







101 Coaching Supervision Techniques, Approaches, Enquiries and Experiments.

Eclectic Chapter: Technique 29 (pages 84 -86)

Edited by Michelle Lucas and Published by Routledge 2020.

Seven Conversations

Written by David Clutterbuck

Where can this be used?				Typical Level of Supervisee Experience Required	
					
Individual Supervision		Peer Supervision	Independent Reflection	All levels	

When is this used?

This approach can be useful where either the supervisee or the supervisor has a sense that they are 'missing something'. Additionally, useful when the client's engagement seems good and yet the coach is questioning the client's progress.

What is the approach?

Here the notion is that there are many more conversations to explore than the coaching dialogue itself. Further, each conversation may hold useful information about the coaching dynamic.

According to Lancer et al (2016) the seven conversations are:

1. The client's conversation with themselves as they prepare
2. The coach's conversation with themselves as they prepare
3. The unspoken conversation that takes place in the client's head during the session
4. The actual conversation between the client and the coach
5. The unspoken conversation that takes place in the coach's head during the session
6. The client's conversation with themselves as they reflect
7. The coach's conversation with themselves as they reflect

Step 1: Enquire whether exploring what was happening beyond the coaching session itself would be of interest.

Step 2: With consent, the supervisor then evaluates which of the other six conversations might be a useful start point. Note: Steps 3-6 could be done in any order.

Step 3: Consider what the supervisee was thinking but not saying as they worked with their client. Enquire what might have been preventing that expression.



Step 4: Invite the supervisee to use their 'best guess' as to what their client might have been thinking but was not yet prepared to voice and why.

Step 5: Consider what the supervisee knows about how their client prepares and/or reflects on their session. The supervisor probes to clarify what is truly known and what is an assumption.

Step 6: Explore how the supervisee prepares for and reflects on work with this particular client, drawing attention to how similar or different this is to other clients.

Step 7: Pause for the supervisee to reflect on how this exploration is moving their understanding of their initial supervision question.

Step 8: As appropriate the supervisor may offer observation on any of the conversations where information is missing. This could be an opportunity for a line of enquiry at the next coaching session.

How to work with the approach...

A supervisor is unlikely to use this approach from the start, rather to use it as a reference point when noticing that there is an absence of 'grit' in the supervision. The exploration could be done explicitly, sharing the model with the supervisee. Alternatively, the supervisor may hold the seven conversations as a mental map to inform their exploration.

What else might need attention?

This approach often highlights that the supervisee has overlooked what is expected of the client outside of the session. This is an opportunity for stronger contracting on what responsibilities each party has in order to make the coaching a success. Sometimes it highlights an expectation that change needs to happen 'in the room'. They may need reassurance and a reality check that often great insight for clients comes when the coach is not present. If this notion is bothersome for a supervisee it may be helpful for them to do some personal work on their desire for influence and control.

A word of caution.

The supervisee may not have explored with their client what happens before and after a session. This could lead to the supervisee answering "I don't know" to many questions. For the less experienced or less confident supervisee this could easily lead to a sense of incompetence. The tone of the supervisor's voice will determine whether the enquiry is experienced as one of curiosity or of judgement.

What other uses are there for this approach?

Provided that the model is understood by participants it can be used with a group. However, given its emergent nature this can be awkward to facilitate. Often when a line of enquiry emerges a deep dive is needed, and the danger is that whilst one person becomes deeply engaged the remainder disengage.



The model can be useful for coaching clients – the principle of drawing attention to what is being thought about beyond an interaction itself has application to many leadership issues. The same words of caution are as relevant for coaching clients as for supervisees.

Reference:

Lancer, N., Clutterbuck, D. and Megginson, D. (2016) *Techniques for Coaching and Mentoring*, 2nd ed, London: Routledge.