

The following eleven core coaching competencies were developed to support greater understanding about the skills and approaches used within today's coaching profession as defined by the ICF. They will also support you in calibrating the level of alignment between the coach-specific training expected and the training you have experienced.

Finally, these competencies were used as the foundation for the ICF Credentialing process examination. The core competencies are grouped into four clusters according to those that fit together logically based on common ways of looking at the competencies in each group. The groupings and individual competencies are not weighted - they do not represent any kind of priority in that they are all core or critical for any competent coach to demonstrate.

A. SETTING THE FOUNDATION

1. MEETING ETHICAL GUIDELINES AND PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS
2. ESTABLISHING THE COACHING AGREEMENT

B. CO-CREATING THE RELATIONSHIP

3. ESTABLISHING TRUST AND INTIMACY WITH THE CLIENT
4. COACHING PRESENCE

C. COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

5. ACTIVE LISTENING
6. POWERFUL QUESTIONING
7. DIRECT COMMUNICATION

D. FACILITATING LEARNING AND RESULTS

8. CREATING AWARENESS
9. DESIGNING ACTIONS
10. PLANNING AND GOAL SETTING
11. MANAGING PROGRESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

A. SETTING THE FOUNDATION

1. Meeting Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards - Understanding of coaching ethics and standards and ability to apply them appropriately in all coaching situations.

1. Understands and exhibits in own behaviors the ICF Standards of Conduct (see list, Part III of ICF Code of Ethics),
2. Understands and follows all ICF Ethical Guidelines (see list),
3. Clearly communicates the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy and other support professions,

4. Refers client to another support professional as needed, knowing when this is needed and the available resources.

2. Establishing the Coaching Agreement - Ability to understand what is required in the specific coaching interaction and to come to agreement with the prospective and new client about the coaching process and relationship.

1. Understands and effectively discusses with the client the guidelines and specific parameters of the coaching relationship (e.g., logistics, fees, scheduling, inclusion of others if appropriate),
2. Reaches agreement about what is appropriate in the relationship and what is not, what is and is not being offered, and about the client's and coach's responsibilities,
3. Determines whether there is an effective match between his/her coaching method and the needs of the prospective client.

B. CO-CREATING THE RELATIONSHIP

3. Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client - Ability to create a safe, supportive environment that produces ongoing mutual respect and trust.

1. Shows genuine concern for the client's welfare and future,
2. Continuously demonstrates personal integrity, honesty and sincerity,
3. Establishes clear agreements and keeps promises,
4. Demonstrates respect for client's perceptions, learning style, personal being,
5. Provides ongoing support for and champions new behaviors and actions, including those involving risk taking and fear of failure,
6. Asks permission to coach client in sensitive, new areas.

4. Coaching Presence - Ability to be fully conscious and create spontaneous relationship with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible and confident.

1. Is present and flexible during the coaching process, dancing in the moment,
2. Accesses own intuition and trusts one's inner knowing - "goes with the gut",
3. Is open to not knowing and takes risks,
4. Sees many ways to work with the client, and chooses in the moment what is most effective,
5. Uses humor effectively to create lightness and energy,
6. Confidently shifts perspectives and experiments with new possibilities for own action,
7. Demonstrates confidence in working with strong emotions, and can self-manage and not be overpowered or enmeshed by client's emotions.

C. COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

5. Active Listening - Ability to focus completely on what the client is saying and is not saying, to understand the meaning of what is said in the context of the client's desires, and to support client self-expression.

1. Attends to the client and the client's agenda, and not to the coach's agenda for the client,
2. Hears the client's concerns, goals, values and beliefs about what is and is not possible,
3. Distinguishes between the words, the tone of voice, and the body language,
4. Summarizes, paraphrases, reiterates, mirrors back what client has said to ensure clarity and understanding,

5. Encourages, accepts, explores and reinforces the client's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs, suggestions, etc.,
6. Integrates and builds on client's ideas and suggestions,
7. "Bottom-lines" or understands the essence of the client's communication and helps the client get there rather than engaging in long descriptive stories,
8. Allows the client to vent or "clear" the situation without judgment or attachment in order to move on to next steps.

6. Powerful Questioning - Ability to ask questions that reveal the information needed for maximum benefit to the coaching relationship and the client.

1. Asks questions that reflect active listening and an understanding of the client's perspective,
2. Asks questions that evoke discovery, insight, commitment or action (e.g., those that challenge the client's assumptions),
3. Asks open-ended questions that create greater clarity, possibility or new learning
4. Asks questions that move the client towards what they desire, not questions that ask for the client to justify or look backwards.

7. Direct Communication - Ability to communicate effectively during coaching sessions, and to use language that has the greatest positive impact on the client.

1. Is clear, articulate and direct in sharing and providing feedback,
2. Reframes and articulates to help the client understand from another perspective what he/she wants or is uncertain about,
3. Clearly states coaching objectives, meeting agenda, purpose of techniques or exercises,
4. Uses language appropriate and respectful to the client (e.g., non-sexist, non-racist, non-technical, non-jargon),
5. Uses metaphor and analogy to help to illustrate a point or paint a verbal picture.

D. FACILITATING LEARNING AND RESULTS

8. Creating Awareness - Ability to integrate and accurately evaluate multiple sources of information, and to make interpretations that help the client to gain awareness and thereby achieve agreed-upon results.

1. Goes beyond what is said in assessing client's concerns, not getting hooked by the client's description,
2. Invokes inquiry for greater understanding, awareness and clarity,
3. Identifies for the client his/her underlying concerns, typical and fixed ways of perceiving himself/herself and the world, differences between the facts and the interpretation, disparities between thoughts, feelings and action,
4. Helps clients to discover for themselves the new thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, emotions, moods, etc. that strengthen their ability to take action and achieve what is important to them,
5. Communicates broader perspectives to clients and inspires commitment to shift their viewpoints and find new possibilities for action,
6. Helps clients to see the different, interrelated factors that affect them and their behaviors (e.g., thoughts, emotions, body, background),
7. Expresses insights to clients in ways that are useful and meaningful for the client,
8. Identifies major strengths vs. major areas for learning and growth, and what is most important to address during coaching,
9. Asks the client to distinguish between trivial and significant issues, situational vs. recurring behaviors, when detecting a separation between what is being stated and what is being done.

9. Designing Actions - Ability to create with the client opportunities for ongoing learning, during coaching and in work/life situations, and for taking new actions that will most effectively lead to agreed-upon coaching results.

1. Brainstorms and assists the client to define actions that will enable the client to demonstrate, practice and deepen new learning,
2. Helps the client to focus on and systematically explore specific concerns and opportunities that are central to agreed-upon coaching goals,
3. Engages the client to explore alternative ideas and solutions, to evaluate options, and to make related decisions,
4. Promotes active experimentation and self-discovery, where the client applies what has been discussed and learned during sessions immediately afterwards in his/her work or life setting,
5. Celebrates client successes and capabilities for future growth,
6. Challenges client's assumptions and perspectives to provoke new ideas and find new possibilities for action,
7. Advocates or brings forward points of view that are aligned with client goals and, without attachment, engages the client to consider them,
8. Helps the client "Do It Now" during the coaching session, providing immediate support,
9. Encourages stretches and challenges but also a comfortable pace of learning.

10. Planning and Goal Setting - Ability to develop and maintain an effective coaching plan with the client.

1. Consolidates collected information and establishes a coaching plan and development goals with the client that address concerns and major areas for learning and development,
2. Creates a plan with results that are attainable, measurable, specific and have target dates,
3. Makes plan adjustments as warranted by the coaching process and by changes in the situation,
4. Helps the client identify and access different resources for learning (e.g., books, other professionals),
5. Identifies and targets early successes that are important to the client.

11. Managing Progress and Accountability - Ability to hold attention on what is important for the client, and to leave responsibility with the client to take action.

1. Clearly requests of the client actions that will move the client toward their stated goals,
2. Demonstrates follow through by asking the client about those actions that the client committed to during the previous session(s),
3. Acknowledges the client for what they have done, not done, learned or become aware of since the previous coaching session(s),
4. Effectively prepares, organizes and reviews with client information obtained during sessions,
5. Keeps the client on track between sessions by holding attention on the coaching plan and outcomes, agreed-upon courses of action, and topics for future session(s),
6. Focuses on the coaching plan but is also open to adjusting behaviors and actions based on the coaching process and shifts in direction during sessions,
7. Is able to move back and forth between the big picture of where the client is heading, setting a context for what is being discussed and where the client wishes to go,
8. Promotes client's self-discipline and holds the client accountable for what they say they are going to do, for the results of an intended action, or for a specific plan with related time frames,
9. Develops the client's ability to make decisions, address key concerns, and develop himself/herself (to get feedback, to determine priorities and set the pace of learning, to reflect on and learn from experiences),
10. Positively confronts the client with the fact that he/she did not take agreed-upon actions.

Part One: Definition of Coaching

Section 1: Definitions

- **Coaching:** Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.
- **A professional coaching relationship:** A professional coaching relationship exists when coaching includes a business agreement or contract that defines the responsibilities of each party.
- **An ICF Professional Coach:** An ICF Professional Coach also agrees to practice the ICF Professional Core Competencies and pledges accountability to the ICF Code of Ethics.

In order to clarify roles in the coaching relationship, it is often necessary to distinguish between the client and the sponsor. In most cases, the client and sponsor are the same person and therefore jointly referred to as the client. For purposes of identification, however, the International Coach Federation defines these roles as follows:

- **Client:** The "client" is the person(s) being coached.
- **Sponsor:** The "sponsor" is the entity (including its representatives) paying for and/or arranging for coaching services to be provided.

In all cases, coaching engagement contracts or agreements should clearly establish the rights, roles, and responsibilities for both the client and sponsor if they are not the same persons.

Part Two: The ICF Standards of Ethical Conduct

Preamble: ICF Professional Coaches aspire to conduct themselves in a manner that reflects positively upon the coaching profession; are respectful of different approaches to coaching; and recognize that they are also bound by applicable laws and regulations.

Section 1: Professional Conduct At Large

As a coach:

- 1) I will not knowingly make any public statement that is untrue or misleading about what I offer as a coach, or make false claims in any written documents relating to the coaching profession or my credentials or the ICF.
- 2) I will accurately identify my coaching qualifications, expertise, experience, certifications and ICF Credentials.

3) I will recognize and honor the efforts and contributions of others and not misrepresent them as my own. I understand that violating this standard may leave me subject to legal remedy by a third party.

4) I will, at all times, strive to recognize personal issues that may impair, conflict, or interfere with my coaching performance or my professional coaching relationships. Whenever the facts and circumstances necessitate, I will promptly seek professional assistance and determine the action to be taken, including whether it is appropriate to suspend or terminate my coaching relationship(s).

5) I will conduct myself in accordance with the ICF Code of Ethics in all coach training, coach mentoring, and coach supervisory activities.

6) I will conduct and report research with competence, honesty, and within recognized scientific standards and applicable subject guidelines. My research will be carried out with the necessary consent and approval of those involved, and with an approach that will protect participants from any potential harm. All research efforts will be performed in a manner that complies with all the applicable laws of the country in which the research is conducted.

7) I will maintain, store, and dispose of any records created during my coaching business in a manner that promotes confidentiality, security, and privacy, and complies with any applicable laws and agreements

8) I will use ICF member contact information (e-mail addresses, telephone numbers, etc.) only in the manner and to the extent authorized by the ICF.

Section 2: Conflicts of Interest

As a coach:

9) I will seek to avoid conflicts of interest and potential conflicts of interest and openly disclose any such conflicts. I will offer to remove myself when such a conflict arises.

10) I will disclose to my client and his or her sponsor all anticipated compensation from third parties that I may pay or receive for referrals of that client.

11) I will only barter for services, goods or other non-monetary remuneration when it will not impair the coaching relationship.

12) I will not knowingly take any personal, professional, or monetary advantage or benefit of the coach-client relationship, except by a form of compensation as agreed in the agreement or contract.

Section 3: Professional Conduct with Clients

As a coach:

- 13) I will not knowingly mislead or make false claims about what my client or sponsor will receive from the coaching process or from me as the coach.
- 14) I will not give my prospective clients or sponsors information or advice I know or believe to be misleading or false.
- 15) I will have clear agreements or contracts with my clients and sponsor(s). I will honor all agreements or contracts made in the context of professional coaching relationships.
- 16) I will carefully explain and strive to ensure that, prior to or at the initial meeting, my coaching client and sponsor(s) understand the nature of coaching, the nature and limits of confidentiality, financial arrangements, and any other terms of the coaching agreement or contract.
- 17) I will be responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries that govern any physical contact I may have with my clients or sponsors.
- 18) I will not become sexually intimate with any of my current clients or sponsors.
- 19) I will respect the client's right to terminate the coaching relationship at any point during the process, subject to the provisions of the agreement or contract. I will be alert to indications that the client is no longer benefiting from our coaching relationship.
- 20) I will encourage the client or sponsor to make a change if I believe the client or sponsor would be better served by another coach or by another resource.
- 21) I will suggest my client seek the services of other professionals when deemed necessary or appropriate.

Section 4: Confidentiality/Privacy

As a coach:

- 22) I will maintain the strictest levels of confidentiality with all client and sponsor information. I will have a clear agreement or contract before releasing information to another person, unless required by law.
- 23) I will have a clear agreement upon how coaching information will be exchanged among coach, client, and sponsor.

24) When acting as a trainer of student coaches, I will clarify confidentiality policies with the students.

25) I will have associated coaches and other persons whom I manage in service of my clients and their sponsors in a paid or volunteer capacity make clear agreements or contracts to adhere to the ICF Code of Ethics Part 2, Section 4: Confidentiality/Privacy standards and the entire ICF Code of Ethics to the extent applicable.

Part Three: The ICF Pledge of Ethics

As an ICF Professional Coach, I acknowledge and agree to honor my ethical and legal obligations to my coaching clients and sponsors, colleagues, and to the public at large. I pledge to comply with the ICF Code of Ethics, and to practice these standards with those whom I coach.

If I breach this Pledge of Ethics or any part of the ICF Code of Ethics, I agree that the ICF in its sole discretion may hold me accountable for so doing. I further agree that my accountability to the ICF for any breach may include sanctions, such as loss of my ICF membership and/or my ICF Credentials.

Approved by the Ethics and Standards Committee on October 30, 2008.

Approved by the ICF Board of Directors on December 18, 2008.