

ICF position regarding Coaching Supervision

Background

It has become recognized practice that coaches at every stage in their coaching journey continually seek development, both personally in terms of deepening their coaching presence and awareness, and professionally in terms of competencies, ethics and standards. One of the growing trends internationally for undertaking such development is engaging in the practice of 'coaching supervision' similar in concept to the supervision which supports many behavioral science professions.

The number of voices globally who have been requesting that ICF give some guidance around this concept is growing and in fact some ICF chapters, as well as several training providers have taken steps to further define a position regarding coaching supervision. Many parts of the world where coaching is well established already consider coaching supervision not only necessary for the coach and the client, but also necessary for maintaining the integrity of the profession. There are even countries where regular engagement in coaching supervision is part of the hiring criteria for an external coach being considered by organizations (e.g., Are you under supervision and may we check with your supervisor to verify that?).

Recognizing this trend, a variety of ICF work groups have held discussions with the intent of defining and establishing a clear position regarding coaching supervision that could be adopted by the ICF. Specifically, discussions have taken place in the past within the ICF Credentialing Committee and with some of the credentialing workgroups. More recently a small team of subject matter experts met to develop a definition and guidelines that could be advanced to the ICF Board for consideration. The recommendations were based on this work but also took into consideration the definition of coaching supervision adopted by the UK chapter. Additionally, a review of the EMCC position on coaching supervision (mandated by that organization) was conducted in order to learn and compare other views/positions on this topic.

Major Considerations

Mentor Coaching vs. Coaching Supervision

One area of confusion around the concept of coaching supervision is about the differences in terminology, between supervision and mentoring. (Currently, ICF defines Mentor Coaching as coaching for the development of one's coaching, rather than reflective practice, coaching for personal development or coaching for business development, although those aspects may happen very incidentally in the coaching for development of one's coaching.) Having a clear definition of coaching supervision is important to help differentiate coach supervision from Mentor Coaching as defined by the ICF.

Specialized Training

Another common misconception is that coaching supervision is just very high coaching ability and that no additional training/experience is required to serve as a supervisor. The awareness that specialized training is needed is gaining interest but not yet fully embraced by all wishing to serve in this role. Identifying the unique qualifications, traits, and skills of a coaching supervisor and defining how to train coaches to serve in this role will be important in clarifying this misconception.

Operational definition of Coaching Supervision

ICF defines Coaching Supervision as follows:

"Coaching Supervision is the interaction that occurs when a coach periodically brings his or her coaching work experiences to a coaching supervisor in order to engage in reflective dialogue and collaborative learning for the development and benefit of the coach and his or her clients."

Coaching Supervision is distinct from Mentor Coaching for Credentialing. Mentor Coaching focuses on the development of coaching skills mainly in the context of initial development. Coaching Supervision offers the coach a richer and broader opportunity for support and development. In Coaching Supervision, the coach is invited to focus much more on what is going on in their process and where the personal may be intruding on the professional. Examples, as developed by the work group are listed as a supplement.

Suggested qualifications for those serving as Coaching Supervisors

In the interest of providing some access to Coaching Supervision in a world which is not yet globally ready to offer sufficient numbers of specifically trained coaching supervisors for the demand that is anticipated, it is proposed that in order to qualify to deliver Supervision for ICF members who wish to pursue this method of personal and professional development, the Coaching Supervisor must:

- Be an ICF member which implies that the Coaching Supervisor is familiar with and abides by the ICF Ethics and Standards and
- Not be under any sanctions from the ICF Independent Review Board for violations of ethical conduct and
- Be an experienced, mature, preferably credentialed coach - at least 3 years FTE practice and
- Has continued expanding exposure to and knowledge of coaching approaches beyond their original coach training

Or

- Be a member of another professional coaching organization with a history of using the concept of supervision whose Ethics and Standards the Coaching Supervisor abides by and
- Is not under any sanctions from the Review board of the professional organization to which they belong and
- Is willing to honor the ICF's Ethics and Standards, and Coaching Competencies, which also includes definitions of coaching, the coaching relationship, an ICF coach, the client, and the sponsor
- Is familiar with at least three (breadth of exposure) different coaching approaches/methodologies

Guidelines for selection of a Coaching Supervisor

The following Traits and Duties for Coaching Supervisors be made available for Coaches who are seeking assistance with making a choice for coaching supervision. These are not intended as strict requirements but instead as an initial set of guidelines intended to inform those seeking a Coaching Supervisor.

Personal traits of the Coaching Supervisor:

- Evokes a sense of trust and has the ability to connect with the coach in terms of fit, chemistry and compatibility.
- Encourages the coach to reach beyond what the coach initially feels is possible
- Demonstrates equal partnership by being open, vulnerable and willing to take appropriate risks, for example, in providing feedback that may make one or both individuals uncomfortable, in the context of the supervisory role
- Understands and is able to model the value of partnership and encourages the coach to lead in designing areas to be worked on, in session, in between session, among others
- Is authentic and supports authenticity including celebrating who the coach is, her/his achievements and growth throughout the process.
- Is secure in his/her own work and is able to demonstrate appreciation and respect for the unique style of each coach.
- Encourages the development of the coach's own coaching style within the boundaries of ethical practice
- Contracts to hold both self and coach accountable for performance and to periodically encourage mutual assessment of the effectiveness of the relationship

Duties of a Coaching Supervisor:

- Models effective initiation of client relationship - understands and can convey what the potential coach supervisor means by supervision
- Supports coach choice by encouraging coaches to interview more than one potential 'coach supervisor' in order to find the best match.
- Explores fully with the coach what they are looking to achieve for maximum clarity about the purpose of the supervision, establishes measures of success in partnership with the coach and fully discusses fees, time frame, confidentiality and other aspects of a coach supervision relationship.
- Focuses on full practice development and indicates how they generally work as a supervisor including what is expected from the coach, methodologies and practices used, feedback mechanisms etc
- Demonstrates that s/he is learning about the coach at many levels at once and is able to hold all of that in the context of who the coach is, what the coach is seeking and honors the coach's unique style
- Engage in their own on-going supervision

Value received

The Coaching Supervision process has high value for both the Coaching Supervisor and the Coach being supervised. The work group developed the following list of value received as a part of the proposal.

Value for the Coaching Supervisor:

- Contributing to the further development of the coaching profession
- Sharpen one's own skills ("to teach is to learn")
- Assess and possibly re-create a definition of "best practice" for oneself
- Come to appreciate another style of coaching

Value for the Coach:

- Environment for customized personal and professional growth
- Environment to bring ethical issues
- Environment to bring personal uncertainties and vulnerabilities
- Environment to bring boundary issues
- Diminished risk around ethical issues means diminished risk for coach and for coach's clients
- Opportunity to engage in a meta-view of client, competency, and or practice
- Opportunity to engage in a matrix view of client, competency, and or practice

Recommended Practices for engaging in Supervision:

- Be an ICF member in good standing, implying subscription to its standards and ethics
- Do some thinking about your learning objectives
- Be willing and commit to applying what you learn
- Be willing to engage in feedback with the supervisor
- If required as part of a group, presenting a case study
- Preparing ahead for each session

Supplemental information

List of potential aspects covered in Coaching Supervision

First, let us stipulate that all of the Mentor Coach aspects may be included in Coaching Supervision but it can and does include many more aspects which a trained Coaching Supervisor is able to recognize and address. Issues which reach beyond those in Mentor Coaching and which are often brought to coach supervision at any point in a coach's professional life may also include (this list is not exclusive and not in any particular order and some points may seem similar but have a slightly different language):

- Providing appropriate support for the coach's work
- Provide regular opportunities to reflect on the coaches work
- Develop skills and strategies that allow the coach to be more effective in their role
- Gain insight and understanding about why things turned out the way they did
- Receive feedback on the coaches actions/approach/behaviours
- Be validated and supported as a person and as a professional
- Ensure that the coach is not left to carry alone, difficulties, problems etc. as a result of the work that they do
- Have space to offload and express personal responses/feelings that arise as a result of the coach's work
- Plan fully use personal and professional resources better
- Be proactive rather than reactive
- Manage self in the coaching role
- Check decisions and choices made by the coach in the course of their work
- Better ensure quality of work. Including ensuring that work practices are applied ethically and effectively.
- Provides protection of client, organizations purchasing services and the coach
- Providing appropriate challenge for the coach's professional and personal development
- Providing a place to try out new ideas and skills, or ways to develop and become more resourceful
- Providing an ethical safety net for coach, and as a result, for client, and/or organization
- Working on developing the coach as a person
- Working on developing the coach as a coach beyond competency development

- Exploring where the personal impacts the professional
- Exploring issues of self-confidence and personal insecurities as they affect the work of coaching
- Inviting the coach to engage in reflective practice e.g., discussing the client, the system, observing what's going on
- Norming with the coaching profession in one's own culture
- Alignment with one's own and others' ethics when working with clients from a very different geographical, political, religious, etc., cultures and backgrounds
- Addressing stuck-ness (e.g. coach dreads seeing the client, fears they are failing, feels they're going in circles, finds themselves offering solutions and being 'yes-butted' by the client.)
- Parallel process (e.g. coach finds themselves telling the client, whose issue is being bullied at work, what to do.)
- Boundary and ethics issues (e.g. working with more than one person in a family, or with people whose interests may be in conflict in an organization)
- Coach's strong emotion(e.g. a racist comment by the client - the coach feels outrage, doesn't know what it is appropriate to do with the feeling, but recognizes that her coaching presence and the quality of the partnership were compromised.)
- Reduction of the possibility of harm (e.g. the client is functioning at work but talks about heavy drinking, suicidal thoughts, etc.)
- Systemic organizational issues (e.g. HR wants information from the coach that would amount to a breach of confidentiality. Inexperienced coaches taking on inappropriate contracts.)
- Responsibility for required reporting of ethical issues as determined by the laws in the country which affect the coach - this varies from country to country