

Professional Ethics

Professional ethics are crucial to any service business. Ethics refers to an agreed upon set of moral principles or values, or rules of conduct. Professional ethics is a broad topic that includes personal conduct, professionalism, confidentiality, client referral to a therapist or consultant, and conflict of interest.

CTI subscribes to the Ethical Guidelines of the International Coach Federation (ICF) and has its own Suggested Rules of Correct and Honorable Conduct as well. In addition to reviewing these two documents, which follow below, it's also important for you to take the time to develop ethical guidelines for your own coaching practice.

International Coach Federation (ICF) Code of Ethics

The following ICF Code of Ethics are taken directly from the ICF web site at www.coachfederation.org in July 2009. CTI highly recommends that all coaches become members of the ICF. Go to their web site for more information and for updates to these guidelines.

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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

CTI Suggested Rules of Correct and Honorable Conduct

We subscribe to the Ethical Guidelines of the International Coach Federation.

In addition, we adhere to the following guidelines:

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 his/her name.
2. As professional coaches we do not break the law for our clients. We do not act as accomplices to our client's illegal activity.
3. As professional coaches we do not enter into financial agreements with our clients based on results of the client; i.e., the client will give you a 10% bonus based on the sales bonus they receive from their corporation. To take such an action is the clients' option but the coach does not count on it.
4. When we enter into agreements with corporations, we hold the individuals as our clients, and respect their right to confidentiality.
5. We do not work with clients who we cannot champion and see their growing edge.
6. We manage our own Saboteurs in such a way that it does not deter the client's progress and enables us to hold the client's agenda, rather than the coach's agenda.
7. We treat our colleagues, competitors and the coaching profession with honor and respect.
8. We agree to hold the client's (A)genda and (a)genda so as to point the client to Fulfillment, Balance, and Process as well as Forwarding the Action and Deepening the Learning.
9. We align with the belief that clients are naturally creative, resourceful and whole, capable of finding their own answers.

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The Coach/Client Agreement

It's important to educate your client about what coaching is and isn't in the very beginning of the relationship. Include information in your initial coaching session and in your coach/client agreement both to ensure that your client understands what kind of relationship they are agreeing to and to protect yourself in the event that any questions come up later on in the coaching relationship. Following are sample paragraphs that you could include in your coach/client agreement to help clarify that the client is entering a coaching relationship and that it is not therapy:

- I understand that Co-Active® Coaching is a comprehensive process that may involve all areas of my life, including work, finances, health, relationships, education and recreation. I acknowledge that deciding how to handle these issues and implement my choices is exclusively my responsibility.
- I understand that Co-Active® Coaching does not treat mental disorders as defined by the American Psychiatric Association. I understand that Co-Active® Coaching is not a substitute for counseling, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, mental health care or substance abuse treatment and I will not use it in place of any form of therapy.
- I promise that if I am currently in therapy or otherwise under the care of a mental health professional, that I have consulted with this person regarding the advisability of working with a Co-Active® Coach and that this person is aware of my decision to proceed with the Co-Active® Coaching relationship.
- I understand that feelings are a normal and healthy part of being human and that through a Co-Active® Coaching relationship, awareness and curiosity will be brought to my feelings so that I can make more informed choices and move into my desired action. I understand that coaching does not deal with the psychological antecedent to emotions – that is the realm of therapy.