>Is professionally and personally mature</i></b>                | <b>93%</b> |
| <b><i>Encourages the exploration of new ideas and Techniques</i></b> | <b>92%</b> |
| <b><i>Maintains consistent and appropriate boundaries</i></b>        | <b>77%</b> |
| <b><i>Accepts and celebrates difference</i></b>                      | <b>73%</b> |
| <b><i>Clarifies the style and expectations of supervision</i></b>    | <b>66%</b> |

As can be seen above, a Supervisor's professional and personal maturity, and their openness to exploring new ideas and techniques, and accepting and celebrating difference were mentioned by a large majority. Their technical expertise in Supervision is also important eg maintaining consistent and appropriate boundaries and clarifying the style and expectations of supervision.

Comments on this topic very much echoe the qualities identified above in the section on Choosing a Coach Mentor/Supervisor. Respondents again emphasised the importance of Supervisors' communication skills and self insight. They should be able to challenge and support effectively and have *"the ability to maintain a secure helping relationship which supports growth and development"*. Respondents emphasised the ethical component indicating that Supervisors should have high personal integrity, and suggest that a Supervisor *"guides in line with professional standards and provides a sounding board for any problems you encounter"*. The experience of a Supervisor was also important, as *"ideally (s/he) must have more experience, wisdom, insight and knowledge than me"*. A Supervisor's perceptiveness is relevant so that s/he engages in *"acute noticing of my thinking that is causing my behaviour"*. In general a Supervisor is someone *"who is there for me"*.

## **Importance of Coach Mentoring/Supervision**

Four fifths of survey respondents agreed that Coach Mentoring/Supervision is vital for ethical practice. As to whether this process should be compulsory for being a professional coach, over half (60%) said that it should.

## **Barriers to Supervision**

It is interesting that when respondents were asked what stops them from having a Supervisor less than a third of respondents answered this question.



**What stops you from having a Supervisor? (T = 87)**

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>Not yet found a supervisor to work with</b> | <b>39%</b> |
| <b>The cost</b>                                | <b>32%</b> |
| <b>Don't know who I can ask</b>                | <b>17%</b> |

As can be seen above finding the right Supervisor and the cost are identified as key barriers.

In their comments on this topic, respondents made a range of points. Many Coaches highlighted that they currently gain insights and learning from a wide range of sources other than a Coach Supervisor and these include their network of contacts *"to support one another and share ideas"*, other peers providing *"informal arrangements with contacts"*, co-coaching opportunities within the AC and outwith it, workshops, conferences. Thus to some extent it seems, the support and learning needs for coaching supervision may be being met for many, by means other than supervision.

For some there were practical issues eg being in the early stages of their coaching involvement or having a limited coaching clientele, and thus *"not spending enough hours on coaching to warrant or afford it"*. A few were unsure how to find themselves an appropriate Supervisor and *"would like a recommendation"*. Also mentioned was whether having a Supervisor might negatively affect the client's perception of their Coach - as one person commented *"(I've) not thought through how to present the fact of Supervision to a Coachee without calling into question my own capability"*. For another respondent, Supervision as a topic simply *"(Has) never come up"*.

### **Supervision in the Future**

As with the previous topic, less than one third of respondents answered the question of whether they would consider supervision in the future. Of those who answered, all said they would consider it. When asked about the circumstances under which they would do this, the points which emerged linked to the barriers to supervision mentioned above, namely the need to have a larger client base than currently for Supervision to be appropriate and justifiable; the challenge of finding the right Supervisor with the right skills at the right fee; and *"if it became mandatory for AC Membership"*.

A few respondents require to be persuaded of the benefits both to themselves, and to their clients. It was suggested that Supervision *"needs to be publicly recognised and provide improved status for the coach"*. The time for involvement in Supervision was said to be right *"when it becomes the norm"*.

## **2. Direct Experience of Supervision**

### **Involvement**



Almost all respondents (91%) said they regard the person currently providing them with developmental guidance as a Coach Mentor/Supervisor. As to Coaching Supervision specifically, over two thirds of respondents in this survey (71%) currently have supervision arrangements.

### **Frequency of development discussions**

When asked about frequency of development discussions the most frequently mentioned model was monthly, followed by bi-monthly, and quarterly as follows:

| <b><i>Frequency of Development Discussions (T = 210)</i></b> |     |
|--|-----|
| Monthly  | 47% |
| Bi Monthly   | 27% |
| Quarterly  | 13% |

### **Duration of development discussions and relationship**

With regard to the duration of development discussions, two thirds of respondents replied. The most often mentioned approach, which was highlighted by half the respondents, was a meeting of 1-2 hours. For over one third (39%) meetings of 30 minutes to one hour were indicated.

When asked how long respondents have been working with their Coach Mentor/Supervisor the shortest duration was 2 months and the longest over 10 years, with a wide range of responses between these.

### **Choice of this Supervisor**

| <b><i>Reasons for Supervisor Choice</i></b>   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b><i>To receive honest feedback both about my strengths and my areas of growth</i></b> | <b>74%</b> |
| <b><i>Qualifications and experience as a coach</i></b>                                  | <b>62%</b> |
| <b><i>Is a member of a professional body</i></b>  | <b>41%</b> |
| <b><i>Has experience of supervision within an organisational context</i></b>            | <b>41%</b> |

As can be seen above, almost three quarters of respondents indicated they chose their Supervisor because of their wish to receive honest feedback both about strengths and areas of growth. Almost two thirds said it was because of the Supervisor's qualifications and experience as a coach. A Supervisor's membership of a professional body was important to almost half, with a similar number valuing their experience of supervision within an organisational context.



Respondents frequently commented that key factors in their choice was that they trusted and respected their Supervisor. Many valued the Supervisor's background and experience, and some had deliberately chosen someone with "a different orientation" as a means of ensuring "challenge and stretch". To several respondents, having undertaken Supervisor training was an important element in the choice, and for some their Supervisor had been recommended by another colleague.

### **3. Supervisors' Views and Experiences**

Just over two thirds of respondents (213) answered the question about whether they practice as a Coach/Mentor Supervisor.

Of these, over half (55%) are currently Coach/Mentor Supervisors. When asked which tools, models or frameworks they currently in use with their clients, a very wide variety was mentioned. Many respondents emphasised that the model used varied, and depended on the needs of the particular client. The most frequently mentioned model was the 7 Eye Model of Supervision, then GROW/TGROW and NLP, followed by Cognitive Behavioural Coaching. Others included Gestalt, Appreciative Enquiry, Oasis 7 Stage Model of Human Relationships, Egan's Skilled Helper, Pharos Model.

As to the format or structure of their sessions, respondents were clear that this depends on the needs of their Coaches, and that at the outset of a session they contract about how to use the time. They indicated that sessions could be one to one, group or peer, and that meetings could be face to face or by telephone. The duration of meetings varied from 1 to 2 hours and could be longer eg up to 3 hours for Group Supervision. They mentioned that Coaches sometimes bring case studies to Supervision, or the focus could be on "something that's bothering them". A typical structure was described as follows:

*"Listen to client, prioritise subjects of discussion, allow flexibility in train, keep track of main goal as initially stated, allow meanderings but also come back to main stream, change tack depending on emotional response to certain subjects, use pen and paper, invite them to make notes or reflect on subjects, share models or techniques for them to use, end the session on a positive pragmatic note, check that the client leaves in a good state of mind".*

### **Conclusion**

This analysis of the AC survey on Coach Mentoring/Supervision has produced interesting data which could contribute effectively to the current topical debate about Coaching Supervision. In my view the next stage would be to work on the key themes in this analysis, provide an informed context for them, and to develop this as the subject of one or more journal article(s) for publication.

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