

# Tautoko

## Supervision for Sustainability Professionals

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***Tautoko: to support and encourage***



*This article advocates for professional supervision for those working in sustainability roles. Silvia draws on her experience both in supervision and in sustainability consultancy to highlight the benefits of external one-on-one mentoring and support.*

Sustainability is rapidly emerging as a profession in its own right. Each of us working in this space brings a passion for the environment and a determination to help change the way we do things. But we are all new to this unique intersection of environmental management with people, culture and values. What is your background, and what are the unique challenges you are finding in your current role? Where is the learning edge for you?

I come from a very 'people' space, of counselling and church ministry, and over the last five years I have learned a huge amount about all that stuff we deal with now: waste minimisation, carbon analysis, nature-based solutions, health impacts, climate risk assessment ... the list goes on! I have two small businesses: one in professional supervision and the other in climate consultancy. The intersection of these two is the topic of this article, with an encouragement for those who work in sustainability to attend to your own needs, both personally and professionally, so that you thrive long-term in this work.

### **External: A Safety Valve**

Professional supervision is not line management. You are accountable to your boss for your work, and hopefully there are people in your organisation who you feel supported by. But when relationships get fraught, or when you are grappling with challenging issues, it is often not appropriate to talk it over with the people you work with. A professional supervisor is outside your organisation and won't get offended by or pass on anything you say. Supervision is totally safe space, a safety valve to let off steam. It is your time to talk about whatever you want to discuss.

### **Training and Support: Both is Best!**

How many webinars (seminars, podcasts etc.) have you done, been inspired, then done nothing with? Professional development that truly 'lifts your game' integrates fresh insights into who you are and how you work. This is called 'praxis': the process of learning through input, reflection and action. By all means, watch online trainings, listen to podcasts, read articles and attend seminars. But this is not enough. Supervision is a vitally important space where you get to embed what you learn into the ways you communicate, the projects you initiate and the way you handle conflicts. This enables your insights and training to be fully effective in flowing through into your organisation.

### **Sustaining Sustainability: Preventing Burnout**

Sustainability work is not easy. It may be getting better accepted and more in demand, but the problems just keep getting bigger. A key reason to be in supervision is for your own self-care. Are you getting good time off and planning holidays? However, people don't crash and burn because they work too hard. Supervision will help you identify and constructively address the destructive patterns in your workplace and your own reactions. Sustaining your own energy and passion comes from knowing who you are, why you do what you do, and from the joy of growing in capacity to deal with all the shit that comes along.

### **Types of Professional Support: Which is Which?**

There are various trained excellent people out there ready to help you. These come with different labels:

**Supervision** is a professional service dedicated to supporting you in your career. It is now required for most 'people-professionals' as it is proven to enhance performance and reduce risk. Normally supervision happens monthly, one-on-one, paid for by the employer. You get to bring your concerns, and in supervision you are encouraged to apply your strengths and insights to the situations you are grappling with.

**Mentoring** tends to be more informal, where you meet with someone in your field who is more experienced than you, who can offer advice and guidance.

**Coaches** are trained in a process to help you achieve your life and career goals. Many people in organisational leadership find an executive coach helpful (but not cheap!).

**Counselling** is important when things at home or at work get overwhelming and you are finding it hard to be fully present. Your workplace should have an EAP programme which provides free counselling.

**Pastoral care** is freely provided by churches and many other organisations, such as chaplains in the military and hospitals. If you are looking for support you will find awesome people who are more than willing to be there for you.

### **Specialist Supervision for Sustainability Professionals**

I don't think anyone else is offering the unique mix that I provide, which I hope is the best of both supervision and mentoring. From my experience as a therapist and pastor I can listen well and genuinely encourage you. From my work in climate & sustainability I am aware of the complex areas of work you are dealing with, and can advise you particularly in the areas of leading teams, addressing conflicts, and motivating & inspiring others. In Aotearoa this intersects with our bicultural values and commitment to upholding the Treaty of Waitangi. I am able to coach non-Māori people along a bicultural journey, esp. in relation to environmental responsibilities.

### **OK, I'm interested. What do I do now?**

If you have never had professional supervision, ask your friends who work in people jobs about their experience. Google it, read about it online. Call me and have a chat.

Think about what kind of professional support you need, and how you develop your skills and capacity as a leader.

Negotiate with your employer about how best to spend the budget allocated for your professional development. Ask for funding for a series of professional supervision sessions.

## **Resources and links**

More on professional supervision at Silvia Purdie's website:

[https://www.conversationscounselling.nz/professional\\_supervision.html](https://www.conversationscounselling.nz/professional_supervision.html)

Te Pou supervision resources: <https://www.tepou.co.nz/resources> (search Supervision as a keyword)

Business Mentors NZ: <https://www.businessmentors.org.nz>

NZ Coaching and Mentoring: <https://www.coachingmentoring.co.nz>

Life Coaching: <https://getcoached.co.nz>

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