

# Chapter Five

## SUPER-VISION

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Here we will look at what *super-vision* is, its importance to the continuing development of the coach and how this practice helps to bring an individual, relational, cultural and universal awareness to your coaching.

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When a client places trust in the coaching relationship, the eyes and vision of the coach can essentially be shared. As we have already explored, the intention of the coach is always to expand awareness and vision – to cultivate *super-vision*. In extending the field of vision, the coach provides the same prospect and possibility for the client.

• WHAT IS SUPERVISION? •

Linguistically, supervision can be a confusing word. A supervisor may at one level be seen as someone who knows best and takes charge of a supervisee. Supervision is also a modern professional practice, operating in multiple professions, whose single goal is to help the practitioner to step back and reflect on their practice in order to return with greater awareness and considered and informed interventions that may best serve their clients. This provides the practitioner with an opportunity to question: What am I learning? What might I be missing? How can I serve my client better? Where can I grow?

• COACHING THE COACH •

The supervisory relationship is a mirror of that of the coach and client. In supervision, the coach steps into the role of the client to consider how the client may be better served through the coaching relationship. In essence the supervisor is the coach of the coach, and the resulting practice is coaching supervision. As the coach is able to help the client to extend their vision, the coach requires a further coach to continue the expansion of their own.

• APPRENTICESHIP •

Supervision is an apprenticeship where the coach literally learns through practice. It may be somewhat of a revelation to realise that in the journey of discovering mastery the coach is invited repeatedly to step into the role of the client and to develop and refine practice.

**The aspiration to become an exceptional coach mirrors an openness to be coached – one necessitates the other**

The coach–supervisor relationship mirrors that of the coach–client, and both share the goal of helping the clients in question – to extend how they see, sense, relate and resolve.

## • CHOOSING A SUPERVISOR •

Since this is an essential relationship to your work and developing practice, your choice of supervisor is very important. Choose carefully. Supervision can be a challenging and supportive environment of continual exploration and learning. You therefore need to choose someone you respect and with whom you can develop a very trusting relationship. I stress the importance of this choice because this is your main learning environment and where you can be supported in how to extend your practice.

### PRACTICALITIES

There are no set guidelines for supervision. The time dedicated to supervision will depend on the size of your coaching practice. Normally the coaches I supervise dedicate a minimum of three hours per month to supervision. I also personally appreciate being able to make contact with my supervisor if and when something urgent arises. A dedicated and agreed time slot, and the possibility of access to your supervisor in between times if and when necessary, is the ideal situation.

### INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP

You can choose individual or group supervision, or both. Obviously individual supervision involves you working one to one with a supervisor, while in the group setting several coaches work together with a single supervisor. The choice depends on

you and the stage of your journey and practice. Supervision helps to build your confidence to practise and, for the new coach, one to one may initially be preferable. In group supervision, the learning experience amplifies and may be of particular value to the more experienced coach. Both are important options at all times, irrespective of your level of experience.

### • THE GOAL OF SUPERVISION •

Supervision is a relationship through which the coach can continue to learn and extend their practice: as vision expands, so does your capacity to relate and help to resolve. Once more supervision mirrors coaching practice in its multidimensional approach, developing different dimensions of awareness. These include:

#### *Self-awareness – how you experience things*

- Understanding your own psychological process and inner experiences.

#### *Relational awareness – your awareness of others*

- Your ability to sense where others may be.
- Your capacity to discern your psychological process from those of your clients.
- Understanding your client's psychological process and needs relative to your own.
- Your ability to empathically relate.

#### *Cultural awareness*

- How the collective experience of culture can influence and impact on your client.

*Universal awareness*

- Becoming aware of the larger energy field in which we participate as a context to make meaning that parallels the realisation of original self.

Although we can differentiate our field and scope of awareness in this way, these dimensions are intimately associated in practice.

• SUPERVISION IN PRACTICE •

Rather than describing supervision from the outside looking in, let me share another recent example of coaching supervision to illustrate its value and application, mindful of the different levels of awareness that allow the coach to see, sense and relate.

Cheryl is a practising coach of two years. Here is an extract from our conversation in supervision. Her client, Ivan, is a senior businessman who has entered coaching for the first time and is exploring the prospect of stepping up to the next level of leadership. He has entered into a coaching relationship to help him to achieve this prospect.

*First I check in with my client to see how she is today and if there are any major needs.*

Supervisor: So how are you? Check in with me.

Cheryl: *(Pause)* Doing well, I think. My practice is growing slowly *(pause)*. I'm enjoying coaching but sometimes I feel a little out of my depth.

Supervisor: Tell me more.

Cheryl: I am working with a senior client – a successful businessman – and something is getting in the

way of the work. I'm not sure what. I just feel uncomfortable, somehow.

Supervisor: Can you share a scene from your work when you feel something is getting in the way?

Cheryl: Sure (*pause*). It's when I meet with him that it begins. I walk into the office and say 'Hello' to Ivan and immediately I begin to feel anxious. It takes me a good while before I can settle into the coaching.

Supervisor: Share a little more? Help me to understand.

Cheryl: Well, when I meet Ivan I suddenly become anxious and quite nervous. I lose my professional edge and become a bit girly.

Supervisor: What's going on inside?

Cheryl: I'm anxious and feel scared – off centre – and it's hard for me to settle for some time. It takes me a while to feel as though I'm able to coach. Something gets in the way.

Supervisor: So you walk in, feel anxious and scared and something gets in the way of your ability to coach. Do you feel you lose something?

Cheryl: Yes (*pause*), my power to coach.

Supervisor: That's good awareness. Tell me something of your inner conversation with yourself.

Cheryl: (*Smiles, long pause*) The voice in my head says that Ivan is a powerful businessman and I'm just a little coach. It says judgementally and quite cynically 'What makes you think that you can help?' I crumble a little and become shy and awkward – somehow younger.

*I am pleased that Cheryl is willing to be authentic about her own psychological process here.*

Supervisor: What do you realise in speaking this?

Cheryl: I've got it wrong somehow.

*Note how Cheryl has immediately personalised this awareness, believing that she has done something wrong. Listening to the judging voice, she has become self-judging. I want to see if Cheryl can look beyond the analytical eye to see how this awareness may also be relevant to her coaching practice*

Supervisor: No Cheryl, you haven't. There's nothing wrong. You're being asked or invited to deepen your awareness in order to coach more successfully in this situation. How can you work with this? What might you learn from this?

Cheryl: I hadn't realised how loud this voice was in my head when I meet with Ivan – the judging voice, I can't stop it and it takes my power away.

*I want to explore if Cheryl can see if this voice of judgement may in some way serve her so that she can learn to see beyond its judgement. Is there a place of acceptance of this voice?*

Supervisor: OK, so this voice limits you. But also how does this voice serve you?

Cheryl: Mm (*pause*). I'm not sure. I didn't consider that it might.

Supervisor: Take your time.

Cheryl: (*Pause*) Well, strangely it reminds me of my commitment to coach – why I am a coach.

Supervisor: Say more?

Cheryl: Well, in saying to me ‘What makes you think that you can help?’ I do become anxious, but what it also makes me do now is to look a bit deeper into the reason why I coach.

Supervisor: Why do you coach?

Cheryl: I’m deeply interested in human nature and what makes us tick – how we get stuck and need someone else to help us realign and grow. That’s why I coach. I care deeply about this process and the people – my clients. I really do.

*I notice a shift in Cheryl’s energy in line with this new personal awareness – more powerful and agile, no longer stuck – and I wonder if Cheryl can ground the learning from this experience.*

Supervisor: How are you feeling now?

Cheryl: Strong, centred and much clearer – empowered.

Supervisor: Notice how you have moved from feeling disempowered to being empowered when you remember why you coach. What are you learning from this with regards to your work with Ivan?

Cheryl: *(Pause)* If I can remember why I coach, then I don’t lose my power.

Supervisor: Good. How will you remember?

*I am again impressed by Cheryl’s learning and want her to explore how she can make this relevant to her practice.*

Cheryl: *(Pause)* I’ll carry something in my pocket – a talisman. Something I can hold just to help me remember why I’m there.



Supervisor: How creative (*we smile*). Do you feel this has helped your own process in relation to Ivan?

Cheryl: Yes. I have made something conscious that was getting in the way before. I didn't know why, now I do. Yes it has.

*I realise that there is a larger relational awareness and context that may bring more learning for Cheryl and I decide to explore.*

Supervisor: Can we work with this a little further to look at your coaching work with Ivan?

Cheryl: Yes.

Supervisor: How might what you are learning speak to the work with Ivan?

Cheryl: I'm not sure.

Supervisor: Take your time.

Cheryl: There's something missing, if I'm honest. It's hard going – the coaching feels like hard work.

Supervisor: What do you mean by hard going?

Cheryl: Well, I seem to do most of the work in the coaching relationship.

Supervisor: Anything more?

Cheryl: I'm not sure we're getting anywhere fast.

Supervisor: Well done, Cheryl. I have a strong hunch you're right.

*My hunch is that Ivan may not be fully engaged in the coaching relationship.*

Cheryl: Really?

Supervisor: Yes. Let's summarise. You walk in – you immediately feel 'What makes you think that you can help?': something seems to be missing

- from the coaching and you experience not getting anywhere fast. What might be missing?
- Cheryl: In Ivan?
- Supervisor: How might your experience – what you feel – say something about the coaching relationship?
- Cheryl: I'm not quite getting it yet.
- Supervisor: OK. What is essential to a successful coaching relationship?
- Cheryl: Trust. The trust is missing.
- Supervisor: How do you foster trust?
- Cheryl: Setting the coaching frame in the first place.
- Supervisor: Right. Can you piece it together?
- Cheryl: (*Long pause*) Got it! Ivan might not be committed to the coaching relationship.
- Supervisor: Spot on. How do you know?
- Cheryl: My immediate feeling of 'What makes you feel that you can help?' – might he also be feeling that?
- Supervisor: Well done. So let's reflect together. You walk in and feel this way. You find it difficult to settle into coaching and something feels missing – his commitment maybe? How strong is the coaching frame? Where might you go from here?
- Cheryl: Wow. You know I've had a hunch with Ivan that the coaching has not been somehow working. I need to revisit our contract and be willing to check his commitment to the work.
- Supervisor: Good. How might that serve?
- Cheryl: (*Pause*) Maybe there is a reason why he is not committed to the work? That's what is missing.
- Supervisor: Very good. What intervention might you make to check this out?

*I am continuing to ground her learning to make it relevant to her practice.*

Cheryl: I'll speak to him about his commitment and how the coaching is progressing or not, and what we might need to put in place or decide to do.

Supervisor: When will you commit to do this, Cheryl?

Cheryl: Next session – this month.

Supervisor: Good. Well done – you have an important intervention and learning to check out that has emerged today.

At our next session, Cheryl and I review progress.

Cheryl: I want to talk about Ivan after our last session.

Supervisor: Tell me?

Cheryl: Well, I felt differently walking in – I took my talisman in my pocket and felt more conscious about what was happening. I remembered my reason for being there. It was easier.

Supervisor: Well done – so your strategy worked?

Cheryl: Yes, I did remember why I was there. It was much easier for me to stay present. When I started the coaching session I realised that I seemed to be doing all the work somehow. So remembering the last supervision, I said, 'There's something I want to explore with you Ivan – I'm wondering how committed you are to the coaching work. On a scale of 1 to 10, may I ask you honestly how committed are you to our work?'

He was surprised by the question. His answer was about 5. I invited him to be very open with me and let me know what was happening and why his commitment was only 5. He said that he was participating in the coaching because his boss felt it was important, but he wasn't fully engaged. He actually mellowed after speaking this and the conversation felt very real. I told him that the choice was entirely his and said we could end if he wished. But he wanted to continue. I said to Ivan, 'This is your time. What do you really want to gain from this?' He told me that he was lacking commitment to his work at the moment and felt a little lost. I asked if he would like to explore this and his response was clearly yes. We had a new context to our work, one to which he was visibly much more committed.

Supervisor: Excellent.

Cheryl: Look what came out of the last supervision session! It seems that the work is all around commitment and engagement.

Supervisor: Is that a surprise?

Cheryl: In some way yes, but very useful.

Supervisor: So what are you learning from this?

Cheryl: That my experience – what I feel – matters, and not to over-personalise it or make it wrong. It may be valuable to what's happening in the coaching relationship. I can use it more creatively – through supervision – here.

*I am delighted with Cheryl's learning and relational awareness.*

Supervisor: Well done. Because you helped Ivan to own his lack of commitment, has he more fully committed to the coaching do you think?

Cheryl: Yes.

*I have been musing whether Ivan's lack of commitment is in relation to his boss or something wider, so I decide to explore.*

Supervisor: If you were to step into Ivan's shoes for the moment, what do you think he is actually telling you about his commitment?

Cheryl: *(Pause)* Because his boss wanted him to have a coach this has affected his commitment to the coaching – rather than engage he has disengaged. With hindsight I should have checked the frame better when we began.

Supervisor: Good. Carry on. What might be happening?

Cheryl: Ivan is also not committed to his job.

Supervisor: Might there be a cultural element to this also, do you know?

Cheryl: That's interesting. He did talk about culture in our last session – a blame culture. That it was dangerous to fully engage for fear of being too visible and blamed.

Supervisor: Remind me of the context for coaching.

Cheryl: To see if Ivan could step up to the next level of leadership and management.

Supervisor: So what are you seeing?

Cheryl: That the culture may also be negatively impacting the intention of the coaching.

Supervisor: How can you work with this awareness?

Cheryl: I need Ivan to help me to understand the impact of the culture more, and how this might affect the goal of the coaching work – his stepping up to a more visible role

*I am aware over the two sessions how Cheryl has worked with personal, relational and cultural awareness and wish to acknowledge this and mirror how all three dimensions are important within supervision.*

Supervisor: Good. Do you see how you have been working with your personal, relational and cultural awareness in these sessions?

Cheryl: Yes, and they all interrelate.

Supervision: Note your widening field of vision. It's good awareness, Cheryl.

In this case study three of the four dimensions of awareness are explored – namely self, relational and cultural awareness. Note how Cheryl learns how her own feelings can, in parallel, indicate something important about the client's experience. In making her feelings fully conscious, Cheryl creates the opportunity to explore how this experience may help her to learn about her client and further inform her future coaching interventions. A cultural dimension is also recognised – how the organisational field can impact on the behaviour of the individual client. Note how the key to change is in making both these dimensions conscious. Once consciously owned, the client is somehow freed from their grip. A space is created for reflection and a deeper consideration of their relevance and meaning.

## ANOTHER SUPERVISORY EXAMPLE

Let me also share a recent example where a more universal dimension of awareness comes into play.

Derek has been an experienced coach for ten years. He is working with a client Sheila, who has been feeling very stuck in her work. Sheila is a senior human resources director and has entered into a coaching relationship to find a way of moving forward.

Derek: I experienced something strange and wonderful in one of my coaching sessions.

Supervisor: Sounds intriguing.

Derek: Yes it is. Let me set the scene. I've been working with Sheila who has been feeling stuck. The coaching work has been going well – we have a good open and trusting relationship. I have really been able to help her to explore her feeling stuck.

Supervisor: What was the turning point?

Derek: (*Pause*) Er, Sheila had got in touch with feeling really lost and had got upset and had actually shed a few tears and didn't know the way forward. I affirmed to Sheila that the answer was inside her and not me. I expressed strongly that I truly believed that she knew deep down what she needed and what needed to happen to move things forward. The penny seemed to drop – she suddenly realised that she had been looking to everyone else to find the answer – everyone other than herself.

Supervisor: What was your experience?

Derek: She suddenly stopped and realised that she had the answer and that this was around being able to include more of what she most enjoyed in her life and work. She grew calm and quiet and smiled. Sheila then went on to talk about the freedom of playing on the beach as a child. I asked if she was experiencing that freedom now, and she said yes. It was strange – we seemed very deeply connected although we didn't say very much. Sheila had found something within and the time together just seemed to somehow disappear.

Supervisor: What had she found?

Derek: A new self-belief. She realised that she was in charge of her own life – you know – only she could navigate her boat, sort of thing. No one else, and it was a revelation. Time passed in a second and it was almost the end of the session before I knew it. Nothing was rushed, it was just right somehow. We were very closely connected even though we said little. There was stillness and long periods of quiet where we didn't feel we needed to speak.

Supervisor: How do you make sense of this experience?

Derek: Sheila remembered something vital and it changed things. She remembered who she was – who she is – she got in touch with her real self somehow. It was like nothing else was needed really. I just witnessed her and mirrored her energy and joy. Everything seemed to move and fit in that instant.



Supervisor: What was your experience?

Derek: I marvelled at this revelation and felt so calm and at peace. It made me realise what this work is about – truly about. Helping people to be themselves within their chosen occupation. I did ask Sheila what had changed at the end of the session and she said everything and nothing, and smiled. I wanted to understand and help her to ground this more fully, so I asked her something like ‘What are you taking from this?’ Her response was: ‘I need to make changes for myself and I’ve been waiting for someone else to make it better, but I can only do this for myself.’ It was an important realisation.

Supervisor: Were you changed by this experience?

Derek: Yes. I felt affirmed – very real and authentic in my work.

Supervisor: (*Smiling*) You were sharing the same parallel experience as Sheila.

Derek: Wow, yes, maybe.

Here, the client of the coach in supervision describes the experience of remembering original self and develops a more universal awareness, recognising a larger context in which the meaning of things profoundly change. Something suddenly appears to fit into place: a realisation and order from amidst disorder. Time seems to take a different measure, together with an experience of being in flow and a joy and deep sense of authenticity and wholeness. Such characteristic experiences will often mark a major shift in a client’s awareness and self-identity. The

masterful coach is comfortable to facilitate, mirror and help to ground such experiences in coaching and supervision.

## • SUMMARY •

Mirroring the coach and their client, the supervisory relationship is based on trust. It is one where the supervisor is consciously seeking to guide the development and growth of the coach. Just as the coach seeks to help their client to expand their vision and awareness, so the supervisor similarly guides the coach to take another progressive step along this journey of deepening awareness and the ability to more sensitively relate. Through supervision we learn to trust our senses to guide us in what may be unspoken within the coaching relationship and in supervision. In building this trust our confidence to practise grows.

It is the work of both the supervisor and the coach to help to transform that which is unconscious or partially conscious into full awareness, allowing vision to expand and sensitivity to deepen. We discover new choices in making the unconscious conscious, transforming reaction into response. We learn to see how we can confine ourselves and our understanding of the other. In taking a personal and isolated view of our experiences, we forget the wider field of which our experience is a part.