

Supervision and Mentoring: A Distinction that is Arbitrary and Contrary?

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I agree with Dr. Patrick Williams, MCC, that the use of the words Supervision and Mentoring feel arbitrary and contrary to what we have been doing as ICF credentialed coaches/coach trainers as well as compared to the broader definitions out in the worlds we work in.

Mentoring in both the coaching and leadership worlds has always been about a more experienced professional guiding someone new to a field or aspect of business. Mentoring can be about helping people master particular skills. It is also about exploring context where the skills are applied. To narrow the focus to only skill building feels awkward. When I hired a mentor coach for my own career, the person helped me with all aspects of my business and growth as a coach.

Supervision in the helping professions has always been about overseeing skill application and is narrowly defined through observing the demonstration of skills and providing feedback. Using the word supervision in coaching blurs the distinction coaching has with therapy. Using the term to broadly signify guiding a coach in a professional context is confusing. I agree with Patrick that Coaching Consultation would be a better name for this role.

THE BIGGER QUESTION HERE is why were the elders of the ICF membership not consulted in this change? Since we have been using the term Mentor Coaching for years in a different context than the ICF is proposing, it seems like simple Change Management procedures, that you include the early adapters in any change initiative or you get resistance. I would have responded to a survey about the use of the words Mentoring and Supervision if asked (and what else these could be called so they make more sense), as I am sure my colleagues would have as well.

I think it is time to have a bigger conversation about this before decisions are made and requirements put into place.