



This is one of a series of Guides written by AC members who are experienced practitioners and wish to share some of their learning and perspectives with other members.

## What's so "Super" about Supervision?

*By Michelle Lucas, AC Supervision Lead*

Coaching supervision is being used increasingly by coaches to gain more insights into their work, their client relationships, the impact client work may have on them and to deal with challenging coaching situations. Ask any professional coach if they have supervision and they will generally say "yes". In fact the CIPD research in 2006 found that whilst 86% of coaches say they believe in having regular supervision, only 44% actually did so. This would suggest that a high proportion of coaches may not yet have experienced supervision. So, for those who have not yet embraced Coaching Supervision, this Guide explains more about what it is and how it can work for the benefit of both coach and client.

The Association of Coaching (AC) defines coaching supervision as "a formal and protected time for facilitating a coach's in-depth reflection on their practice with an experienced Coaching Supervisor. Supervision offers a confidential framework within a collaborative working relationship in which the practice, tasks, process and challenges of the coaching work can be explored. The primary aim of supervision is to enable the coach to gain in ethical competency, confidence and creativity so as to ensure best possible service to the coaching client, both coachees and coaching sponsors. Supervision is not a 'policing' role, but rather a trusting and collegial professional relationship."

What this means in practice for coaches is:

- We create dedicated time for reflection
- We give focus to reviewing or preparing for our coaching work
- We engage with someone who has a deep understanding of what it means to work as a coach
- We actively work to get better at what we do
- We can reassure our clients of our intention to deliver the best, and most ethical, service for them

### FAQs

#### Where do I find a good supervisor?

The AC has a directory of members who are supervisors. Some are AC Accredited Supervisors, whose work has been assessed as aligning with the principles, competencies and functions of supervision outlined in the AC Supervision Principles.

Some supervisors choose not to become accredited, so it's important that you do your own research on which supervisor is best for you.

#### How much should I expect to pay a supervisor?

As you might expect this varies - a good starting point is to expect to pay an uplift of 10 – 20% on the rate you charge as a coach. However many established supervisors also have a minimum session fee.

#### Where can I get an experience of supervision?

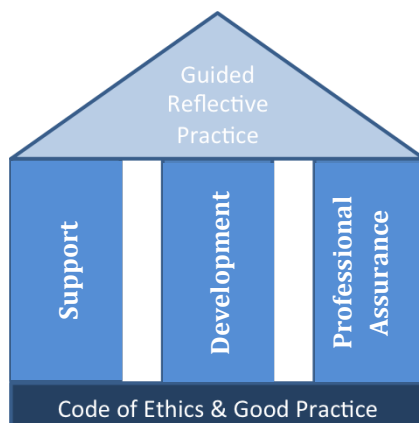
The AC offers members Groups Supervision calls to provide an experience of supervision members. More info on the [AC web site](http://www.acweb.org). To book e-mail

[karenb@associationforcoaching.com](mailto:karenb@associationforcoaching.com)

## ***What is the purpose of coaching supervision?***

In simple terms Coaching Supervision is just one form of guided reflective practice. The primary functions of Coaching Supervision are to support, develop and ensure best practice of coaches in service of their coaching clients (both individuals and organisations) and their professional associations. This has been described as the Supportive, Educative and Administrative roles of a supervisor. These roles, underpinned by a Code of Ethics come together to create good reflective practice. Coaching Supervision brings all of this together – I call this “the House of Supervision”.

### **House of Supervision**



### ***The Support function of supervision***

Like many helping professions – sometimes the client’s story mirrors our own and so the work can stir up ‘unfinished business’ for the coach. Here the supervisor plays an important restorative role, aiding the coach to work through things that have had an impact on them to find resolution. Plus, for a coach to be of service to their clients they need to be in ‘good shape’ themselves. The supervisor might take a problem-solving role to support the coach deals with their own issues to make sure they have good energy for their clients.

### ***The Development function of supervision***

This is probably the most familiar part of supervision. Sometimes a supervisor is chosen because they have more experience than the coach. On occasions this can lead to the supervisor sharing experience or highlighting alternatives strategies, just as a mentor might do. However, primarily the supervisor will work to help the coach to understand why they chose to do what they did as well as consider alternative approaches for the future.

### ***The Professional Assurance function of supervision***

This is where the supervisor plays a role in maintaining best practice amongst the profession, including reviewing ethical issues. It is not a policing role, rather it is designed to raise the coach’s awareness of the complexity of their work and guide them to find their own way forward.

### ***The AC Code of Ethics & Good Practice***

This is an essential framework for coaches to work within (find it on the AC web site). Of course it can’t cover every eventuality and real examples are unique, hence the value of exploring specific ethical issues with a supervisor.

### **How often do I need supervision?**

This depends on your caseload and your experience. For Coach Accreditation the AC has some specific requirements. AC offers some guidelines through its Coach Accreditation Schemes. Best practice would be no less than quarterly and ideally monthly. If you have a lower caseload you may consider attending group rather than one-to-one supervision.

### **Will a supervisor tell me what to do?**

A supervisor will help you explore what you think might work for you, although they are also in a position to share their own experiences with you if appropriate. They may give a view on an issue that has ethical implications – typically this is the most appropriate time for a supervisor to take a directive stance.

### **Why should I have supervision?**

If you enter supervision to find out the value that it brings, rather than because you ‘have to’, you are more likely to experience its positive impact. . It’s important to find a supervisor whose – style, experience and approach works well for you.

### **What if I have nothing to take to supervision?**

This is a common fear! Remember that supervision is a place to celebrate what has gone well as well as discuss any difficulties you might be having. Plus, when working in a group people often find that in

## ***What might you work on with a supervisor?***

Many coaches will take examples of their coaching client work to discuss with their supervisor. In order to prepare for supervision, there are three questions which help the coach decide what parts of their practice would be useful to take to supervision,

### **(1) What is going really well?**

*In keeping with a positive psychology approach by affirming our strengths and understanding how we have developed them, we can more deliberately deploy them for the benefit of our clients*

### **(2) When do I feel stuck?**

*Perhaps you've tried everything in your repertoire and a client is not making much progress. Perhaps something's niggling you and you don't know why. Often so much is going on in the coaching room we can't understand it all in the "here and now". Talking it through with a supervisor can often bring to the surface information that was previously just beyond your reach.*

### **(3) What's coming up that I need to prepare for?**

*Some coaches like to ensure they are well prepared and find exploring how they might approach the next client session can be valuable. Sometimes particular clients will cause even the most experienced coaches to consider more what they need to do in advance of a session. This is not always about rehearsing the dialogue with the client it is sometimes about supporting the coach to have good energy to work with the client.*

## ***What tools and approaches do supervisors use?***

There are probably as many different approaches to supervision as there are to coaching. However one model most supervisors will use is known as the Seven-Eyed Model of Supervision (Hawkins & Smith: 2006).

Its usefulness is based on a very simple truth. No matter how experienced you become as a coach there will always be more "happening" in a session than it's possible to deal with at the time. There are many questions that you can ask or not ask – and many avenues to explore once a conversation starts. Once asked you can't go back – you will always have influenced what happens next.

A supervisor may work with you to explore what informs your choices – what prompted you to go in one direction or another. Some choices are conscious and others are driven by our unconscious or by the dynamics in our client relationship. It is this complexity and richness in the coaching relationship which the Seven-eyed Model helps us to learn more about.

listening to issues emerging in others' work it can prompt them to re-visit their own work.

### **What if I really don't have any client issues I want to talk about?**

Sometimes it can be useful to talk about coaching issues that are wider than specific client work. For example you might want to discuss how you articulate your model of coaching to your clients. Or perhaps you want to talk through getting ready for accreditation.

### **Can I talk to my supervisor about my coaching business?**

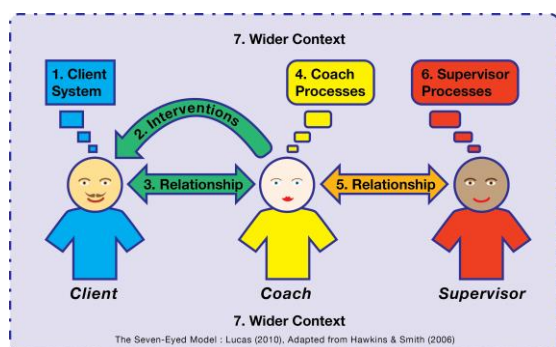
Different supervisors will respond differently to this question. Some prefer to keep business development topics separate from supervision. Others will see it as an integral part of the supervision system.

### **Do I need a supervisor if I already reflect with a colleague?**

Reflecting on client work with your colleagues can be very helpful especially when you create a formal contract for the activity. It is however different from reflecting with a supervisor, who has specific training and who can offer greater impartiality and challenge. It's great to have both!

The seven eyes, or perspectives are:

1. **The client system:** Recognising the client doesn't live in a vacuum, we need to consider past, present and future influences on the client.
2. **The coaching interventions used:** Considering the questions and techniques the coach chose to use and why.
3. **The relationship between client and coach:** Considering how the coach and the client are relating to each other as they work together.
4. **The Coach's processes:** Just like eye 1 we need to recognise that the coach doesn't live in a vacuum. We need to take account past, present and future experiences of the coach and how that might be influencing their work.
5. **The relationship between supervisor and coach:** Considering how the coach and supervisor are relating as they work together. Sometimes this mirrors the quality of the coach and client relationship - this is what is known as "parallel process".
6. **The Supervisor's processes:** Considering what the supervisor is experiencing in the moment, this can often provide insights for further exploration of the coach's work. As with eyes 1 and 4, the supervisor's experience of the coach may also be impacted by past and future influences.
7. **The wider context:** Considering the bigger picture and how other stakeholders in the system (e.g. in an organisation or a family) could be impacting on the coaching.



With 7 different perspectives to consider, this model helps the supervisor and coach tap into more information than they were initially aware they had. **For me, this is fundamentally what is so “super” about what we call “supervision”**

### *About the Author*

This article was written by Michelle Lucas, AC Accredited Coach and Accredited Coaching Supervisor. Michelle volunteers her time as the AC Supervision Lead.



Michelle runs her own independent consultancy, Greenfields, delivering coaching, coaching supervision, coach training and writing.

### *Other AC Member to Member Guides*

**Developing your Coaching through Reflective Practice**

*Other Guides to be added to the series soon.*

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Do you have experience which you would like to share with other members in a Member to Member Guide please contact [sarah@associationforcoaching.com](mailto:sarah@associationforcoaching.com) with an outline of your proposed Guide.