

## Supervisors on the Run

„The supervisor as a coach“, „the supervisor as a motivator“, „the supervisor as a problem solver“ – the list is growing and I am getting tired of it. How about the supervisor as a chimney sweeper? As a large intestine? As a buffer? As a compass? As a nourishing primeval earth mother? Why have supervisors to be something else than supervisors all the time? What's going on? Is being a supervisor something dingy or not good enough?

The supervisor as a coach is especially en vogue. A lot of the things that are represented under this headline may be good and right. But in a professional context it's not enough to mean the right thing. One of the problems is the endless dilution of the term „coaching“ which is also fostered by the abundant proliferation in this professional field. Coaching in it's pure sense is a very specific setting, though.

The relation between coach and coachee is a particular one in at least two dimensions: there is a closeness in a humanistic, sometimes even spiritual way, but the coachee is not part of the social environment of the coach; there are no private interests at stake. Second, the coach should lead the process, but he is not do decide and to rate: the coachee remains totally free in his decisions, so there are no interests at stake with regard to content.

Funny enough that these specialties seem to be totally obvious only in one of these dimensions, or do you find a concept named „as a husband, I am mostly a coach“ attractive? High risks for getting a slap in the face if you try to define yourself as a coach in your marriage... Or think of it the other way around: at a reception, with a glass of champaign in your hand, you trust your guest with a confession, sending a warm smile towards your beloved: „My wife is my best coach!“ Will your counterpart immediately be convinced that passion is riding high in your home? Will your wife think: „god, is this sexy and romantic“? No and no.

In business life, on the other hand, people go on an on talking about „the boss as a coach“. Now as a supervisor you can see yourself in whatever way you like, but once and for all: being a coach is not an option. IT – IS – NOT – POSSIBLE. Kiss it goodbye. Won't work. Just forget about it. Basta. Supervisors going on about themselves being coaches just create confusion: confusion in themselves, because they tend to avoid dealing with the power that they just have, and therefore don't develop a way of handling it in an adequate way; confusion in their subordinates who prefer to have a real boss instead of one in disguise and wonder what they can expect from such a supervisor. Quite probably they also wonder whether their boss seriously expects them to tell him about their most private thoughts in the same way they would to someone outside the power structures they work in.

Of course the story about the authoritarian boss who knows it all and does everything better is over. But it is so obviously over that it doesn't have to be repeated all the time anymore. The relation remains a hierachic one, the position of a supervisor comes with formal power, and supervisors can't avoid to address it and find a way of dealing with it that will allow employees to see this power as legitimate.

Maybe there is one book missing in the jungle of guidebooks, after all: maybe „the supervisor as a supervisor“ has yet to be written, or „stop the planishing!“. It's a shame, after all, to planish this issue, because too many people deny their power or their competence and don't dare show themselves with these qualities. But that is in demand, because, with an attitude of responsibility and integrity you can do a lot of good using your power and competence. So take a stand and dare to lead.