

## **Reflective Spiritual Practices for Professional Leaders. Psychologist Daphne Austin and Spiritual Director Pastor Michael Mayer with panel - 1 session**

**The Presenters.** Daphne Austin has worked as a psychologist in private practice for over 20 years, and is also a Consultant Psychologist and Director of Bayside Transformations, a Christian Drug and Alcohol, and Mental Health Rehabilitation Therapeutic Community. Strongly supporting the value of professional supervision for those working within 'coal-face' professions, including leaders and principals in schools, Daphne is currently working with the leadership team at Grace Primary providing professional supervision, and with other school leaders and chaplains in both the private and public school sectors. Daphne will speak to the benefits of supervision being complimentary to spiritual direction, in maintaining psychological well-being, alongside spiritual well-being, for school leadership team members, who deal with many stakeholders and their often, very challenging, issues.

Michael Mayer (a school pastor at St Peter's, Indooroopilly) first came across spiritual direction when visiting the Greek Orthodox monasteries at Mt Athos. For his final year seminary thesis he looked at direction in the desert fathers from 3<sup>rd</sup> C Egypt, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He is a member of Australian Network of Spiritual Directors, and an accredited director trained in Brisbane 2007-10. He loves it when the question, "What was that like for you?" opens up experiences rich in meaning. He is part of a contemplative men's prayer group on Monday nights, run by Centre For Men. Sometimes he is found as part of a drum circle in the year 8 or 9 lunch areas.

**Spiritual direction or Professional Supervision for school leaders:** There is wisdom in nurturing and caring for the soul of leaders. The burden of leadership is a profoundly psychological and spiritual one. Many of the incidents and decisions and judgments required of school leaders are traumatizing. In many cases the issues are of a confidential nature and much of what has been experienced and decided cannot be shared with colleagues. The leader is often hurt, angry, lonely and tired. These are factors which put them at risk. Who helps to bear this pain? How does the leader stay centred and at peace when so much of what happens is destabilizing and often traumatizing. Terry says that "spiritual direction starts from the position of maintaining wellness and wholeness, exploring the journey to discover where the spirit is operating and finding what is energizing and sustaining in my life." "Problems arise but they are integrated within the journey to wholeness and wellbeing." This session is a conversation about professional supervision and spiritual direction as possible means of debriefing and renewal and re-centering.

**ACLE National Conference : Elective: Monday 30.9.13: Reflective Practices for School leaders.**

**G Butler with Daphne Austin & Pastor Michael Mayer Plus panel – Katrina Valencia/Stephanie Maher.**

- **Notes - Daphne Austin: Psychologist:** (Nextsteps Psychology)
- **What is this thing called Professional supervision?**

Professional supervision is a process, based on a reflective, conversational structure that allows for a number of; professional , workplace and personal interconnecting dynamics to be discussed, explored and evaluated, independently and confidentially. It occurs at regularly spaced times, and in different helping professions there are different dynamics and supervision tasks that take priority. Where and when needed, supervision allows for focused supportive strategies or skills to be explored and added, and in some cases depending on the issues at hand, for psychological understanding to be added to assist in the management of the challenges faced. In supervision we say no topic is taboo, and all intentional planned supervision occurs within a safe, boundary or space, that allows the openness to discuss any workplace or personal issue that impacts on our vocation and profession. Supervision guards and often protects our enthusiasm for what we do, aids in enhancing resiliency, can protect us from burnout, strengthens wise informed choices, which leads to ongoing continued professional, and personal life growth and well being.

Christian Professional Supervision is where one combines Spirituality, our Christian faith, with the specific tasks of supervision. Christian supervision practices arise out of being embedded in the acknowledgement and awareness of, in particular, God's grace and love, for us, and for those we work with or relate to. This further aids in enhancing resiliency and strength which is God breathed, by integrating vocational/spiritual/and psychological reflection, which provides an opportunity for continued professional well-being. In Augustine's words, it "Prepares the way for the Holy Spirit" to enter and remain present in our vocational and personal practices and relationships. Christian supervision not only allows for, but focuses on enhancing & navigating the integration of our faith walk, with our professional skills and the challenging issues we face. Supervision is then praxis based, arising out of the supervisee's, e.g., senior educators, own pastoral practice, with the supervisor providing not just psychological support and strategies but holding a rich Christian theological understanding that fits with the educators or leaders Christian world view. Most Christian supervisors have undertaken recognized Christian theological or ministry training alongside their other professional degrees.

- Resources:** Carroll, M, & Holloway, E. (Eds). (1999). *Counselling supervision in context*. London; (Sage)
- Hawkins, P., & Shohet, R. (2000),. *Supervision in the Helping Professions* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed). Buckingham Open University Press.
- Mearns. D. (1995) *Supervision: A tale of the missing client*. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 23(3), 421-427
- McMahon, M, & Patton, W. (Eds). (2002). *Supervision in the Helping Professions, A Practical Approach*. Pearson Education Australia Pty Ltd.
- Campbell. M. & Wackwitz H. (2002) *Supervision in an organization where counselors are a minority profession.*, in. McMahon, M, & Patton, W. (Eds). (2002). *Supervision in the Helping Professions, A Practical Approach*. Pearson Education Australia Pty Ltd. (p. 313-322)

**Summary Tasks and Practice of Supervision: Foundational across all helping fields include:**

- \* Provision of Planned Sessions at regular intervals within a safe (confidential) boundary space
- \* Structured process which includes:
  - Reflective observation of working context, stakeholder management, working alliances
  - Supervisee/Supervisor conversation to “foster well-being of absent other/s”
  - Evaluation of process and practices, (confidential relevant disclosure)
  - Supervisee (leader) support and stress management
  - Observation and refinement of skills
  - Exploring intrapersonal & interpersonal issues (interconnecting personal & career issues)
    - Transference Issues
  - Relationship dynamics
  - Professional, & personal accountability – implicit/explicit feedback
  - Psychologically informed drawing on relevant theory/insight to aid management
  - Clarity of Direction Discussions
  - Integration of Praxis – Faith – Vocational Exploration
  - Time Restricted: i.e. Changeover of Supervisor after 2-3 years (dependent on regularity)
  - Specific Strategies to aid Helping Professional’s Field
  - Monitoring of overall well-being between work life, personal life, and spiritual life.

**Supervision is Not:**

- Spiritual Companionship/Spiritual Direction – (does not explore directly spiritual walk/life in detail, overall checking in on spiritual life only as pertains to work/life well being and balance – compliments spiritual companionship)
- Counselling: If specific issues that require counselling are identified, appropriate referrals can be offered.

- Resources:** McMahon, M, & Patton, W. (Eds). (2002). *Supervision in the Helping Professions, A Practical Approach*. Pearson Education Australia Pty Ltd. (p. 331)
- Johnson. A. (2007). *Shaping Spiritual Leaders, Supervision and Formation in Congregations*, Alban Institute.
- Leach. J. & Paterson. M. (2010). *Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook*. SCM Press. London. P. 204

## 1. Where did Supervision come from?

The history of supervision for helping professions, in a formalized way can be traced back to the early medical fields, where in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century it was very much a direct, close, 'over the shoulder' type of hands on supervision. Apprentice doctors, as they were then called, were watched critically by their elder more experienced peers. This then transitioned across various allied helping professional fields to include direct and indirect, but still close mentoring, supportive supervision.

One form of supervision is known as peer supervision, and this would also cover group supervision. There is a very interesting story regarding the first peer supervision where it is said that at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the coal mines in England, coal miners went on strike. The strike was over the fact that their marital relationships were breaking down because they would come home to their wives and families, covered in coal dust and soot, dropping it all through the homes, and the wives had the job of not only washing the clothes and cleaning up, with no modern white goods like we have, but also having to listen to all the gripes about the days hard labour and work. The coal miners went on strike to ask for time, at the end of their shifts, paid at the mine's expense, to both clean up, get all the grime, dirt and dust off, leave washed and clean, after having been able to discuss with their peers the days challenging work. They could talk briefly with each other about how to troubleshoot problems, and debrief other issues like how they felt about their employers. So critical were the coal miner's to the economy of England, they could not afford for them to stay on strike. So this was agreed to, and it became known as "Pit head time" given to all coal miners working at the coal face, in close proximity with each other. So at the end of each shift they had their 20 mins time, paid, to get cleaned up, go home refreshed ready to start again the next shift. (P. Gordon: (2013): Org: Psychologist: Personal Communication)

This is where the phrase, 'working at the coal face' came from, which in our field, and many others, now means, those working in challenging and close situations, face to face on a daily basis with others. It was in fact, the first type of peer supervision in a veiled way, and now peer supervision is favoured in many helping professions. For managers, and key leaders in helping professions including educators, face to face supervision, occurring intermittently, often once per term, is more the approach that is suggested as most beneficial, and most utilized. Types of supervision include: face to face, group supervision, peer supervision, co-supervision, where two supervisors sit in, either to directly watch another at work, or are visited by a supervisee at some time to discuss their work. Supervision is always intentionally planned, but varies in time frames from 4-6 weekly, bi monthly, each term, and now we have in recent years, remote supervision with monitoring through skype, email, and distant learning, webinar type sessions.

**Where did the history of reflective supervision for Qld Education begin ?** In Queensland, Education Queensland began introducing guidance officers in 1948, and within the public sector, since 1988 a Senior Guidance position, (Senior Guidance Officer) has the responsibility for supervision, support, development and co-ordination, but this is mostly associated with guidance and counselling services. However, I have found that some school leaders within

Education Queensland utilize external independent psychologist/consultants for their supervision, and particularly those who wish to integrate their Christian walk, seeing it as a God given vocation, with their professional practice. Supervision provision in independent schools continues to grow, with various denominationally undergirded Christian schools now providing supervision opportunities for key leaders, including for their own guidance officers.

**Resource:** Logan, G., & Clarke, E. (1984) State education in Queensland: A brief History. Production and Publishing Services Branch, department of Education, Queensland.

### **3. How do you see it as being useful to school leaders...Principals ...other Executives**

For Senior Educators, and leaders, and other executives, the self reflective processes can and do usually cover a broad spectrum of areas. Some of the more beneficial reflective processes centre around the challenges faced managing and supporting various stakeholders which require close working alliances. In effect often in supervision, there is(are) an unseen person(s) in the room, absent guests if you like, that you are seeking, in effect, to not only support or to manage but to aid in their well-being along with your own. It is in our managing the challenges well, that their well being, (alongside ours), is maintained, fulfilling the pastoral compassionate care aspect that infiltrates what we do in our leadership roles and responsibilities. So sometimes supervision is directly a two person process, yourself with the supervisor, exploring your own practices, relationships, management styles, progress, or lack thereof. However, it effectively can be a 3, 4 or more person well-being management session. Thus, not only including managing staff issues, and perhaps personality difficulties, but it could be you have a major building project with input from project managers, and each stakeholder having their own agenda. So now there are concerns raised from school boards, teachers, parent groups, project manager, or various others. Along with reflecting on the journey of managing all these dynamics, possibly providing support and stress management strategies, there may have been mediation needed to accommodate the agenda's of differing stakeholders. This can be stressful in itself. Whilst you get on with the job, and do it successfully, often there is little time or opportunity for your own safe debriefing, which means these matters may end up being debriefed at home. This then may bring unnecessary stress into the home. Or if not debriefed at all, puts pressure on our mind and body, and lead to our own mental and physical un-wellness.

At other times, with other challenging situations in the workplace, or at home, there may also be issues of transference, which I'll come back to in a few moments. Discussions around challenging emotional issues needing management within the school, multicultural integration challenges, which may require some educative component around psychological strategies for support, or family stressors that mirror workplace stressors, and in your due diligence, you seek strategies to ensure the two do not cross, as far as is possible.

Sadly within our schools we are encountering more and more mental health issues, if not the students themselves, sometimes with their parents, certainly teachers as a result of parents and students. This is also where some critical input and psycho-education on understanding and

management can be invaluable as it is explored within a supervision session. Whilst there are provisions made within education systems for support of teachers, and counselors in many schools now, for yourselves as leaders, if we think of the coal miners story, debriefing the journey in supervision helps to wash away the load one carries. Lastly but not least supervision allows for the enhancing of clarity with direction. I see one of your electives looks at transition to retirement. This is also an area that comes up in supervision, as does the possibility of applying for a transfer, or to take up a new position, looking at the journey and the issues.

**Transference issues.** For those of us who may not be sure what this is, think for a moment of a time when you have walked into a room, and as the saying goes, you can “cut the air with a knife”. Everything in your spirit, and your mind tells you that there has been some tension, if not conflict, in this room some time before you got there. However, you were not there when it occurred. What is this? Just as we know the Spirit is within and without us, but we do not see Him, he is in the air we breathe, and, as we tell our students, the air we breathe is itself made up of many particles, but we do not see them. Transference is where the air also fills with the heaviness of conflict, oppression, the weightiness of harsh words, or pain. It’s pain filled, unseen energy particles, that exist in the air. We literally feel it as we breathe it in, and our spirit picks it up, and our mind endeavours to interpret what our troubled Spirit is experiencing. Metaphorically, If you are a glass of water, and another person is say, a glass of cordial, it is a bit like pouring cordial into your glass of water. Some days, we know that we know that there is nothing wrong with us, yet we seem weighed down with this heaviness, or there is an issue which we have dealt with really well, but we are still weighed down. The heaviness, or pain of another may have left their glass, so to speak, and been poured or transferred to us. Supervision allows us to identify these times, identify the issue, sometimes it’s hidden, and to debrief it, separating the oppression from us. Sometimes supervision protects others from our pain, and from receiving transference from us, as we are able to work and identify our own heaviness, that could impact on our work professionally and spiritually. Transference, undealt with, leaves us vulnerable to taking things far too personally, to robbing us of our enthusiasm, and for causing lack of confidence in what we do, and can cause spiritual dryness at times.

Undergirding all supervision is a relationship of trust, confidentiality, openness, and support, in a safe, bounded space. Supervision allows for the meeting of one with another, looking at processes, practices, self reflection, observation and evaluation that fosters and maintains well being, professionally & emotionally. Christian supervision allows for the Spirit to undergird the supervision practices with God’s love and grace aiding spiritual wholeness. Specific counselling is not offered in supervision. Issues requiring counselling, occasionally identified, would be discussed only in relation to referring to an appropriately qualified practitioner.

- Resources:** King, D. & Wheeler, S. The responsibilities of counselor supervisors: a qualitative study, *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*. 27(2). 215-229.  
McMahon, M., & Patton. W. (2000) Conversations on clinical supervision: Benefits perceived by school counselors. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*. 28(3), 339-351  
Proctor, B. (1994) Supervision, Competence, confidence, accountability. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*. 22. 309-318.