

## READING #10: ETHICS

Throughout this Certification Program, you have been exploring the Co-Active® Coach, a wide range of coaching skills, and ways to grow yourself as a Co-Active® Coach. Now we are going to take a metaview of the coaching profession, with a focus on ethics.

Ethics matter to a profession because professional standing both implies and engenders the trust of members of the public. There is a public expectation that professionals are objective and independent. An ethical code honored by members of a profession is one way to safeguard the public's trust. John W. Lewis, MD, JD, writing for the Institute for Global Ethics, said it succinctly:

“The overriding rule of professional ethics is that... the interests of the served public always trump those of the providers.”

### The Coaching Profession

Coaching is a growing profession. The International Coach Federation (ICF) is an association that provides support, guidance and governance to the coaching profession. As an ICF-accredited school, CTI encourages all students to join and actively participate in the ICF.

In addition to continuing education, accreditation of coaching schools, and credentialing of qualified coaches, the ICF has developed Ethical Guidelines that all members must agree to follow, as well as a system to address ethical breaches by coaches.

Visit the ICF website [www.coachfederation.org](http://www.coachfederation.org) for more information about how the ICF addresses ethical issues in the coaching profession.

### Values, Morals, Ethics

There are some differences among the concepts of values, morals and ethics, and sometimes they overlap. It is important for you to be really conscious of your own values, the morals that you live by, and your own ethical stance. Also important, as a professional coach, is that you abide by the ICF Ethical Guidelines for Coaches, and as a Co-Active® Coach, that you abide by the Ethical Standards for Co-Active® Coaches.

In the Reference section of this Manual, you will find a number of articles and websites that address professional ethics. Take some time to read these to further stimulate your thinking.

When ethical questions arise for you, one powerful resource that is available to you is the Co-Active® Model. Lean into the Model by considering questions like these:

- What does your client want?
- What is the transformation you envision for your client?
- What needs to be articulated or named in this situation?
- Where is the resonance or dissonance in this situation? What does that tell you?
- What about your own Self-Management, your Listening at Level 2 and Level 3, your curiosity?
- What does your intuition tell you?

- What is needed to design the alliance more fully for you and your client?
- What is the safe and courageous space of your ethical stand in this situation?
- What does your Captain tell you is needed here?

As you explore these questions, you will deepen your learning, opening the space to forward your action, or perhaps you will act first, and then consider these questions as you deepen your learning.

What else could you ask yourself with the Model as your guide?

## Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest occurs when you have a personal interest in a situation, and your personal interest might or actually does influence the professional and independent judgment you exercise as a coach. One example is when you are holding multiple roles with someone that you are coaching. For example, you might be coaching a friend's spouse or a colleague with whom you have been working on a project. Even the appearance that your personal interest is affecting your professional judgment is a conflict of interest. When there is a possibility of a perception of a conflict of interest or a breach of trust, even if what is actually happening is completely ethical, the possibility that something unethical might be perceived is more important than the actual situation.

Since anyone's personal interests can affect their ability to be objective, it takes some skill, experience and your best judgment to recognize when you are in a conflict of interest. It is often much easier for us to recognize when others are in a conflict of interest. For this reason, many ethics scholars recommend that you talk to a trusted colleague or friend if you are unsure about the ethical implications of a situation.

While a coach's involvement in a conflict of interest can certainly harm a particular client or employer, as well as the involved coach's professional reputation, their involvement can also damage the reputation of the coaching profession as a whole. Abandoning one's professional judgment reduces the public trust in a profession. As a professional coach, you are always representing the profession of coaching to the public, whether you are in a coaching session or on vacation.

As soon as you recognize that you are either moving toward or involved in a conflict of interest, find a straightforward way out of the situation. If that is impossible, articulate what is going on to all of the affected individuals. By responding in this way, you can maintain your professional integrity and preserve the trust that is essential to your professional standing and the standing of the coaching profession.

## Ethical Issues, Dilemmas, Challenges

Many of the ethical questions that will surface in your coaching experience may seem to have obvious answers, or you may have addressed them with your client as you designed your alliance. Those straightforward issues simply require your own clarity about how you will respond in a given situation. What seems obvious from the outside is often not obvious from the inside.

Sometimes you will encounter questions whose answers are fuzzy at best, areas that are unclear, or situations where different people respond differently or disagree about the ethical response. Membership in the ICF serves another important function here, as you can tap into the wisdom of your professional colleagues, whether they are local or far away.

Here are some examples of challenging issues that you might encounter. How would you approach each of these scenarios?

**Your client has lost her job and is facing bankruptcy.**

1. Her check for last month's coaching has just been returned to you for insufficient funds. What do you tell her?
2. She wants to charge her coaching fees with you to her only remaining credit card. What do you say?
3. What if your client lost her job and she was facing a medical illness rather than bankruptcy? How do your responses compare to one another? What, if anything, is different for you about each scenario?

**You have a coaching contract with a large corporation. One of your ongoing coaching clients tells you about his plan to leave the company and begin his own business with the same customer base. He has not told management. The company is paying your coaching fee.**

1. What do you do?
2. What if the company is a small local business? A family business? What, if anything, changes about your response?

**Your client, who is an executive at a well-known corporation, tells you about a revolutionary new product to be released by her company in time for the holiday shopping season.**

1. Do you buy stock?
2. Do you tell friends/family or others who might benefit?

**Your client invites you to be his business partner for a small contract he is about to receive. He also wants to continue coaching with you.**

1. What would you do?
2. What if your client's contract was a large contract? Would your response change?

**You have a professional relationship with your client's spouse. In fact, he referred your client to you. Your client reveals to you that she is having an affair.**

1. What would you do?
2. What if you didn't know your client's partner? Would your response change? What, if anything, is different?

In addition, consider these questions:

- When would you refer a client to another professional?
- Under what circumstances would you ethically decline to take on a new client?
- How do you tell your client that your ethical considerations call for you to complete the coaching relationship?

- What is your ethical responsibility to former clients?
- What if your client desires to commit a morally reprehensible act, or a criminal act, or to cheat a little bit on their taxes, or to drive over the legal speed limit, or to embezzle funds, or to use company time or materials for personal needs, or....
- Where do you draw the line? How do you sort that out?

## A Tool for Exploring Ethical Dilemmas

Consider your approach to ethical dilemmas as concentric circles moving out from the client to larger circles around them and the coaching relationship. First identify everyone who may potentially be in these circles. Then drill down into the possible actions you might or might not take, and what impact those actions might have. With this big picture in mind, your ongoing designed alliance with your client will support you as you address the various relationships and people that might be impacted in a particular situation.

When you get that “red flag” feeling, your best course of action may not always be clear. Because there are often many complexities in an ethical dilemma, it is extremely important for a professional coach to thoroughly think through every ethically challenging situation.

Here are some questions to consider and support you in thinking through ethical issues:

1. What is the impact on my client? On our relationship? On me as a coach?
2. What is the impact on the perception of the coaching profession?
3. Who/What else may be impacted by this situation?
4. What effect could it have on them?
5. If I take an action or do not take an action, how will that affect those mentioned above?
6. What action will I take to resolve, clarify or manage this situation?

## Ethical Standards

As the leading association for professional coaches, the International Coach Federation has developed an Ethical Code for coaches, which contains the ICF Ethical Guidelines, as well as a system to address ethical breaches by coaches.

The full text of the most recent ICF Code of Ethics, as well as the Ethical Guidelines for Coaches may be found on the ICF website: [www.coachfederation.org](http://www.coachfederation.org). Be sure to read through the Q&A section on the ICF website, too. You will find some current ethical dilemmas faced by coaches and other rich resources there.

In addition to the Co-Active® Model and the ICF Code of Ethics, the Ethical Standards for Co-Active® Coaches that follow will also guide you as you explore ethics and coaching. Coaches certified by CTI agree to abide by the Ethical Standards for Co-Active® Coaches.

## Ethical Standards for CoActive® Coaches

1. We hold the content of the relationship with our clients as confidential. Even the names of our clients are confidential unless the client gives permission to mention or use their name.
2. We do not break the law for our clients, nor do we act as accomplices to a client's acts of violence or law breaking.
3. We do not enter into financial agreements with a client based on the client's results; e.g., the client will give the coach a 10% bonus based on the sales bonus they receive from their corporation. The coach does not expect or solicit any gifts or rewards from the client. Any gift from client to coach is unsolicited and completely at the client's discretion.
4. When we enter into agreements with corporations, we hold each individual we coach as a client, and we respect each client's right to confidentiality.
5. We do not work with clients whom we cannot champion and see their growing edge.
6. We are committed to our client's transformation and use rigorous Self-Management so that we are fully able to hold the client's agenda rather than our own.
7. We treat our colleagues, competitors and the coaching profession with honor and respect.

## Professional Integrity

Your standards of professional integrity may come more clearly into focus when you're facing a challenging client situation. There are a number of fairly common situations that coaches may encounter which challenge the coach's professional stand. We offer a few of these here to give you an opportunity to consider how you would respond in similar situations. At the end of this chapter, we offer some suggested ways to approach situations like these to stimulate your thinking, and as a reference for you going forward.

- Your client routinely misses their appointments.
- Your client is delinquent in paying you.
- Your client asks you to use your name as a reference for a job application.
- Your client makes disparaging comments about a group of people — based on ethnicity, age, or religion, etc.
- Your client discloses, in passing, that they belong to a group that promotes segregation.
- Your client is recently divorced and is having unprotected sex with multiple partners without telling any of them.

It is important for you as a coach to have a plan to address each of these situations so that you will be able to move forward easily if you experience a similar situation. Once you are clear about what you would do, CTI recommends that you write up a policy, and include your policy in the logistics section of your discovery session materials. By doing this, your designed alliance with each of your clients will include how you will address some of the more common challenging situations that may arise in your relationship. Of course, the unexpected comes up, and there will be situations that you haven't anticipated.

## Possible Approaches to Challenging Client Situations

### Missed Appointments

Most clients will miss an appointment during the course of a coaching relationship. After all, things do come up in life. When clients miss, it's usually due to something unexpected — an emergency, a change in plans at work, or something unexpected in their day. Sometimes, a client will get involved in a project and think: "I have 10 minutes until my coaching session; I'll just get into my email." They get lost in that and forget the appointment.

Sometimes, there is another issue below the surface. Here are two examples; there are many other possibilities, too.

1. Your client decided it was time to start working with a coach. Soon they realize that coaching is about changing their life, and they get scared and stop calling
2. Your client has missed a coaching session, and they are too embarrassed to return your call.

When you are working with a client who has missed a coaching appointment, first, get curious about your client — who are they? Is this a pattern or a one-time occurrence? Then, consider how you want to handle this situation with them. Is it an issue for coaching or for designing your alliance in more detail? It is easy to get irritated when someone misses an appointment, and it may provide an opening for deepening the coaching relationship if you bring your curiosity instead of your irritation.

In creating your client agreement, consider these questions:

1. How would you like to be notified if something comes up and your client needs to miss an appointment?
2. How will you work with a corporate client who gets pulled into an important meeting at the time of your coaching session?
3. How will you inform your client or ask your client to inform you that there is a need to re-design your alliance?

If missing appointments is routine for your client, it is something for you to bring into your coaching with them. Find out what is going on for them. Is this something that happens elsewhere in their life? What is it for them to keep their word? What is it for them not to keep their word? How do they handle agreements?

### Late or Delinquent Payment

How will you work with clients who are late or delinquent in paying you? What is your payment agreement? How will you work with someone whose payments are late or don't arrive at all? Sometimes this is a possible issue for coaching; other times you will want to redesign the alliance or even terminate the coaching relationship. Be clear about your policy on these types of issues, and also look carefully at each individual situation that arises to see what is needed in your coaching relationship.

We also recommend that you talk with other coaches and learn about how your coaching colleagues address missed appointments or non-payment. At CTI we recommend that you charge your full fee for missed appointments. You have reserved and held your client's appointment time whether they show up or not. So, treat yourself as the professional you are

and charge for your professional time. And, if you intend to charge for missed appointments, include this information in the logistics section of your designed alliance.

If these types of issues turn up frequently in your coaching relationships, look to the metaview.

And look at yourself. The issues that you are working on in your own life often show up in your clients. Are you someone who keeps appointments? Are you routinely late or forgetful? Do you call to change appointments or do you wait until the time has passed? Do you pay for professional services in a timely manner? What else might your client's behavior be reflecting back to you?

### **Terminating a Coaching Relationship**

You may decide that it would be best to complete a coaching relationship for any number of reasons. Be sure to include as part of your designed alliance how both you and your client will close or end your coaching relationship. We recommend that notice is given in time for at least two scheduled sessions to be devoted to the closing. During these two sessions, share what worked, what didn't work, and what each of you needs to feel complete. Champion your client and send them off with acknowledgment and gratitude.

If your client has missed several appointments, or has not paid you for their coaching time, and you have decided to end the coaching relationship, send your client a letter of intent to terminate, as described below. Your client may respond by saying they do want to work with you, and now once again, you choose whether you really want to work with this client. If you do decide to continue working with them, redesign your alliance, and set some firm parameters. If not, it is recommended that you keep a letter in your files to document your actions with this client.

Here is one way you might work with a client in one of these situations. This example is for someone who has missed one or more coaching appointments, and you can apply it to other situations as well, simply changing the details:

1. If this is the first time that your client has missed an appointment with you, call them within five minutes of their scheduled time. Honor whatever time is remaining in the appointment, and end the call at the usual time, rather than trying to make up the time the client missed.
2. Remind them of your agreement about missed appointments. Let them know that you prefer to hear from them at least 24 hours ahead of time if they need to reschedule, and that you generally charge for a missed appointment. We recommend that you waive the fee for the first missed appointment.
3. Let's say that they miss again. Again, we recommend that you call them five minutes in and continue the coaching session to its usual ending time if you are able to. If not, remind them of your conversation after their last missed appointment, and tell that you will be charging them the full fee for this missed appointment.
4. If you're unable to reach the client directly, leave them a friendly voice message — and remember Rule #1: nobody gets to be wrong. Stay curious. Let them know you are just calling to check in, that you were looking forward to working with them, that you understand something must have come up, and to please give you a call to reschedule.
5. If there is no response after a few days, leave a second message, also friendly. Keep the message authentic for you. Some examples: "I'm wondering since I haven't heard from

you, is everything OK?” Or, “Let’s get started; give me a call so we can set up a time to meet.”

- a. If you still don’t hear from them, you might send them an email requesting that they contact you.
- b. After you have tried to reach them three times without hearing back from them, it is time to let the relationship go, and you can send them an email to that effect.

### **Referral to Therapist**

Sometimes coaching is not what is needed. It’s not always black-and-white, but there are some red flags to watch for that may indicate that therapy is the better approach or would be a good adjunct to the coaching. Here are some examples:

- Client is persistently consumed by their Saboteur, and is not able to separate themselves from it. Of course, we all have times when we are consumed by our Saboteur, and we typically can separate ourselves from it, even in small doses.
- Active addiction not being dealt with...
- Client’s forward movement is impeded by issues from their past that are not healed.
- Client needs to take medication for a mental health issue and would benefit from working with a mental health professional.

The challenge for the coach is to refer the client to a therapist or other professional in a graceful and respectful manner so the client feels supported rather than wrong or broken. It can be helpful for the coach to state that they are not trained to work with the types of issues the client is facing. For example, saying “Client, this is an issue that would be best addressed by someone who is trained to work with this... it is outside the scope of my training as a coach. I want the best for you and I think you will be better served by working with a therapist who has the training to address this area with you” rather than saying “You need therapy.”

Working with a therapist does not mean that they can’t continue working with you as their coach, or that they won’t return to coaching later in their process. It just means that the support of a relationship with a therapist will serve your client at this point. For some clients, it works well to have both a therapist and a coach, with clear agreements about the focus of each relationship.

### **Unusual Situations**

Some questions you may have relate to serious circumstances that rarely happen. Did you know that in addition to obeying the laws in the country and location where you live and work, you may also be obligated to follow the laws in the locations where your client lives and works? If you work with clients outside of your geographical area, it is a good idea to learn about what is expected of you as a professional coach working with a client in the location where they live. You may need to do some research to get this information, and we recommend that you do so. Check the ICF website and local coach associations where your clients are located. You may also want to consult an attorney or a local government office for more information.

For example, in many states in the U.S., it is a coach’s responsibility to report that a client is contemplating suicide. Coaches in the U.S. may also be obligated to report suspected abuse to the appropriate authorities. This may occur if you learn, or you have reason to believe, that your client is being abused, or is abusing someone else. You would then need to contact the Social Services department where your client resides.



It is important to tell your client in the Discovery Session about situations like these where you would breach confidentiality.

Should you encounter a situation where your client sounds depressed or possibly suicidal, here are some guidelines about how to go forward:

If the client divulges to you that they are thinking about suicide, you can assume that they are asking you for help as best they can. In this type of situation, do whatever is needed to know that your client has help or support before you hang up the telephone.

First, keep them on the line. Ask them if there is someone with them, or if there is someone, perhaps a family member or a social worker, that either you or they could call on a second line, while they are on the phone with you. If neither of you know of someone who could help, call information and find out how to reach your client's local mental health crisis line. If you cannot locate a crisis line in your client's area, call the one in your geographical area. They may be able to help you locate the right number to call on your client's behalf. We also recommend that you check in with your client within 24 hours – either with the client themselves or with one of the people who is helping them. Find out how your client is doing, and follow up to make sure that they are getting the help that they need.

Work with your client to design some accountability around the ongoing help they will get for themselves once any type of crisis has passed. Offer whatever assistance you can to help them set it up, and work with them to find other people who will help and support them, too. Remember, your coaching relationship is a partnership. Partner with your client to get them connected with good people who can help support them.

If your client tells you that they are doing something illegal, or you suspect that your client might be breaking the law, here are some steps to take:

1. Review the International Coach Federation (ICF) ethical guidelines and the Ethical Standards for Co-Active® Coaches. If your client is breaking the law, both sets of ethical guidelines and standards state very clearly and simply that coaches do not partner with clients around issues that involve breaking the law.
2. If you suspect that your client may be breaking the law, or you are uncomfortable for any reason about your client's actions, these are some steps you might follow:
  - a. Consider your own values. What's important to you? Considering how you feel, are you willing to coach someone in this situation?
  - b. Touch base with a trusted colleague or two while maintaining your client's confidentiality. What do other coaches think about this? What's the best way to handle this?

Remember that in any challenging situation, there is an opportunity for coaching and for learning, for both you and your client.