



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.

Developing your Coaching through Reflective Practice

By Lynne Cooper, AC, UK Vice Chair

Reflective practice is a process that helps turn experience into knowledge (Gilbert and Trudel, 2001). It is therefore invaluable for the professional development of a coach. In practice it can be hard to know how best to do this, how it fits with coaching supervision and probably hardest of all for many, making the time to do so. Yet given that we ask our coaching clients to reflect, to discover new insights and to try out new behaviours, we know how important and valuable it is to do so.

Reflective practice can take many forms. It may be individual, or with a peer or peer group; it may be with a supervisor or as part of an action learning group. Reflection can be on specific client work, feedback from clients or patterns and themes emerging across sessions or across clients. It can also be on new approaches and techniques being tried out. Reflection on CPD, trainings and all other learning opportunities all support the practical integration of new knowledge, ideas and approaches into the Coach's coaching approach and ability to deal with the unexpected and the more complex coaching issues.

If you are not getting the most from reflecting on your work or struggling to prioritise this activity, you are not alone! There's no one-size fits all solution, but here are a number of things you can do to discover what would make taking time to reflect purposefully work effectively for you.

Find your motivator

What needs to happen for you to prioritise your reflection over other urgent demands on your time? What might motivate you? Consider the following potential benefits of reflective practice and notice which work for you:

- Get better value from your supervision – reflecting in advance to allow for even more productive exploration with your supervisor
- Build your coaching competence and confidence

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

Me as coach

- What feelings do I get when I think of this coachee?
- Am I reminded of someone else and does that influence how I behave?
- What have been my assumptions and thinking regarding this person and the work we are doing?
- How am I affected by the work with this individual?
- What might be aiding or preventing me working effectively with them?

The coachee

- What do I know about this coachee?
- How does the coachee present?
- What are their values and beliefs?
- What does the coachee do between sessions?
- What patterns have I noticed?
- Is there anything else about this individual?

The relationship between us

- How do we interact?
- What would an outsider notice about that?
- How does this relationship compare to other coaching relationships I have?

- Address your anxieties or concerns about certain aspects of your work
- Develop your internal supervisor – noticing what is happening in your body and thoughts in a session and adjusting your approach as a result
- Prepare for coach accreditation – exploring your strengths and development areas
- Develop your reflective skills in advance of the critical reflection components of the AC Coach Accreditation
- Avoid an unsatisfactory outcome from a specific coaching relationship

If none of these energise you, find out what *will* (you might want to work on this with a coach!).

Develop an approach to reflection that suits you

There are many techniques for undertaking reflection and you need to find the one that works best for you. Some people use reflective journals and diaries, free-form writing or through-the-mirror writing (Bolton, 2010). Others prefer creative approaches including drawing, metaphor, mind-mapping and movement through space. Some like to talk things out to a voice recorder or a peer. It's important to experiment to find the route that best suits you.

The AC has a Reflective Records pack (accessed through the *Coaching Supervision and Reflective Practice* page of the AC web site which offers example forms for reflections on your client work plus all the records you will need to keep for Coach Accreditation purposes.

Make the time for reflection

Immediately after a coaching session is certainly a good time to think about and record what happened, even if you don't undertake any critical analysis at this point. Book time in your diary around the coaching session to achieve this rather than rushing to your next commitment and losing some of the data you may benefit from recording.

Some coaches find that a deeper level of reflection and learning can then be achieved later, with further time to review your notes and think about your coaching from different perspectives. Here you might consider an individual session or relationship, or search for patterns and themes over a number of coaching assignments.

Make diary commitments to yourself to do this – and keep them!

Maximise your insights

The interventions I have used

- What have I done with this client? Models, techniques, direction and style of questioning?
- What led me to make these choices? What other options were available?
- What has worked well, and what less well?
- What might I do differently?

The system in which the coachee is operating

- What is the system in which this coachee is operating in the context of this work, such as family, organisation, cultural, social or political contexts?
- Who are the key stakeholders?
- What pressures do they bring to bear?
- What is the impact of the system on the coachee?
- What else is happening?

AC Reflective Records

Find these [here](#)

(<http://associationforcoaching.com/pages/membership/supporting-information/coaching-supervision>)

Reflecting on your own can have its limitations unless you stretch yourself to notice the things you haven't been paying attention to. This is where supervision is so important. However, when reflecting alone you may find it helpful to structure your thinking around five different perspectives:

- Me as coach
- The coachee
- The relationship between us
- The interventions I have used
- The system in which the coachee is operating

These modes, from the Seven-Eyed Model of Supervision (Hawkins & Smith, 2006) offer different insights when you reflect from each perspective (more information on this model can be found in the AC Member to Member Guide: '*What's so "Super" about Supervision?*').

This approach is most powerful if you 'step in' to each mode or position. Reflect from just one mode at a time to gain clearer insights from each perspective. Separate the information gleaned from each when you map your findings onto paper. Doing this physically by moving around different spaces also works well. The sidebar in this Guide holds questions that you may wish to ask yourself in each mode.

Reflective practice is easiest when it becomes regular and habitual and for that to happen you need topractise!

About the Author

This article was written by Lynne Cooper, who volunteers for AC in the UK as Vice Chair.



Lynne is Managing Partner of Change Perspectives partnership, a leadership development practice. She is an AC Accredited Coach, Accredited Supervisor, Team Coach, Trainer and author.

Other AC Member to Member Guides

What's so "Super" about Supervision?

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 with an outline of your proposed Guide.