

THE OASIS OF SUPERVISION IN TIMES OF CRISIS

'Being Supervised: A Guide For Supervisees' has recently been revised by [Erik de Haan](#) and is now available in second revised edition with Routledge. In an interview with co-editor [Clare Manning](#), Erik shares his thoughts on the stability of the profession and how to engage authentically with the process of supervision.

What do you feel has changed in coaching supervision in the five years since this book was last revised?

The first development that springs to mind is the fact that supervision has become very acceptable and supported in many countries where it wasn't previously. In my country, the Netherlands, for example, people in many clinical professions, certainly in organisational professions, went to 'intervision' – which is a kind of group supervision without a supervisor, where you help each other. This is not the same: there's nobody signing anybody off, there's no real rigour. And so that rigour of supervision is now much more accepted in the Netherlands and more widely in Europe.

For me the main example is the USA, though. Back in 2015, when I first launched the book in English, there wasn't much supervision in America to speak of, except in the social work and therapy professions – and that has completely turned around. They have a big training centre there, the CSA, and the ICF now recognises not just their own mentors, as they call them, but also supervisors explicitly. In terms of the practice of supervision, I don't think that much has changed. There's always new research and new methodologies. Maybe there's

also more understanding now for how hard it is for supervisees, how vulnerable and courageous they need to be.

You describe supervision as a journey of self-discovery fuelled by uncertainty and insecurity. What are your thoughts on how we get out of our own way in supervision so that we can make the most of the process?

I had a session today where someone experienced high emotion in the group, but they stayed and they worked it through. There's also an element where you shouldn't be working with somebody if you don't feel a good chemistry, trust or attachment. So, on the one hand, you can be selective at the front end as that's important, but on the other hand, once you have committed to work with the supervisor, you need to work things through and become more and more open.

I'm also thinking about the fact that supervision often starts during training, and it's something that you must go to. You often can't choose the group you are in or the supervisor you are with. That makes it harder. Whereas later, in the marketplace, you can choose your supervisor yourself and that's very helpful.

You talk about the importance of reflective practice and the significance of working emergently. What are your thoughts on the place of both in supervision?

In my experience, supervisees tend to settle into their own preferred way to prepare for every session. Some of them take me through a long list, while others just arrive and talk associatively. What I have found is that the first category of people, after a number of sessions, say, okay, well, this session I don't have so much and there's nothing going wrong. Now that could actually be one of the fruits of supervision: that they learn to handle lots of things by themselves and are self-supervising. And then they ask whether we can skip a session, make it shorter or have fewer sessions. Although I agree that fewer sessions might be a good idea, I also encourage them to stay with the session, not to walk away so soon, and to see what comes up or review a little bit how we have been working together. You usually go from one thing to the other and you still have a very valuable session.

I've also said to a few supervisees: if you don't have a lot going on why don't you bring your dream from the previous night to the session – that's usually very enlightening. Biographical background or dreams provide a backdrop against which we can achieve more depth when reverting to cases from practice. In the book we use reflective tasks and biographical questions to help readers create a rich canvas behind their supervision. I ask similar questions in my practice as a supervisor.

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You mention the power of endings and the importance of parting ways. As a supervisee, how do you know when it's time to move on?

That's a tough question. All clients are different. I've learned through my psychotherapy training that you need to start talking about the ending when you're about halfway through a commission. So, when an individual starts to talk about potentially ending the supervision, I assume that we might be just over halfway through. If I can see that somebody is moving into a different profession or that they have one more decade to practise, then I might say: why don't you do that decade with another supervisor? So the first hints towards an ending can come from either of us.

Then I try to be patient in terms of what our end date is. In longer-term individual supervision it may be more than a year later because it takes some time to think about endings and continuations, and the ambivalence surrounding them. Then you start talking about it more and you realise a coming-of-age feeling, of a mature person maturing further by leaving you, and that feels quite nice. Yet sometimes it can also be painful. There can be a lot of hurt and grief in the ending because somebody is really very attached to you. And after years of working together, somebody doesn't want to hear me suggest that it might be time to maybe look for another supervisor. So, I notice I am slowly getting better at talking about the ending with most supervisees.

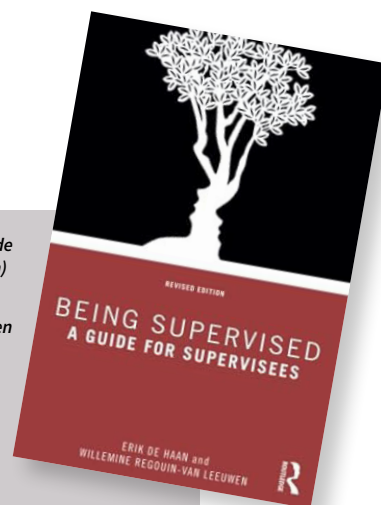
What are your thoughts on supervision in times of conflict and crisis?

I think supervision is a signing off of the practice of another person, but underneath that it's holding the other person in a safe space so that they can bring the grime or stress from their work to a neutral and reflective environment. So, in times of crises of leadership, such as the ones we are experiencing currently in many areas – especially in the areas of climate change, war and so on – then we need more supervision because coaches are exposed to more crises. Supervision is typically a profession that will be needed more in times of crisis, but should not itself be in crisis. Medics in Ukraine, for example, may get in crisis mode themselves on the front line and then of course they still need a place where they are held because they're seeing so much traumatic material. So that's where supervision comes in and it's important that it stays calm and out of crisis.

ABOUT ERIK DE HAAN



Erik de Haan is the director of the Hult Ashridge Center for Executive Coaching. He aims to support individuals in their search for what is right and just for themselves and for others in their organisations. He is a British Psychoanalytic Council registered psychodynamic psychotherapist with an MA in psychotherapy from the Tavistock Clinic; has (co-)authored more than 200 articles and 16 books; and sits on the editorial board of three journals. Erik is an Ashridge-, EMCC-, and ICF-accredited coach and supervisor.



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