

Coaching on the Couch

Erik de Haan looks at Peter Hawkins' and Robin Shohet's *Supervision in the Helping Professions*

I have chosen to write about *Supervision in the Helping Professions* by Peter Hawkins and Robin Shohet because this work is rightly considered to be the 'bible of supervision.' Hawkins and Shohet cover all aspects of supervision meticulously, and have generated a band of devoted followers, of which I count myself one.

The book is introduced with a quote from Juvenalis: 'Sed quis custodiet ipsos custodiet?' ['but who will take care of the carers?'] which, I feel, says it all: this is a book about coaching the coach.

The authors express the importance of this mission beautifully when they write about the fight of British miners in the 1920s for 'pit-head time' – the right to wash off the day's grime in work time rather than take it home with them.

Supervision, the authors believe, is pit-head time for those who work at the coalface of personal distress, disease and fragmentation.

Introducing the Work

It contains some radical truths about the helping professions:

- What brings us to this work is often an insufficiently processed need to be in control, or to help ourselves by projecting our own neediness onto others.
- To be supervised, coaches have to temporarily leave the luxury of 'help' for the uneasiness of 'being helped.'
- Becoming a coachee exposes our vulnerabilities and anxieties about becoming dependent, which makes supervision so keenly difficult for helpers.
- The supervisory role is felt unconsciously as an 'escape route' from being supervised: it offers the status of "super helper" or 'helper-of-helpers.'

The authors then describe professional supervision. Their process model increases the number and depth of perspectives during supervision; it also opens up simple, case-driven supervision to include the dynamics of the session itself, organisational cultures, ethics and diversity.

A personal reading

The authors discuss many issues relevant to coaching, but what fascinates me most is the work on transference – the power of unconscious messages to spread from the client into coaching, into coaching supervision, and into the supervisor.

To help us explore these fascinating phenomena, Hawkins and Shohet have devised a 'seven-eyed model' for supervision.

Supervision is not just as scary as coaching can be, it also feels even more like 'seven parallel universes' about to take off at any moment.

For me, supervising other coaches has had the greatest impact on my work as a coach. It made me more sensitive to those patterns of transference which allow supervisors to peek into the coach's practice, and allow coaches entry into the emotions of their coachees.

Why I think it's inspirational

In *Supervision in the Helping Professions*, you'll find boxes, figures and models, that help supervisors improve and learn.

For me, as a new supervisor, it was a relief to read that there are four beliefs that can get in the way of good performance and learning: 'I must be competent,' 'I must be in control,' 'I must be consistent,' and 'I must be comfortable.'

I am always grateful if I can transfer this relief into my coaching sessions, and onto my clients!

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