

SUPERVISION FOR COACHES

A quality assurance for coaching

*Handbook for the development
of concept and practice*

Louis van Kessel & Sonja Vlaar

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Those who walk alone lose their way.

(Old African proverb)

***Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,
committed citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.***

(Margaret Mead)

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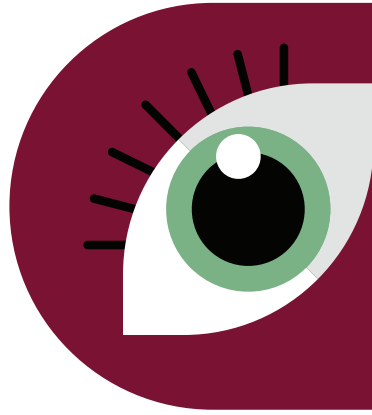
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Introduction

This handbook focuses on coach supervision¹, an effective and proven method for training and continuing professional development that optimizes the quality of coaching in practice. It is a revised and updated translation of the original, published in Dutch in 2025, and based on numerous publications on the subject, especially in the Anglo-Saxon language area since 2005.

Supervision has become indispensable in the coaching world. The global professional associations², AC and ICF, advise their members to seek supervision to ensure the quality of their work. EMCC makes it a condition of registration and requires practicing coaches to take supervision³ at a frequency commensurate with the extent to which they perform coaching. Also, organizations that commission coaching place importance on the coach taking regular supervision. That applies to both external coaches they commission and their internal coaches. For the latter, they organize supervision performed by internal or external supervisors. Nowadays, coach training programs also include supervision as part of their curriculum. Moreover, coaches themselves indicate a need for coach supervision and value it.

In the stream of this development, the supply of specialized training courses specifically aimed at equipping coach supervisors⁴ with the necessary competency is also increasing. Coach supervision is evolving as a specific application of the generic supervision methodology, tailored to the unique experiences coaches encounter in their professional situations, which require them to possess appropriate acting skills. Coach supervision keeps the coach fit for purpose and helps them to prevent emotional exhaustion, commonly referred to as compassion fatigue⁵.

¹ We chose the term *coach supervision* to refer to supervision for coaches. This designation seems most appropriate because the coach is the one being supervised. Besides the term *coach supervision* (e.g., AC, 2023d; Bolton, 2022; Brabon, 2022; Comensa, 2018; DeFilippo, 2013; Duffell & De Estevan-Ubeda, 2019; Lucas, 2017b; Menaul, 2006; Passmore, 2011b, p. viii; Turner, 2024; Van Reenen, 2015), English-language publications also use the term *coaching supervision* (e.g., Bachkirova et al., 2021; Birch & Welch, 2019; Brabon, 2022; Clutterbuck et al., 2016a; Grant, 2012; Hawkins et al., 2019; Kotte & Zimmermann, 2022; Turner & Palmer, 2019a), *coach's coach* (Downey, 2003), *supervision in coaching* (Bachkirova et al., 2020; Lines, 2021; McLean, 2012; Passmore, 2011b), and *supervision of coaching* (Thomson, 2011).

² These professional associations, their abbreviations, and websites are listed in Appendix I.

³ To emphasize the coach's own responsibility and active engagement, we use the formulation that a coach *takes supervision*, instead of receiving it.

⁴ We use the term *coach supervisor* to indicate the supervisor who provides supervision to coaches. For the coach who takes supervision, we use the term *coach-supervisee*. ICF (2024a) calls the latter *supervision client*.

⁵ Müller et al., 2020.

What this handbook provides

This handbook offers insight into the developments mentioned above and provides an overview of what supervision entails for coaches. It highlights essential themes and practical experiences that supervision helps clarify, as well as what taking supervision⁶ contributes to their functioning as coaches in everyday practice. It provides coach supervisors with a conceptual framework, models, and tools for supervision in this context. Practical examples illustrate this. It provides insight into the policies of professional coaches' associations, the competency requirements that coach supervisors must meet, and the training they must complete. A reader's activity at the end of each chapter helps readers engage with the information provided and thus optimize their own practice.

Why supervision is necessary for working as a qualified coach

Working as a coach in practice inevitably involves many puzzles. The coach encounters unexpected situations. The coachee or client⁷ behaves differently than expected. Also, one's own reactions as a coach to it raise questions. How did it come that I react this way? How should I handle it, and how can I do so professionally? What in my method of coaching could I improve? And what does that require of me? What I learned in training doesn't seem to apply in practice. By now, I am ready to reflect on what I aim to achieve with my coaching and how I implement it. Is it right for me to be so satisfied with how I work? Perhaps by now, some wear and tear has occurred, and a routine has developed, rather than engaging in and creatively responding to what the coachee brings in and needs?

To truly learn, within a coach training program, how to work in practice—amid unpredictable, changing situations and the unexpected ways of coachees' and clients' functioning—supervision is a practical training component because it is tailor-made for the individual coach. It is not about getting answers to simple questions, but about reflectively examining the many sides of the complex puzzle that the coach supervisor encounters in their practice, which they⁸ are often only partially aware of. Also, it involves examining how they work in relation to the standards of the profession. The result is the discovery of new points of view, perspectives, and possibilities for action, along with learning themes and learning goals for further development of one's professional expertise. That is experienced as a relief and eases the often-unconscious burden of practice.

Even for the experienced coach, such questions and needs can be a reason to seek supervision. Within the agreed-upon session time, the coach supervisor is available to assist the coach with any issues they are struggling with in their practice. The coach supervisor helps them gain insight into how they actually

⁶ We use the phrase taking supervision instead of the usual receiving supervision to emphasize the coach's responsibility for their own professional quality.

⁷ In this publication, the term client can refer to the coachee as the direct client of the coaching, or to the organization in a sponsoring or commissioning role. Consequently, the meaning the reader attaches to client depends on its context.

⁸ For the sake of readability, unless not applicable, we use the plural they/them/their as gender neutral pronouns.

function in practice. With an eye for identifying pitfalls and opportunities, the coach supervisor focuses on improving the coach's professional functioning. The results of this process are often unexpected: practicing becomes better, more responsible, and more aware, and requires less energy. That translates into better results for coachees and greater client satisfaction.

Coach supervision enhances the quality of the coaching delivered

Coach supervision aims to develop the coach's expertise and to organize and carry out their work with ability and responsibly. It encourages coaches to become (more) aware of how they perform their work, what they could improve, and what this requires of them in terms of personal and professional development. Supervision also encourages them to put their insights, gained through the supervision process, into practice. That leads to effective monitoring and enhancement of the quality of the coaching they provide.

Therefore, professional coach associations make supervision a necessary condition for their accreditation of coach training programs. However, even after training, supervision is indispensable for both novice and experienced coaches to remain aware of their blind spots, dysfunctional reaction patterns, perceptual and meaning-giving biases, and shadow sides that inevitably arise in their work.

Taking supervision offers practicing coaches a confidential relationship in a time-space to reflect on what they encounter in their work, and how they perform it. Furthermore, they can face and unravel the puzzles that occupy them, investigate which undesirable behavioral reactions are related to their issues and how, and gain clarity on the issues underlying the themes and behaviors of their coachees and clients. In that way, they optimize their methodical conduct and become able to meet professional standards. That benefits not only the coaches themselves, but also their coachees and clients directly. Ultimately, it contributes to the recognition of coaching as a professionally executed people-oriented service. The time a coach allows themselves to take supervision thus pays for itself more than twice over.

Relevance and usefulness of this book

This handbook offers insight into how coach supervision, as a practical methodology, is evolving and can be practiced. In addition to presenting research and theory development results on coach supervision, this book provides models and tools that coach supervisors can use in their work. Practical suggestions and illustrations from practice make coach supervision concrete and accessible. For the user, it will prove its value as a reference work for further deepening one's own practice and underpinning theoretical understanding.

The numerous sources consulted provide the reader with a foundation for further study, inspiration for substantiation through focused research, and guidance for use in one's own supervision practice.

Reader-users

The information is usable for a broad group of reader-users:

- All types of practicing coaches, in and outside organizations. Supervision focuses on the quality assurance and development of their work in practice.
- Clients for coaching in or on behalf of organizations, be it in the position of an HR or Learning and Development department employee, or as a line manager.
- Coordinators of organization-internal coaches and mentors.
- Training programs for coaches and their trainers/lecturers.
- Supervisors who (aspire to) supervise coaches.
- All types of professional supervisors, including supervisors in fields other than coaching.
- Training programs for supervision and their trainers/lecturers.
- Professional associations of coaches.
- Professional associations of supervisors.
- Professional coaching providers.
- Researchers of coaching and supervision.

A look at the contents

Chapter 1 surveys the international development of coach supervision. It provides an international perspective on the development of coach supervision, the policies of coaches' professional associations, and the training of coach supervisors.

Chapter 2 provides insight into the concept of supervision as it has been developed specifically for coaching, and as the literature on coach supervision advocates.

Following this theoretical exploration, based on research and concept development, subsequent chapters focus on aspects of coach supervision practice. Beginning with Chapter 3, which outlines the themes for which coach supervision is essential, the text continues in Chapter 4 with how a coach supervisor can methodically supervise coach-supervisees on them.

Because coaching in practice has many differentiations, supervisors need to be aware of them and, if possible, familiar with them. Chapter 5 maps this out and clarifies what that requires in terms of specific expertise from supervisors.

Coach supervision is carried out not only with various types of coaches but also in different ways and forms. Coach-supervisees and coach supervisors can make choices about this by mutual agreement. Chapter 6 highlights this and describes