**Making the Best Use of Coaching Supervision[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**By Steve Page**

As practitioners and supervisees I firmly believe that we need actively to engage in co-creating effective and productive supervisory spaces for ourselves, in collaboration with our supervisors. This is a continuous process and should not be restricted to structured reviews that may be part of the supervisory contract (Page and Wosket 2014). I appreciate that some practitioners are required to have supervision from a specific supervisor appointed by their employer, agency or training organisation. Nevertheless I feel strongly that as practitioners we must take responsibility for ensuring that *our* supervision meets *our* needs as practitioners, re-negotiating the supervisory contract where this is no longer the case. When it feels right and we have the option to do so, this also means taking the decision to bring the contract with our supervisor to an end and seeking a new supervisor. In the context of work as a coach, it may also mean seeking very specific supervision, possibly quite short-term, when a coaching contract faces us with particular challenges.

It is all too easy to fall into a routine with our supervision, which may be encouraged by the natural loyalty we develop for a supervisor by whom we feel supported and trusted. We may need to remind ourselves that fundamentally supervision is in the service of our clients and as such we have a professional responsibility to ensure the supervision we receive is the best it can be.

I want to offer a number of questions that may help you review your supervision and I will start with what for me is perhaps the most significant:

1. **Does this supervisory relationship feel right for me, now?**

There is a wealth of research (see, for example, Gnilka et al. 2012, Starr et al. 2013, Sterner 2009) to support what I imagine we all know intuitively, which is that the quality of the relationship between supervisor and supervisee is the single strongest determinant of the effectiveness of supervision. I explore this for myself by meeting potential supervisors and paying close attention to how I feel in their presence and throughout our dialogue. I want to feel safe, trusted, respected and yet not too comfortable, as I expect supervision to stretch me and enable me to grow.

Bridget Proctor (Proctor 1988) elegantly articulated the functions of counselling supervision as *Restorative,* *Normative* and *Formative.* I consider these are equally applicable to coaching supervision, or supervision of integrated therapy/coaching client work. When it comes to reviewing our supervision these functions offer a very useful framework:

1. **Is my supervision helping me maintain vitality and enthusiasm for the work I do with clients?**
2. **Is it challenging me to address my professional, administrative and ethical responsibilities openly and creatively?**
3. **Is it assisting me to develop and renew my knowledge, skills and awareness with hunger for learning?**

It is also important that we consider carefully what we are putting in to our supervision:

1. **Am I preparing for supervision session in the most useful way I can?**

If not, then how will I do so?

1. **Is there anything I consciously hold back from my supervisor?**

If I am then it is as well to contract with ourselves to discuss this with our supervisor at our next session.

There are further questions which may help us review our current supervision arrangements for ourselves.

1. **Is the coming period primarily one of consolidation or expansion of my approach?**

This invites us to think about our supervision needs from a developmental perspective (Stoltenberg and McNeill 2010).

1. **How relevant is the background of my supervisor?**

At different points in our development as practitioners it may be important to have a supervisor from our own approach and background; so there is a good match; or from a different approach or background so that they invite us to consider fresh and perhaps challenging perspectives.

We may need a supervisor with a specific skill or background, for example one experienced in negotiating three-way contracts with organisations commissioning coaching.

1. **Does it matter to me whether my supervisor and I are in the same professional networks?**

This can be a benefit, or it can feel uncomfortable or be a hindrance. With the benefits of conference calling facilities on our computers (and phones of course) we potentially have access to a very wide range of supervisors, so can avoid overlapping networks.

My final question is a sense check on how fully and authentically have I addressed the previous questions.

1. **Can I, hand on heart, confirm to my clients that I have the best supervision available for the work I am doing with them?**

References

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1. This handout is adapted from an article first published in the Journal of ‘The Association of Integrative Therapist Coach Practitioners’ in summer 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)