



## Presence-Based Coaching II

### Concall #1: Ethics and Self-Work

*Please review this entire document, including the Ethical Dilemmas and the ICF Code of Ethics, before our call.*

In Presence-Based Coaching, we hold ethics in two distinct perspectives: conventional and post-conventional. We can actually see that our relationship to ethical guidelines reveals a stage model of development, similarly to the Levels of Motivation we discussed in a PBC1 call.

Specifically, our relationship with the ethical guidelines serves multiple purposes. In order of increasing stage of development (1-4 are conventional, 5 is post-conventional):

1. helps us stay out of legal and ethical trouble by following practices approved by authorities.
2. helps us do the right thing by drawing from best practices.
3. supports building an effective relationship that can produce the desired results.
4. creates a relational field of trust and safety, which facilitates personal work
5. *provides a mirror on ourselves, furthering our own work with our attachments and aversions.*

Given this overall pattern, here are some conventional ways the ethics code provides explicit support for our professional behavior. These will relate to points 1-4 above.

- The code is a set of agreed upon guidelines, established by the profession of which we are a part, that clarify right and wrong behavior. These guidelines help both coaches and clients know what to expect around sometimes murky areas, and define what is acceptable or not from a legal and regulatory standpoint. Since coaching is not a regulated profession, industry standards (e.g., the ICF Ethical Guidelines) outline expectations for ICF credentialing and also potentially identify legal issues.
- Guidelines support a safe space for the client to do personal work. Presence is created not simply by the consciousness of the practitioner, but also by the physical space and the container of the coaching relationship. This container is established by contract-specific agreements and also held by broader shared ethical understandings.
- Familiarity with best practices in your coaching content area also provide you with alternate and accepted views of how coaches work with ethical issues that may arise. Knowing the scope of your own practice, and staying well within that scope, decreases the probabilities of having ethical issues come up in the first place.
- Another approach around ethics, widely accepted outside the US and increasingly common everywhere, is to contract for ongoing supervision with an experienced coach, or a group of peers, where you can ask for help around ethical dilemmas that may arise.



Post-conventionally, the code provides a reflection that accelerates development. These relate to point 5 from the list above.

- We frame the overuse of a particular Septet Voice in coaching sessions as an example of a potential ethical issue. While ICF ethical guidelines do not address this, placing ourselves in service to our clients inherently requires that we recognize and let go of our identity-based attachments so that we can truly be present, neutral, and in service to those we intend to support. Allowing our own identity needs to override what best serves the client is a subtle internal conflict of interest.
- We see that any structure of guidelines or expected behaviors will reveal our own attachments and aversions. Ethical choices are often not a simple, objective decision that must be made, but can reveal strong urges that require personal work to navigate. (e.g., sexual attraction to a client.) To paraphrase Pema Chödrön, “we work on ourselves in order to help others. And, we help others in order to work on ourselves.” Ethics is yet another place for self-observation and self-work. Knowing our own personal stance and integrity with ethics issues will help us stay grounded in the face of unexpected ethical issues when they do arise.

## Working with Ethical Guidelines

The first and simplest requirement is to become familiar with the ICF Code of Ethics (included below,) to examine your practices, and to ensure that you are in compliance. If you are, or become, an ICF member, and/or if you are pursuing certification as a Presence-Based® Coach, you will be making an explicit commitment to follow the sensible and practical requirements of this code.

The ICF Guidelines (and the accompanying FAQ’s on the ICF site) provide a fair bit of detail on ethical choices that you are likely to encounter. Knowing the territory before a situation arises is far easier than extricating yourself after there’s a mess.

## Placing Ourselves in Service

Beyond the obvious need for compliance with industry standards, there is the significant question of what it means to truly place ourselves into service to our clients. This is a consciousness question, and requires recognizing the attachments and aversions that might distort our discernment of what the client needs or what is right in the situation, and may even lead us to override ethical guidance.

A strong internal compass and a grounded awareness of what you stand for require doing the self-work to negotiate with your own habits. This is not simply a matter of following guidelines (although that’s a good start!) but also facing and dealing with the attachments and justifying narratives that arise in response to the guidelines. Ethical commitments, too, are development work!



## Ethical Dilemmas

**Before our call, please consider the following situations. For each,**

- What ethical guideline is most relevant to this situation?
  - What attachment or aversion within you is likely to be triggered here?
  - How might you work with this attachment?
  - What course of action might you take in this situation?
  - How might the coach have headed this off in advance?
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1. Your coaching work is paid for by your client's boss (the "sponsor.") Your client does not trust his boss. Both parties understand that the conversations are confidential, however, their relationship is becoming increasingly tense and your client's performance has been spotty. Your client is considering leaving the company, but hasn't spoken to the boss; the boss, who is a long term client/friend of yours, insists on knowing how the coaching is going, and when she can expect to see the client's performance getting better. The boss reminds you frequently of your long term relationship with her, that her company is paying for results, and she needs to decide whether to keep your client or let him go.
  2. You have been coaching a client for nine months, and she has been pretty successful at achieving the goals you started with. As you near the end of your agreement, she starts talking more about problems in her marriage. Marital issues are outside the bounds of what you originally contracted to work on, although you see how some of the old behaviors you have been coaching on could also be enabling difficulties in her marriage. She has requested that you extend your coaching relationship because you have built trust together, the marital situation is deteriorating, and she doesn't know who else to turn to.
  3. You have a client who is in the process of starting a new business in the city where you live. A lawyer friend of yours has offered you a small commission for any business you send her way. She specializes in small businesses, and is committed to supporting women entrepreneurs. You like both of these women, and feel sure that they would like each other and work well together.
  4. Your client has brought up, in coaching conversations, his/her dissatisfaction with his/her marriage, and the lack of intimacy. The client has said that you are the only one that he/she can be really honest with, and has hinted at meeting socially outside the bounds of your coaching sessions. It has seemed harmless, and you enjoy your client, but you are also aware that there seems to be some charge from him, and you are wondering if he has some attraction to you.



# The ICF Philosophy, Definition, and Pledge of Ethics

## The ICF Philosophy of Coaching

The International Coach Federation adheres to a form of coaching that honors the client as the expert in his/her life and work, believes that every client is creative, resourceful, and whole. Standing on this foundation, the coach's responsibility is to:

- Discover, clarify, and align with what the client wants to achieve
- Encourage client self-discovery
- Elicit client-generated solutions and strategies
- Hold the client responsible and accountable

## The ICF Definition of Coaching

Professional Coaching is an ongoing professional relationship that helps people produce extraordinary results in their lives, careers, businesses or organizations. Through the process of coaching, clients deepen their learning, improve their performance, and enhance their quality of life.

In each meeting, the client chooses the focus of conversation, while the coach listens and contributes observations and questions. This interaction creates clarity and moves the client into action. Coaching accelerates the client's progress by providing greater focus and awareness of choice. Coaching concentrates on where clients are now and what they are willing to do to get where they want to be in the future, recognizing that results are a matter of the client's intentions, choices and actions, supported by the coach's efforts and application of the coaching process.

- **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.

## The ICF Pledge of Ethics

As a professional coach, I acknowledge and agree to honor my ethical obligations to my coaching clients and colleagues and to the public at large. I pledge to comply with ICF Standards of Ethical Conduct, to treat people with dignity as independent and equal human beings, and to model these standards with those whom I coach. If I breach this Pledge of Ethics



or any ICF Standards of Ethical Conduct, 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 loss of my ICF membership or my ICF credentialing.

## The ICF Standards of Ethical Conduct

### ICF Code of Ethics

ICF is committed to maintaining and promoting excellence in coaching. Therefore, ICF expects all members and credentialed coaches (coaches, coach mentors, coaching supervisors, coach trainers or students), to adhere to the elements and principles of ethical conduct: to be competent and integrate ICF Core Competencies effectively in their work.

In line with the ICF core values and ICF definition of coaching, the Code of Ethics is designed to provide appropriate guidelines, accountability and enforceable standards of conduct for all ICF Members and ICF Credential-holders, who commit to abiding by the following ICF Code of Ethics:

### Part One: Definitions

**Coaching:** Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.

**ICF Coach:** An ICF coach agrees to practice the ICF Core Competencies and pledges accountability to the ICF Code of Ethics.

**Professional Coaching Relationship:** A professional coaching relationship exists when coaching includes an agreement (including contracts) that defines the responsibilities of each party.

**Roles in the Coaching Relationship:** 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 are therefore jointly referred to as the client. For purposes of identification, however, the ICF defines these roles as follows: **Client:** The "Client/Coachee 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 agreements should clearly establish the rights, roles and responsibilities for both the client and sponsor if the client and sponsor are different people. **Student:** The "student" is someone enrolled in a coach training program or working with a coaching supervisor or coach mentor in order to learn the coaching process or enhance and develop their coaching skills.

**Conflict of Interest:** A situation in which a coach has a private or personal interest sufficient to appear to influence the objective of his or her official duties as a coach and a professional.



## Part Two: The ICF Standards of Ethical Conduct

### **Section 1: Professional Conduct at Large: As a coach, I:**

1. Conduct myself in accordance with the ICF Code of Ethics in all interactions, including coach training, coach mentoring and coach supervisory activities.
2. Commit to take the appropriate action with the coach, trainer, or coach mentor and/or will contact ICF to address any ethics violation or possible breach as soon as I become aware, whether it involves me or others.
3. Communicate and create awareness in others, including organizations, employees, sponsors, coaches and others, who might need to be informed of the responsibilities established by this Code.
4. Refrain from unlawful discrimination in occupational activities, including age, race, gender orientation, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, national origin or disability.
5. Make verbal and written statements that are true and accurate about what I offer as a coach, the coaching profession or ICF.
6. Accurately identify my coaching qualifications, expertise, experience, training, certifications and ICF Credentials.
7. Recognize and honor the efforts and contributions of others and only claim ownership of my own material. I understand that violating this standard may leave me subject to legal remedy by a third party.
8. Strive at all times to recognize my personal issues that may impair, conflict with or interfere with my coaching performance or my professional coaching relationships. I will promptly seek the relevant professional assistance and determine the action to be taken, including whether it is appropriate to suspend or terminate my coaching relationship(s) whenever the facts and circumstances necessitate.
9. Recognize that the Code of Ethics applies to my relationship with coaching clients, coachees, students, mentees and supervisees.
10. 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.

11. Maintain, store and dispose of any records, including electronic files and communications, created during my coaching engagements in a manner that promotes confidentiality, security and privacy and complies with any applicable laws and agreements.
12. Use ICF Member contact information (email addresses, telephone numbers, and so on) only in the manner and to the extent authorized by the ICF.

### **Section 2: Conflicts of Interest: As a coach, I:**

13. Seek to be conscious of any conflict or potential conflict of interest, openly disclose any such conflict and offer to remove myself when a conflict arises.
14. Clarify roles for internal coaches, set boundaries and review with stakeholders conflicts of interest that may emerge between coaching and other role functions.
15. Disclose to my client and the sponsor(s) all anticipated compensation from third parties that I may receive for referrals of clients or pay to receive clients.
16. Honor an equitable coach/client relationship, regardless of the form of compensation.

### **Section 3: Professional Conduct with Clients: As a coach, I:**

17. Ethically speak what I know to be true to clients, prospective clients or sponsors about the potential value of the coaching process or of me as a coach.
18. 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.
19. Have a clear coaching service agreement with my clients and sponsor(s) before beginning the coaching relationship and honor this agreement. The agreement shall include the roles, responsibilities and rights of all parties involved.
20. Hold responsibility for being aware of and setting clear, appropriate and culturally sensitive boundaries that govern interactions, physical or otherwise, I may have with my clients or sponsor(s).



21. Avoid any sexual or romantic relationship with current clients or sponsor(s) or students, mentees or supervisees. Further, I will be alert to the possibility of any potential sexual intimacy among the parties including my support staff and/or assistants and will take the appropriate action to address the issue or cancel the engagement in order to provide a safe environment overall.
22. Respect the client's right to terminate the coaching relationship at any point during the process, subject to the provisions of the agreement. I shall remain alert to indications that there is a shift in the value received from the coaching relationship.
23. 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 and suggest my client seek the services of other professionals when deemed necessary or appropriate.

#### **Section 4: Confidentiality/Privacy As a coach, I:**

24. Maintain the strictest levels of confidentiality with all client and sponsor information unless release is required by law.
25. Have a clear agreement about how coaching information will be exchanged among coach, client and sponsor.
26. Have a clear agreement when acting as a coach, coach mentor, coaching supervisor or trainer, with both client and sponsor, student, mentee, or supervisee about the conditions under which confidentiality may not be maintained (e.g., illegal activity, pursuant to valid court order or subpoena; imminent or likely risk of danger to self or to others; etc) and make sure both client and sponsor, student, mentee, or supervisee voluntarily and knowingly agree in writing to that limit of confidentiality. Where I reasonably believe that because one of the above circumstances is applicable, I may need to inform appropriate authorities.
27. Require all those who work with me in support of my clients to adhere to the ICF Code of Ethics, Number 26, Section 4, Confidentiality and Privacy Standards, and any other sections of the Code of Ethics that might be applicable.

#### **Section 5: Continuing Development As a coach, I:**

28. Commit to the need for continued and ongoing development of my professional skills.



## Part Three: The ICF Pledge of Ethics:

As an ICF 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, teach, mentor or supervise.

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.

***Adopted by the ICF Global Board of Directors June 2015.***

The ICF Ethics FAQ page has useful information and examples for each of the standards. See <http://bit.ly/18YAvqs>.