



In my keynote address last October at the annual Henley Business School Coaching Conference, entitled 'The Corporate Coaching Market – How to Survive and Thrive', I reviewed a number of areas that can help executive coaches to develop their practices.

I drew on hard data from the most recent two reports in my *Ridler Report* research series (which analyses trends in the use of coaching in large organisations), and my personal experience of key factors that helped me to survive in the early years and thrive in the later years of my nearly 20 years of practising as an executive coach in the corporate market.

The topics covered in my presentation included getting onto

Safety net

Building on his recent keynote address on how coaches can thrive in the corporate market, Clive Mann highlights the value of good supervisors to the coach as well as the client



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supervision to the coach, I will first consider evidence, from the *Ridler Report*, of how the corporate coaching market perceives the role of supervision in coaching delivery. Second, I will consider the stance of the professional coaching body I belong to, the Association for Professional Executive Coaching and Supervision (APECS), towards supervision.

VALUE OF SUPERVISION

The *6th Ridler Report* found that the need for coaches to be supervised is overwhelmingly recognised in the UK (most participating organisations in the research were UK-based).

As Figure 1, page 30 shows, 88% of organisational sponsors of coaching agree with the statement, ‘Supervision is a fundamental requirement for any professional executive coach’.

A senior organisational sponsor of coaching from a leading professional services firm, interviewed during the research, commented, “Coachees put themselves in a vulnerable position when they are being coached. Supervision helps coaches to keep on the right side of boundaries, for example being clear about what material arising in the coaching is

theirs versus what is the coachee’s. It is not possible to do this without supervision.”

However (and somewhat worryingly), less than half (47%) of organisations surveyed were confident that all their coaches were in supervision. In addition, anecdotal evidence from interviews suggested that most organisations aren’t monitoring coaches’ use of supervision.

In a case study in the *6th Ridler Report*, Civil Service Learning expressed its belief that supervision plays a central role in coaches’ ongoing development, giving the coach ‘a supportive developmental space where their “world view” as a coach can evolve’. The organisation stated, “Supervision is seen as an effective safety net, enabling coaches who find themselves challenged in various ways by their client relationships to work out how to move forward. They may feel stuck or out of options with a coachee, or their work with a coachee may be triggering unhelpful emotional patterns in them, or they may be concerned that a boundary is being crossed in the coaching relationship. In such situations, supervision is seen as the central means to ground the coach.”

APECS’S APPROACH

APECS takes a distinctively unequivocal stance to supervision. Its commitment to members’ use of supervision is illustrated by its requirement that

preferred supplier lists, winning chemistry meetings, delivering value for clients, fees for coaching senior leaders and the value of a good supervisor. The latter was one of the areas of my presentation which gave me most cause for reflection. It occurred to me that it’s not just the client who benefits from the increased safety, reliability and consistency of service from a coach who is in regular supervision. Supervision also gives immense value to the coach.

Before I look at the value of

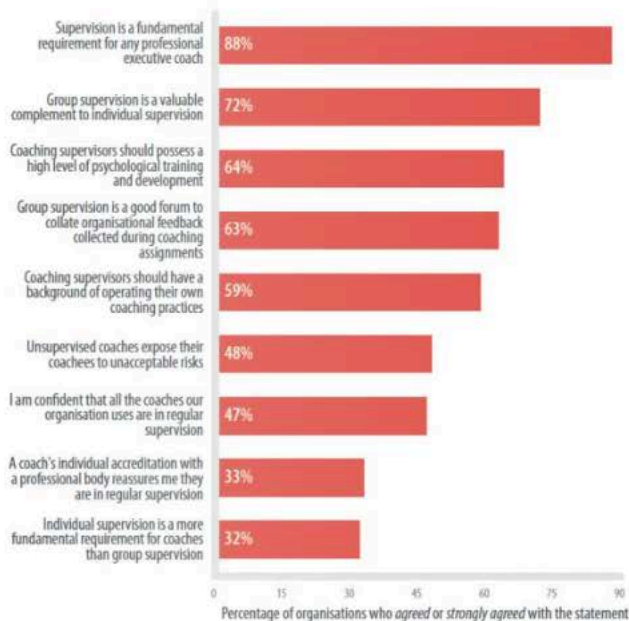


Fig 1: Coaches' use of supervision in their coaching practices

Source: 6th Ridler Report

supervisors of their Accredited Executive Coaches provide APECS with an annual report, offering assurance that coaches are working ethically and to an acceptable standard.

An extract from the *APECS Ethical Guidelines* illustrates further its stance: "In ongoing and regular supervision, each Executive Coach will discuss confidentially their thoughts, feelings and reactions to their work at all levels: clients, relationships, interventions, contracts, impasses, joys, upsets, etc. Supervision will be a forum for reflection on coaching work, where supervisees will take responsibility for their own learning."

VALUE OF SUPERVISION

In essence, the corporate market is commissioning executive coaches to help its executives become more self-aware and efficacious leaders. This conclusion is borne out by a key finding of the *2013 Ridler Report*: when organisational sponsors of coaching

were asked to rate the importance of a variety of senior level coach qualities and abilities, the most highly rated quality was the ability to "work insightfully to raise the coachee's awareness of their ingrained patterns of behaviour".

It seems self-evident to me that the endeavour to do the latter can only benefit from the support of a skilled supervisor, helping the coach reflect on the task.

I count myself lucky to have been introduced to a highly experienced and psychologically astute coaching supervisor in the very early stages of setting up as an executive coach. My supervisor made a commitment, over a number of years, to support me in my vision of delivering a high quality coaching service to my client base of senior leaders and their teams in the corporate world.

My supervisor's insights into my clients' underlying needs from me, and how I could design and deliver

psychologically robust one-to-one and team coaching interventions in a way which senior corporate executives would receive well, enabled me to progress much more quickly in my professional work than would otherwise have been possible.

I think my training as a UKCP registered psychotherapist, and subsequent experience at the Tavistock Clinic and Tavistock Institute, meant I started my career as an executive coach with prior experience of the benefits of using supervision. I didn't struggle to see the point of supervision, in the way I believe a minority of coaches starting out do.

In addition to individual supervision, I joined a number of supervision groups over the years, which gave me invaluable insights into how other coaches practise, and feedback on my practice from those coaches.

In summary, I subscribe to the belief that no matter how experienced you are as an executive coach, you can never be so advanced that you cannot benefit from the reflection on your practice which supervision offers.

Clive Mann is an executive coach and managing director of Ridler & Co. He has nearly 20 years' experience of coaching senior leaders and their teams in commercial organisations, and is the author of the Ridler Report.

FIND OUT MORE

- For a copy of Mann's keynote slides, email: info@ridlerandco.com
- The *2013 Ridler Report* (free) and the *6th Ridler Report* can be found at: www.ridlerandco.com
- *Coaching at Work* readers are entitled to a 30% discount on the price of the *6th Ridler Report*. To claim the discount, write 'Coaching at Work' in the box on the order form titled, 'How did you hear about the Ridler Report?'