CYBER SUPERVISION

ANNE STOKES

Recently a colleague asked "Do your supervisees do any preparation that you know about? If so, what?"

I hadn't really thought that someone might be curious about this, but once the question was in my mind, it didn't leave.

The short answer is: some supervisees tell me about their pre-session preparation ahead of time, and some don't. In the latter group, there are some who prepare for the session by themselves, and tell me about this at the beginning, and some who prefer to meet and work spontaneously. These two groups are very similar to face-to-face supervisees.

Maybe it's the group who ***do*** let me know ahead of sessions what they want included that my colleague was more interested in. How they do this varies, and supervisees may use all of the methods below at different times, though most have a 'generally preferred method'.

The shortest and simplest pre-session communication was:

'Hi Anne, I would like to talk about endings in our next session'.

A bit of an ambiguous statement, as we are both of an age where retirement raises its head from time-to-time! I was glad that he started the session by writing 'You probably wondered if I was talking about our ending or my endings with clients. It's the latter. I am sorry I wasn't clear.'

However, it taught us both about the need to be clear when setting agendas or it won't aid my preparation for sessions. Perhaps that doesn't matter if you take the view that it is the supervisee's preparation that's important, not the supervisor's. However, I think that if it is going to be shared with me, then I need to be able to understand the theme, at the very least. So another supervisee might write:

'I'd like to discuss whether I am sufficiently bracketing off my own not dissimilar experiences

Preparation For Online Text-based Synchronous Supervision Sessions

with client F. I've also two new clients I'd like to introduce.'

That's more helpful and all I need to do at the beginning of a session is to check whether these are still the areas the supervisee wants to look at, how we might divide the time, and if I've understood and remembered correctly the experiences referred to.

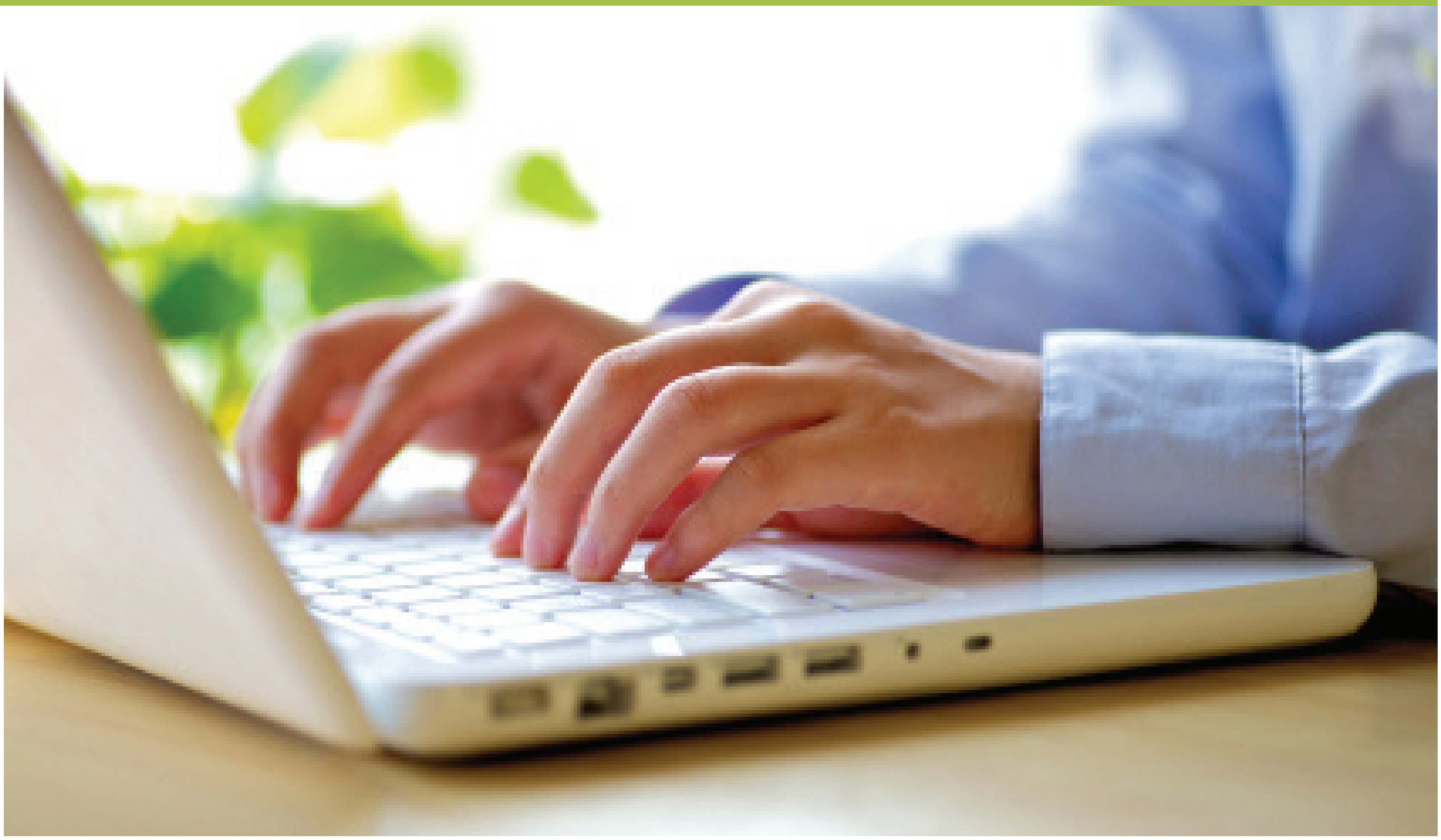
The two examples above only take me a short time to read and do my own preparation for the session. The following take more time, so some online supervisors might feel that they don't want to encourage this, as it intrudes into time that not set aside for work, or that isn't being specifically paid for. It's valid to raise these objections. We each need to find ways of working that sit well with ourselves. I allow time for preparation if that's the way the supervisee wants to work for a number of reasons:

- it enables us to cover more if the background is already given since it takes longer to write/read than to speak
- If it's how a supervisee generally chooses to work, I can factor it into my work schedule and fee structures
- It often gives extra insight into supervisees' work and thinking

In the first of these more time-consuming ways, supervisees send an email, rather as if we were engaged in asynchronous supervision. So it gives client details, or updates of where work has got to, for as many clients as the supervisee is hoping we'll explore. They may also include details about anything else they want to discuss, for example CPD or organisational issues. I don't reply, other than to acknowledge receipt, as this is solely preparation for the live session.

The final way has a formula, developed by one supervisee, though others now use it in their personalised form. Initially we used it in asynchronous exchanges, but continued with it when we changed to live sessions. Here the supervisee sends me an email which updates across a spectrum:

- **Me as me** - particularly useful when there are personal events which may affect the work.



- **Me as a professional** - an overview of work life, changes, updates etc
- **A chart** showing names of each client, number of sessions since last supervision, and themes of sessions
- **Further details** of clients or issues to be discussed in the session
- **Sometimes a further paragraph** of anything supervisees feel is relevant, not mentioned elsewhere.

This does take time to read and reflect. It can however enhance the quality of sessions, and help tackle the thorny question arising when professional organisations need to ensure that online supervision hours equal f2f hours!

I am sure that there are many other ways of preparing for live sessions – I'd love to hear about them! Do email me.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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