



101 Coaching Supervision Techniques, Approaches, Enquiries and Experiments.

Systemic Chapter: Technique 87 (pages 295-297)

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Working with the Shadow

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Where can this be used?				Typical Level of Supervisee Experience Required
 Individual Supervision	 Group Supervision	 Peer Supervision		 Experienced Supervisees Only

When is this used?

This enquiry would likely be used part way through a programme of supervision, or annually to keep sharp. It is typically offered as preparation for a supervision session, or to reflect on themes at the start of a supervision session. It is particularly useful where an existing relationship has plateaued or where the supervisor senses that the supervisee avoids (or excludes) certain themes.

What is the enquiry?

Our shadow can be something forbidden, taboo, or unwelcome...and it can equally be our talents, ways of being, artistry, intellect, athleticism. A set of questions is offered prior to a supervision session, to highlight what they tend *not* to bring to supervision, either consciously or unconsciously. They may then make a conscious choice about what to bring to supervision this time.

Step 1: The supervisor offers questions such as:

- What is in me that I don't want to own?
- What makes me unique, compared to other coaches?
- What would I not want my clients to know?
- What is sabotaging my efforts?
- What haven't I brought to supervision?
- Therefore, what will I bring to supervision this time that is really challenging for me?

Step 2: The supervisee(s) reflects on the questions.



Step 3: The supervisor asks the supervisee to reflect on the experience of working with the questions. “What was that like?”. This gives an indication of how ready they are to explore in Step 4.

Step 4: The supervisor asks what insights the supervisee(s) has had, and what they would like to bring to supervision. This can be as light-touch or as deep as the supervisee(s) wishes to go. For example, you may go deep into exploring each question, and as a result of saying things out loud, the supervisee may get additional insights. Or you may simply get straight into the supervision question that has arisen.

How to work with the enquiry...

Supervisees often bring issues that are front of mind to their supervision. This approach works best where the supervisee has time to prepare. As such the questions might be provided as part of the joining instructions for a session. Step 2 can be illuminating as there is often significant impact for the supervisee simply through facing these questions. They tend to enable supervisees to go deeper, to discover some untapped potential for themselves and their clients.

In a group setting, the supervisor might ask each person in turn to share their perspectives to Steps 3 and 4. Where that feels overly challenging, start with a discussion in pairs, before sharing with the whole group. Or, the supervisor may choose to simply have them share with the group what this has prompted them to bring to supervision.

A word of caution.

Be sure that you pay attention to the psychological contract so that there is enough trust and intimacy between you and your supervisee(s) and between supervisees to allow for the vulnerability that this exercise may expose. It can be tough to admit to some of these things – and perhaps this is why they have not already been brought to supervision. For some, recognising their strengths is difficult; for others, it is the things they dislike about themselves. Empower your supervisee(s) to choose how much they wish to disclose at this time – while also challenging them to stand at the edge of their comfort zone or just outside of it.

Be willing to explore your own shadows so you don't get caught in your own projections and transference; parallel process can then be used in service of the learning for the supervisee.

What other uses are there for this enquiry?

Look for patterns so that you can tailor these questions to create balance in their supervision. For example, where someone seems overly self-critical, add a question like “What well-deserved praise is hard to hear?” or “What passion would you like to explore, but something holds you back?”.

The purpose here is to shine a light on aspects of themselves that they do not want to look at, but where it could be useful to their clients to do so.

With care this could also be used for some coaching clients. The coach would need to be highly skilled and the coaching client comfortable with their own vulnerability.



Acknowledgement:

Prentice, K. (2013) Me and my shadow. In: Oxford Brookes University, *3rd International Supervision Conference*, 20th June 2013. Wheatley Campus.