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SuperVision

The next step in our professional status

Like therapy and counseling, coaching structurally depends on the ‘cleanliness’ of the relationship between the coach and client. In a relationship which is designed to be catalytic, we are required as coaches to be fully present in the dialogue, in service of the client, and yet at the same time not become a part of it by allowing our own agendas or ‘saboteurs’ to get in the way.

Coaches become part of the relationship when they allow their ‘buttons’ to get pushed, and then interact with the client from that place. Instead of empathizing, the coach can instead project their feelings onto the client, and in so doing, subtly collude with the client’s process. It is true that transference (when a client projects feelings onto the coach) and counter-transference

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(when the coach projects feelings onto the client) are a fact of almost every human relationship, and yet even the projection of warm feelings can obscure, in a way which undermines the integrity of the client relationship.

When a coach is unable to manage their feelings and agenda in the client-coach interaction, they leave their ‘fingerprints’ on the relationship, and they cease to be the catalyst they have been engaged to be.

Where mentoring primarily focuses on the development of a coach’s skill set, it is supervision which seeks to protect the integrity of the client-coach relationship, by offering a deeper understanding of these subtle interactions that can prevent the coach from being more effective.

A more experienced coach in the role of supervisor can offer a coach the ‘SUPER-VISION’ – the helicopter



view – required to identify how the coach’s own personal process is showing up in their client relationships, decide how to work through it, and whether to address the issue directly with the client. Indeed, in so doing, supervision allows the coach to actually see more of the client. Where a coach is a catalyst, a supervisor is a catalyst for the catalyst.

At present, there is a groundswell of support within the coaching community for supervision, and yet there are a significant number of coaches who have voiced some obvious objections.

For example, some coaches believe the client’s right to fire their coach provides a coach with all the feedback they need. However, this doesn’t take into account cases where the coach may not be able to accept that the client has left because of their coaching, and instead assumes it was about the client’s process. Supervision helps coaches avoid this kind of isolation by providing the opportunity to keep learning about how to become a better coach.

There is another view that supervision is a way of policing the industry by having coaches record or document every session in detail. This, too, is unrealistic.

Supervision is about the integrity and professionalism of the industry, and the onus of responsibility to engage in supervision must rest squarely with the coach,

although not be enforced in a way which makes their working lives unmanageable. Having recognized the value of supervision, as champi-

orous level, by creating a space for another educated perspective on what's happening in the coaching relationship, in service of the client.

mental agenda" – then coaching too, cannot afford to ignore its psychological underpinnings.

The damage to the industry of

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oned by their regulatory body, coaches must be free to identify which clients and sessions they want to discuss with their supervisor. They need to do this, above all, because they want to be better coaches.

Continuing professional development is a characteristic of any mature, responsible profession. Supervision takes that to a more rig-

Still others worry that adopting supervision might align coaching too closely with the world of therapy, and in so doing muddy the emphasis on ‘taking forward action’ which makes coaching unique. But if you make the definition of therapy – “being in a helpful and supportive relationship with another human being, focused on their develop-

ignoring supervision is that through blindness to our own process, the effectiveness of coaching is diminished. As coaches we owe it to ourselves, our clients and the profession to engage in supervision, and moving forward I hope that accrediting and other respected bodies will reinforce this need by making it part of their code of ethics. •

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