COACHING FOR SOP

SUMMARY
Coaching promotes desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the social worker, making a positive impact on the organization, children and families. (Cox, Bachkirova, & Clutterbuck, 2010).

SUPERVISOR’S ROLE

- Coaching is a framework for supervision in general; a style wherein supervisors ask thoughtful questions and encourage learning and critical thinking.
- A supervisor’s ability to ask powerful questions when working through challenges (as opposed to providing concrete answers) is a key hallmark of coaching.

SKILLS-BASED COACHING MODEL

- The model can be used by supervisors to help social work practitioners integrate new learnings into practice. It includes
  1) Joint Planning (the “coaching conversation”) during which the coach and learner have a thoughtful conversation and come up with goals and a plan for integration.
  2) The worker must at some point demonstrate her/his use of the new skills with a skilled practitioner (or his/her supervisor/coach) watching so as to reflect on their use of the new skill, and then
  3) have a thoughtful, reflective conversation and receive feedback.

COACHING QUESTIONS TO PROVOKE THINKING

- Questions like the ones below are designed to elicit thoughtful responses when working through complexity and challenges. Remember, if the challenge is not technical, asking a good question in lieu of giving the answer is advisable!
  - What did you learn (from the class, experience, etc.)?
  - How would someone you admire deal with this situation?
  - What is the most challenging part of this for you?
  - Give me two options.
  - Can you think of four different ways of tackling this situation?

SETTING GOALS

- As Antoine de Saint-Exupéry said, “a goal without a plan is just a wish.”
- If a worker returns from an SOP class and wants to integrate new learning into practice, they must do some planning.
- Spend time with your worker talking about what they learned and what they want to do differently as a result of the class. What are they not doing that they want to do?

- Try asking following questions when setting goals:
  - What did you learn from class that you would like to use?
  - What’s the first step? Second? Third?
  - What would be a milestone on the way?
  - What do you need to do right now to radically increase the chance of success?

A WORD ABOUT ADVICE

- The lure of giving advice in an effort to be helpful is strong; however, advice does not allow the learner to explore their own solutions, and does not build critical thinking skills.
- Here are some tips for when to utilize coaching instead of giving advice/the answer:
  - Have you already helped the social worker with the same scenario more than one time? If yes, coach!
  - Has the social worker attended a class or other learning event? If yes, coach!
  - Is this an adaptive challenge (one that doesn’t have a concrete answer)? If yes, coach!
- The best response to a worker saying, “I don’t know,” is “Pretend like you do,” and then let your worker answer the original question.

TRY ON THE “SCARF” MODEL

- Learning SOP practices and strategies, like learning anything new, requires staff to take risks. When stakes are high and stress levels match, the supervisor can help create a learning environment by utilizing the SCARF model (Rock, 2008).
- The SCARF domains describe the social threats and rewards that are particularly impactful on behavior, attitudes and even cognition. The five domains are: 1) Status, 2) Certainty, 3) Autonomy, 4) Relatedness, and 5) Fairness.
- Tips for mitigating a threat response:
  - Share the SCARF model with your staff so that it can be used to predict possible future responses, regulate real-time responses and explain past responses.
  - Own your ability to “SCARF” staff you supervise. Even the most supportive leaders have the ability to send staff into a status threat response simply by doing even the most innocuous of things. The biggest mistake a supervisor can make is believing they won’t SCARF their staff.

REFERENCES