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# **GOLD RUSH COACHING SUPERVISION**

## **PROFESSIONAL COACHING AND THE DANGERS OF COACHING SUPERVISION**

**VIKKI BROCK**



Let's face it, I am an American coach writing from the perspective of coach mentoring and supervision in the United States of America (USA) and as prescribed by the International Coach Federation ([ICF](#)). This perspective can be in sharp contrast to the European and UK perspectives where the major professional body appears to be the European Mentoring and Coaching Council ([EMCC](#)) followed by the Association of Coaches ([AC](#)).

### **HOW DO COACH MENTORING AND COACHING SUPERVISION RELATE?**

To look more closely at the distinctions and similarities between mentoring for coaches and coaching supervision, I will use the ICF as an example. Since the mid-1990s, coaching has used “mentors” to assist coaches in growing their skills, building their businesses, developing their foundations, preparing for certification, and reflecting on experiences. On March 25, 2010, ICF (2010) defined a form of mentor coaching, for credentialing purposes only, specifically:

*“For purposes of Credentialing, mentor coaching means an applicant being coached on their coaching skills rather than coaching on practice building, life balance, or other topics unrelated to the development of an applicant’s coaching skill.”*

This ICF definition applies primarily to credential applicants who have not been trained by an accredited coach training program, where the provision of observation and feedback to the coach in training would already been assessed. This specific form of mentoring is also required for renewal of the introductory Associate Credential Coach (ACC) credentials where a minimum of 60 hours of coach specific training is required.

Throughout the coaching profession, when credentials such as these are attained, coaches continue to mentor students and experienced coaches in the areas of credential preparation, professional and personal development, business development, and other areas (including reflective practice). In fact, until recently, in the USA the term “coaching supervision” had evolved into “mentoring for credential purposes only” as a way to distinguish it from more traditional forms of mentoring.

ICF (2012) further delineates mentor coaching from coaching supervision as:

*“One area of confusion around the concept of coaching supervision is about the differences in terminology, between supervision and mentoring.”*

*(Currently, ICF defines Mentor Coaching as coaching for the development of one's coaching, rather than reflective practice, coaching for personal development or coaching for business development, although those aspects may happen very incidentally in the coaching for development of one's coaching.) Having a clear definition of coaching supervision is important to help differentiate coach supervision from Mentor Coaching as defined by the ICF."*

As this is the case, the ICF definition defines a specific type of mentor coaching and is not inclusive of all 'mentor coaching' that is used for coach development. The proponents of coaching supervision argue on the other hand that this is the only form of mentor coaching and thus there is a need for "coaching supervision" to meet the other needs. The current policy outlined on the [ICF website](#) states:

*"Coaching Supervision is distinct from Mentor Coaching for Credentialing."*

There is no disagreement on this statement. However coaching supervision is NOT distinct from mentor coaching as defined within the profession. As early as 2005, Bachkirova,

Stevens and Willis (2005) stated "Coaching Supervision is a formal process of professional support which ensures continuing development of the coach and effectiveness of his/her coaching practice through interactive reflection, interpretative evaluation and the sharing of expertise." Hawkins (2009) describes the three elements of coaching supervision as:

1. Coaching the coach on their coaching
2. Mentoring the coach on their development in the profession
3. Providing an external perspective to ensure quality of practice.

The above definitions and elements describe some, but not all of what mentor coaching encompasses. Same for the ICF (2012) description of coaching supervision, which is only a portion of how mentor coaching is described: "Coaching Supervision is the interaction that occurs when a coach periodically brings his or her coaching work experiences to a coaching supervisor in order to engage in reflective dialogue and collaborative learning for the development and benefit of the coach and his or her clients." Mentor coaching includes credential preparation, professional and personal

***"Coaching turns the way that we learn things upside down. For thousands of years learning has been primarily hierarchical: teacher to students, a relationship that can be easily exploited. Coaching is a non-hierarchical and a highly respectful relationship where the coach asks questions rather than supplies answers. The coach is there to bring forth the client's hidden brilliance. It is a beautiful, marvelous relationship."***

~ Arjuna Addagh ~  
Coach and author  
[Biography](#)



development, business development, and other areas (including reflective practice).

In 2012 ICF posted a position statement on Coaching Supervision (ICF, 2012) which constituted a significant change in the purpose of their credentialing programs. In 2014 (ICF, 2014) they then changed the long-standing policy on the way Continuing Coach Education (CCE) units could be used to allow serving as a coach mentor and/or supervisor to qualify for credential renewal. This new policy on CCEs appears to put the mentor/supervisor above the need for continuing education requirements, which is anomalous. ICF Assistant Executive Director George Rogers (G Rogers email September 26, 2014) confirmed that, at the July 2014 ICF Global Board meeting, the Board reviewed and “approved phase 1 of a proposal that had been developed by the ICF Australasia Supervision Task Force” (led by Tammy Turner, a certified coaching supervisor and graduate of the Coaching Supervision Academy).

Further, in a July 14, 2014 [video-presentation](#) (Goldvarg, 2014) recorded at Royal Roads University in Victoria, British Columbia, ICF Global President Damian Goldvarg (a newly-certified Coaching Supervisor at the time) clearly stated an intention to make Coaching Supervision mandatory for ICF credential renewal within three years. He later said he misspoke, and supports ICF website (ICF, 2014) which states:

*“In the interest of providing some access to Coaching Supervision in a world which is not yet globally ready to offer sufficient numbers of specifically trained coaching supervisors for the demand that is anticipated, ...”*

**“The EMCC Code of Ethics requires that all members have regular supervision. It is described as:**

- **normative—the supervisor accepts (or more accurately shares with the supervisee) responsibility for ensuring that the supervisee’s work is professional and ethical, operating within whatever codes, laws and organisational norms apply;**
- **formative—the supervisor acts to provide feedback or direction that will enable the supervisee to develop the skills, theoretical knowledge, personal attributes and so on that will mean the supervisee becomes an increasingly competent practitioner;**
- **supportive (Proctor calls this restorative)—the supervisor is there to listen, support, confront the supervisee when the inevitable personal issues, doubts and insecurities arise – and when client issues are ‘picked up’ by the supervisee”**

~ Robert Garvey ~  
Professor of Business Education  
York St. John University

[Source](#)

There appears to be a conflict of interest given that the former ICF Global Board President and the leader of the task force upon which the board based their recent coaching supervision changes are both certified coaching supervisors advocating a specific approach related their own qualifications. Additionally, it appears that the form of supervision used as the inspiration for this approach is derived from clinical psychology/therapy, which involves supervision all the time for all coaches. It does not make sense that coaches should be facing the same or more stringent, longer-term supervision requirements that are required of registered clinical psychologists (Lisa Mallett, 2015).

Supervision is the 'new' term for what mentoring has always been. Requiring mentoring (or supervision) for students and coaches going for certification is beneficial for their growth and development. However,

surely it is not something to be controlled or mandated by professional associations.

## CHRONOLOGY OF COACHING SUPERVISION

Coaching supervision has its roots in the model of supervision used in the therapeutic disciplines of psychology and social work. It operates from this borrowed therapeutic model, and is a technique unsupported by evidence-based research within the coaching field. The "Coaching Supervision" agenda appears to be predominantly driven by certain (some) coaching psychologists/ psychotherapists, coaching supervision training providers, coaching supervisors, and coaching supervision associations publicly dedicated to making Coaching Supervision a mandatory standard of practice in the coaching. In fact, the EMCC requires coaching supervision to become a member.

***"I agree [with other comments on this [ICF blog](#)] that the use of the words Supervision and Mentoring feel arbitrary and contrary to what we have been doing as ICF credentialed coaches/coach trainers as well as compared to the broader definitions out in the worlds we work in.***

***Mentoring in both the coaching and leadership worlds has always been about a more experienced professional guiding someone new to a field or aspect of business. Mentoring can be about helping people master particular skills. It is also about exploring context where the skills are applied. To narrow the focus to only skill-building feels awkward.***

***Supervision has always been about overseeing skill application and is narrowly defined through observation and feedback. I would think this word would clearly question the overlap coaching has with therapy. I agree with Patrick [Williams] that 'Consultation' would be a better word."***



~ Marcia Reynolds ~  
Former President of the ICF, executive coach, author, and hiker  
[Biography](#)

Coaching supervision first appeared in early 2000 in the UK during the same period the coaching psychology sub-discipline of psychology was formed. Evidence of a “coaching supervision” agenda abounds. The ICF, for example, is being advised on the subject of coaching supervision by individuals who are certified coaching supervisors, who have graduated from the Coaching Supervision Academy, and have an interest in seeing coaching supervision become a mandatory requirement.

A Dublin university, offering a coaching supervision training program (UCD, 2014), states that:

*“Supervision of coaching is increasing in demand as professional bodies such as the EMCC, AC and ICF are making it a requirement for ethical practice and necessary for individual accreditation. Organisations are also insisting that coaches they take on have in place proper supervision arrangements.”*

These claims are not yet true for the ICF and it is not clear what evidence has been used as the bases of these marketing messages. This kind of misinformation muddies the waters.

## IMPLICATIONS (UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES) FOR COACHING’S FUTURE

What is happening here is “Professional bodies claim that supervision, as one of their rules, reassures potential clients or sponsors and ensures quality control. (Garvey, 2014). The coaching supervision movement is spreading globally through a concentrated marketing effort. These coaching supervision proponents are lobbying coaching professional associations, coaches, and prospective employers of coaches to embrace coaching supervision (or “non-clinical supervision” that stems from a therapeutic model).

This agenda has far-reaching and negative implications on a multitude of fronts. This trend now threatens to:

- ☑ Blur the carefully drawn lines/distinctions the ICF has drawn between the type of coaching practice covered by ICF credentials and related, but different forms of practice such as psychotherapy;
- ☑ Place the coaching industry at risk of broad government intervention via increased regulation and possible licensure;

***“The reason why we need a supervisor is because we need another person who can notice what we are unaware of, and we need them to do that in a way that means we become more self-aware, so that the supervision process is developing our own super-vision, or meta-perspective. To achieve this, the super-vision of the supervisor may of course be needed but this is an enabling rather than an outcome objective.”***

~ Julie Hay ~

British co-founder of the EMCC, author, therapist

[Contact](#)

- ☑ Create onerous and expensive burdens for all coaches, especially for those coaches who are self-employed, independent business people who would have to pay for the cost of their own supervision; and
- ☑ Ultimately control the coaching industry through effecting changes that could eventually limit the supply of coaching professionals, thereby creating higher incomes for those who influence and control both how many, and who, would be allowed to enter the profession.

A key risk associated with the Coaching Supervision agenda is the blurring of carefully drawn distinctions the ICF has made between the coaching that is credentialed by the ICF, and forms of practice applied in other parts of the world where there are differences in the regulatory frameworks for mental health services where the blurring of these boundaries is less of an issue. As this is the case, the psychology, or therapy based models of “supervision” activity are highly inappropriate for widespread application or adoption across the coaching industry. It is important to bear in mind that the framing of the service being supplied is not therapeutic in nature and where providers do not supply

services to vulnerable client populations. I believe that coaching services focused on clients who are “creative, resourceful and whole” (ICF, 2000) according to the mandate of the ICF, do not require the same type of supervision that is applied within a clinical context.

### **CONSIDERATIONS THAT NEED TO BE MADE BEFORE CLINICAL MODELS ARE IMPORTED**

It is also the case that the application of clinical models of supervision should not be conducted without careful consideration of the type of practice and context. As Jeff Auerbach, PhD Psychology, MCC, President of College of Executive Coaching and Past ICF Vice-President, states (email dated February 18, 2015):

*With over 500,000 mental health professionals in the US (versus approximately 20,000 coaches) I think “supervision” in a helping type of field equals the type of supervision where the supervisor assumes legal responsibility. I think it is rather naïve for coaches to think that they can redefine “supervision” to mean something other than how it is commonly used in the other helping fields. Having two licenses in helping*

***“By its very nature, coaching makes considerable demands upon coaches who may become over-involved, ignore some important point or have undermining doubts about their own abilities. It is difficult, if not sometimes impossible, to be objective about one’s coaching and the opportunity to discuss the coaching work in confidence with a suitable person is invaluable. Good coaching also requires the coach to relate practice to theory and theory to practice. Supervision can help the coach to evolve practice and in this sense is one aspect of continued training.”***

~ New Zealand School of Coaching~

[Source](#)



*professions myself and having had over 6,000 hours of “supervision” pre-licensure, I find that the type of supervision that most mental health professionals go through is actually very similar, if not identical, to what one of the major coaching supervisor authors, Erik de Haan (2012), describes in Supervision In Action: A Relational Approach To Coaching And Consulting.”*

*The Wiley International Handbook of Clinical Supervision* (Watkins and Milne, 2014) cites research conclusions from the past 15 years (three studies) showing that not all state clinical supervision can clearly demonstrate quantitative, empirical benefits—not to the supervisor from their supervision training, not to the coaching supervisee, and not to the supervisee’s clients. Further, supervision is being questioned for the therapy field in Canada: On the one hand, supervision is central to a clinician or counselors’ learning and practice. On the other, the contribution it makes to a client’s wellbeing is assumed and is not always tested. Matching the practice with evidence within the specific context of application is clearly important. So, if there were to be appropriate application, then there would need to be a compelling raft of

evidence based practice and research to assess the efficacy of the models applied to the type of coaching championed by the ICF.

Recent coaching research by de Haan & Page (2013) finds that the relationship, rather than technique, most affects the success of the client engagement. Linda Page, Ph.D., MCC, and President of the Adler School of Professional Studies in Toronto, continues (email dated February 28, 2015) by asking for ‘due diligence’ and relying on valid data to “know about the different elements of supervision [and mentoring], how they are experienced by coaches, and what the outcome is of those experiences.”

The trend within coaching to require supervision for all coaches is, therefore, misguided and fraught with dangers for the entire profession. From the earliest days, coaching has been a self-regulated profession, successfully fighting off attempts to regulate it by government and outside professional entities. Mentor coaching, in its broad definition, has provided and continues to provide the reflective opportunities that are purported to be provided by coaching supervision.

***“The CIPD (2006) issued a comprehensive report on coaching supervision. This report showed that the majority of coaches and those who provided coaching within organisations agreed that all coaches should have regular supervision. However, the report found that in practice less than half of coaches had any coaching supervision and less than a quarter of organisations which used internal coaches provided access to any form of supervision.”***

~ Kim Morgan & Geoff Watts ~  
Coaches

Quote from contribution on [ICF Blog](#)  
[Biography](#)



## THE WISDOM OF OPENING PANDORA'S BOX

Finally, adopting clinical forms of supervision, using the language that applies to regulated areas of clinical practice in the USA holds significant risks for the coaching profession, as represented by the ICF. Whether or not coaching is the *de-facto* practice of psychotherapy becomes less clear if practices applied to the legal control of therapeutic practice become mandated for all coaches. From the creation of the first credentialing program in the mid-1990s efforts have been made to keep the distinctions between these types of practice clear and to “reinforce professional coaching as a distinct and self-regulating profession.” (ICF, 2005)

Dr. Auerbach (email dated February 18, 2015) consulted with Eric Harris, JD who believed that:

*“A US court would see coaching supervision, because of the similarities in the methods of the supervision process in the mental health fields, and in the similarities between coaching and*

*counselling, as a form of consultation that would align with what is commonly known as the type of supervision that licensed mental health professionals experience, which is defined by the American Psychological Association as the supervisor having authority and legal liability. In the mental health fields this legal liability of the supervisor leads to many people not wanting to take on the responsibility of supervising others, hence causing a serious difficulty for aspiring professionals to get their required supervision.”*

Linda Page identifies a type of psychological supervision that she calls “developmental supervision”, which is very relevant to coaches. However, in an email dated February 28, 2015, she states “I believe this is the type of supervision that is captured by the ‘mentor coach’ designation.”

Coaching supervisors stand to make a great deal of money from providing coaching supervision. In a profession that has seen many trained and certified coaches unable to make a



***“This whole idea of supervision is misguided. Who supervises the supervisors? Is this another monetized certification? I train all coaches and myself to ‘consult’ with trusted well trained and experienced colleagues regarding their clients and themselves. I suggest we call this process Coaching Consultation and then require 20 hours or so as part of continuing education...”***

~ Patrick Williams ~

Pioneer of coaching

Excerpt of comment of [ICF Blog](#)

[Biography](#)

[Twitter](#)

living, since the global financial crises, this added requirement may cause even more coaches to leave the field. Some argue that supervision (and mentoring) is actually exploitive of coaches and coaching, representing a form of ‘pyramid model’ and reinforcing the unfortunate perception that the industry’s growth is in part coaches making money from coaching other coaches who may be required to hire/pay these coaching mentors and supervisors (Carr, 2012). I say, let the market be the deciding factor—the reputation and work of effective coaches will speak for themselves, and clients will continue to be well served.

## TAKING ACTION

We need to be sensitive to the notion that professional regulation is changing, and that it is not the same in all countries. Here I have presented a North American-based perspective of coaching supervision, where government regulation is unlikely, provided that the scope and practice of coaching as defined by the ICF is not compromised. This culture shift in the coach profession to more control by professional associations through mandated supervisory practices, may lead to coaches voting with their feet.

The future of coaching as defined by the ICF can be best supported by fewer rules and requirements from professional associations and more humanism (or as Bob Garvey (2014) says, less “neofeudalistic surveillance” and more ethical and democratic way of being). Bottom line: mandatory coaching supervision doesn’t make any sense for coaches who are professionally credentialed by the ICF (and more specifically in North America).

How about using a critical friendship approach rather than supervision? Or, as the Association of Corporate Executive Coaches (ACEC) calls it “Rapid Cycle Peer-to-Peer Coaching” (CB Bowman email February 28, 2015), similar to a workable system pioneered by [Reciprocoach Coordinator Dr. Kerry Griffiths](#). What this means is a collaborative approach where coaches call on peers and/or friends when facing a challenge or want support (like writing an article, reflecting on a client situation, or exploring an issue). Mature and experienced coaches have a strong support network that provides critical friendship. For those who are training to be coaches, the existing mentoring model (which provides all of what coaching supervision purports to provide) is a solid model that is

***“...the community of practice is deeply divided with regard to beliefs about the relevance, value and forms of coaching supervision that are most appropriate for coach-mentors. There is also some ambivalence to the role played by various professional bodies seeking both to serve and control the market space.”***

~ Pauline Willis ~

U.K. editor of AMED’s *e-Organizations & People* journal

(Above quote is an excerpt from the editor’s comments about Garvey’s 2014 article)

[Twitter](#)



accepted and achieves the desired results. Perhaps we would be wise to adopt an evaluation based approach associated with our current forms of support before adopting clinically focused models that may have no relevance to the coaching we practice.

There is a growing awareness in North America that the special interest group composed of Coaching Supervision training providers, Coaching Supervisor practitioners, and two professional coach associations—all based in psychological and psychotherapy models which require “supervision” for trainees—is now dangerously confusing the distinctions between the practice of coaching and therapeutic disciplines.

Senior experienced coaches and others are concerned about the dangers of this trend toward coaching supervision. We want to keep the defined boundaries between coaching and therapeutic disciplines by:

- ☑ Maintaining the traditional inclusive definition of coach mentoring
- ☑ Recognizing the value of critical friendship also known as peer-to-peer coaching or coach consultation
- ☑ Eliminating or restricting coaching supervision to training and credential purposes only

This will ensure that coaching, as it has been defined within the ICF, remains a self-regulating profession with strong professional associations that accredit coach specific training programs and credential coaches that meet stringent educational and practice standards. Then, as with most professions, let the marketplace decide who is effective and who is not.

If you are concerned about this disturbing trend, 1) take the time to determine valid facts through due diligence and 2) make your voice heard with your professional associations. The International Coach Federation (ICF), European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), and Association for Coaches (AC) are international bodies operating in markets with different regulatory approaches. All have blanket policies in place regarding coaching supervision. If they do not fit the way your practice is framed, as is the case for the ICF in the USA, then make your voice heard, before it is too late.

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***“It might be helpful to include a broader historical perspective on coaching supervision. Taking some findings from Vikki Brock’s book, Sourcebook of Coaching History, and Leni Wildflower’s The Hidden History of Coaching, it’s important to note that coaching in both the U.K. and Australia were developed primarily by people who were actively involved in psychology, a profession with a long history of supervision. European and Australian coaching associations have long been dominated by psychologists who have taken on the coaching mantle.***

***In the U.S., in contrast, coaching was developed by persons who were more associated with the human potential movement, and had backgrounds as varied as accounting, business, and self-help, none of which are known for being associated with supervision. The pioneers who established the ICF were self-taught coaches who also came from varied backgrounds and did include at least one psychologist who was dedicated to helping other psychologists become involved in coaching. In addition, the early leaders of the ICF relied heavily on peer interaction and support to help each other strengthen their coaching practice and the early ICF conferences were dedicated to this principle. Further, the emphasis was on outcomes or results, and very little attention was paid to credentialing, accreditation, or supervision. It seems ironic that today so much ICF attention is being paid to structures, modalities and professionalization, and so little to those outcomes and results that make coaching unique among the helping professions.”***

~ Rey Carr ~

Level III Certified Peer Coach & Consultant, Peer Bulletin Editor, and Grandpa  
[Biography](#)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vikki G. Brock, Ph.D., Master Certified Coach, Executive MBA, and Peer Resources Network member Emeritus, has been in private practice as an executive leadership



coach and mentor for other coaches since 1995, following a twenty-one year corporate career. She defines coaching as ‘raising awareness, so people are at conscious choice’ and is committed to transformation at a global level. One third of her clients are

international leaders committed to making a difference in their country. The foremost subject matter expert on the roots and emergence of the coaching field, in May 2012, after six years of research, Dr. Brock published the *Sourcebook of Coaching History*. She walks her talk and enjoys coaching and consulting from her fifty-foot TriStar sailboat in Ventura, California. She can be contacted at

[coach@vikkibrook.com](mailto:coach@vikkibrook.com) or by phone: +1 805-676-4200.

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## FURTHER READING

The editors of the AMED journal want Peer Resources Network members to know that they will be able to download the entire Spring 2015 issue free [here](#). They encourage readers to make a voluntary donation by clicking on their Donate button on the inside cover of the magazine.)

## FURTHER DIALOGUE

To increase global dialogue about this issue, there are now at least three places where active discussions about this article and other contributions to the discussion about coaching supervision are taking place: The Library of Professional Coaching, Google+ and in the blog of the International Coach Federation (ICF) on this topic. To comment on this article or view other comments about this supervision issue, go to the [LPC](#), [Google+](#), or [ICF blog](#).)

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