

Supervision or Peer Consultation: an op-ed blog

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In the last few years there have been increasing opinions expressed about the need (or not) for *supervision of coaches*. From what I see, much of this seems to have emerged from European (the European Mentoring and Coaching Council - EMCC, the Association for Coaching - AC) and Australian coaching associations. The International Coach Federation (ICF), in an attempt to be globally sensitive, seems to have fallen for a false expression of this need for supervision and is considering incorporating coach supervision as highly suggested (but not required) for both new and experienced coaches.

While this is not a problem if *it is not required*, it may set a confusing and misguided precedent in the coaching industry or certification of professional coaches. In my career as a psychologist (a term that cannot be used in the USA unless you have a doctorate AND are licensed in your state locale) we were required to be supervised. Due to the fact that our 2000 required postdoctoral counseling hours were either in a mental health center or contracted with a therapist group, we were treating those with diagnosed mental disturbance (the medical model). Psychologists were required to have 2000 hours of supervision before sitting for the state licensing exam. The supervision included case review and guidance, and often a ‘behind the mirror’ observation of the therapy session with a team watching behind a one-way mirror with the patient/client knowledge.

Coaches do not require supervision in an unlicensed profession, but peer consultation is highly suggested and encouraged all along the way.

This is for professional development, self-reflection of the coaching process, challenges that arise, and concerns with the case, or even concerns with the coach’s state of mind or engagement.

I think supervision without doubt is the wrong term and creates a view that coaches need supervising or else coaching may be harmful, or unhelpful, or unproductive. In my opinion, the insinuation contained in the word supervision is the problem. We early members of the ICF and trainers of coaches have long fought for a clear boundary between psychotherapy and coaching, and this muddies those waters. Coaching is not a treatment oriented profession, and in fact, prides itself on trusting that the client is “creative, competent, and resourceful” in other words, we bring forth new wisdom and thoughts and actions for the clients we coach, but we do not fix, treat, or advise them on their course of action in life or business.

It seems like EMCC and Australian coaching associations are favoring "supervision" and the ICF, in trying to be globally sensitive jumped on board. In my 25 years as a coach, I have always sought consultation and/or coaching with a peer or another coach for my case management, practice management, skill acquisition, and self-reflection on my coaching. I came to call that *mentor coaching* as did the ICF until March 25, 2010 when they defined "for purposes of Credentialing, mentor coaching means an applicant being coached on their coaching skills, rather than coaching on practice building, life balance, or other topics unrelated to the development of an applicant's coaching skill."

In 2012 the ICF included coaching supervision in the definition by stating that:
"Mentor coaching is coaching for the development of one's coaching, rather than reflective practice, coaching for personal development or coaching for business development, although those aspects may happen very incidentally in the coaching for development of one's coaching. Having a clear definition of coaching supervision is important to help differentiate coach supervision from Mentor Coaching as defined by the ICF."

I believe that what is being called supervision is traditionally one of the duties of a fully engaged mentor coach. But the prevailing winds seem to want a distinction. My strong suggestion is to avoid the word supervision and simply and elegantly call it *peer consultation* with an experienced colleague. This is good for the practice, for the coach, for ethical concerns, and for improvement of coaching proficiency and for specific client service.

The idea of suggesting *peer consultation* with another coach is a good ethical principle, but supervision is the wrong term and the wrong implication.

This whole idea of supervision is misguided. Who supervises the supervisors? Is this just another monetized certification? I train all coaches and myself to "consult" with trusted well trained and experienced colleagues regarding their clients and themselves. I suggest we call this process Coaching Consultation and then require 20 hours or so as part of continuing education. That's more valuable than hours given at a conference for poor breakout sessions, in my opinion as a coach and coach educator for 25 years.

What's interesting to me is that ALL the things listed in the definition of professional supervision were things I handled with my mentor coaches years ago...and continue today with colleagues that I've known for 25 years in the profession.

I will make one caveat to my position stated herein. I am an associate for a couple of organizations who hire me as a "coach for service" under their company, and in that case, I have no problem with them supervising my work product. Its mostly a review of progress, contracted agreements, and asking if there are any challenges or other services needed....more of quality control than supervision. That is a proper use of supervision when one is under the employment

of another, but anything else in private practice would be satisfied with calling it peer consultation.

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