

COACHING SUPERVISION MUST BE COMPULSARY

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It is essential that professional rigour is applied to coaching, both in its practice and its practitioners. That's why, argues Nick Smith, it's important to supervise your coaches.

As the use of executive coaching grows, so it becomes increasingly important that coaches are trained and follow a structured continuing professional development programme.

The key to developing and maintaining highly professional coaches is regular supervision. This is important both for the coaches and the client organisations in which they work. As Barbara Picheta, development consultant and coach at PricewaterhouseCoopers UK, says, supervision should not be a voluntary activity. "To open one's work to scrutiny is important and best practice in any helping activity. If you're going to invest in coaches in the workplace, this is an essential part of it -it's not an optional exercise."

Bath Consultancy Group recently conducted research for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development on supervision. It showed that 88% of coaching organisers and 86% of coaches believe that coaches should have continuous and regular supervision. But only 44% of coaches currently receive coaching supervision, and less than one-quarter of organisations provide it. This gap between aspiration and practice needs to be closed for everyone's benefit.

Supervision should offer a coach support and challenge in three different areas: skills and professional development helping the coach to understand and process difficult client interactions and to provide quality control of a coach's work.

The term 'executive coaching' extends across a range of coaching activities. At its most practical, it offers specific skill development for managers. The focus here is primarily on external activity.

By looking less at a client's efficiency in doing a specific task, and more at their broader effectiveness in the role, the coach focuses on performance management. If the client needs to look more broadly at their present role in terms of an overall career, the coach would focus on personal development. To help someone make a transition from, say, manager to leader, the focus should be on transformational coaching.

In my work researching this spectrum from skills to transformational coaching, I've found that coaches inevitably and regularly get 'hooked' into emotional reactions to the client's situation and lose professional focus. To retain this, and offer the best service to clients, regular supervision - in my view - is critical for good coaching practice.

How much supervision does a coach need? Someone newly trained should get the ratio of one hour's supervision for every 10 to 15 hours of coaching. The more experienced coach needs one hour's supervision per 25 to 30 hours of practice.

Regular supervision of a coach is also critical to a successful outcome for the organisation using them. That organisation needs to be clear about two things: that the coaches are competent and that their investment in coaching achieves the organisation's aims, as well as the coachee's. Such good quality supervision is one of the actions that can help deliver a sound return on investment.

Nick Smith is co-author, along with Dr Peter Hawkins, of *Coaching, Mentoring and Organizational Consultancy: Supervision and Development*. For more information, go to www.bathconsultancygroup.com