

ETHICS IN COACHING

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WELCOME TO INTRODUCTION

“Ethics is nothing else
than reverence for life.” -Albert Schweitzer.

Ethics is one of the most critical aspects of our lives. In a true sense, one can easily say that a man without ethics has no future. It is the standing block of our life. It is present in all fields, from our early childhood when we start to show empathy-based guilt while breaking the rules to the stage where we enter a professional stand and make ethical decisions. It all comes down to ethics.

In this book, we will critically analyze Ethics in the field of Coaching. We will begin by first defining and evaluating all the necessary points about ethics and then read about the history of ethics. In this chapter, we will explore the issue of ethics in coaching starting with a review of the nature of ethics.



Moving forward, we will evaluate the ethical dilemma in the world of coaching and then discuss the Ethical Decision-making process. We will also be covering the Ethical Standards by ICF which is a professional body in coaching along with the principles for a coach. In the final section of this book, we will discuss the Ethical Responsibilities of A Coach and consider ethical decision-making to offer a model of decision-making designed specifically for coaching practitioners.

WHAT IS ETHICS?

The word Ethics is derived from the Greek word 'ethos' which means customs, habits, characters, or disposition. Ethics is a branch of philosophy that focuses on human behavior and moral judgments in the sense of specific relationships, and it is used to codify ethical principles (Remley & Herlihy, 2001). They are moral philosophies or standards of what is right and what is wrong for humans usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to the society, fairness, or specific virtues.

They usually affect how people make decisions and lead their lives. Thus, Ethics covers the following dilemmas:

- » **how to live a good life**
- » **our rights and responsibilities**
- » **the language of right and wrong**
- » **moral decisions - what is good and bad?**
- » **code of conduct**

THE ROOTS OF ETHICS IN COACHING

Coaching is one of the upcoming professional industries that is bound to bring revolution in human life. And like any other professional body, coaching also requires an ethical code. It must include professional qualifications, definitions, ethical principles, ongoing testing, and credentialing in order to be accepted as a specialty.

With the establishment of many coach training schools and organizations in the early 1990s, the coaching movement accelerated. In 1996, two large organizations, the Professional Coaches & Mentors Association (PCMA) merged with the International Coaching Federation (ICF), and the ICF led the way as the most recognized international association representing the coaching profession. Practice standards, credentialing, and ethical guidelines were quickly developed after that.

THE ETHICAL DILEMMA

When an individual first enters the world of coaching, he may believe that in order to be successful and make ethical decisions, he must first undergo training and learn about the ethical code of conduct for coaches. However, ethical behavior involves a more comprehensive journey. There may be emotional, personality, or behavioral issues that might have multiple sources. Therefore one can easily conclude that ethical decision-making is intertwined with the process of coaching.

Handelsman, Gottlieb, and Knapp (2005) state that- “Becoming an ethical professional is more complex than simply following a set of rules or doing what one sees one’s mentors do . . . [It] involves more than teaching certain professional rules to morally upright people who will easily understand and implement them.”

It is not easy to fit into the coaching community. It entails a phase of adaptation or acculturation. According to Handelsman, Gottlieb, and Knapp (2005), the ethical culture of a profession, in this case, coaching, may vary significantly from a person’s ethical culture of origin or personal ethics.

THE ACTION MODEL OF ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

Since there are numerous issues with the ethical code of practice and limits of these codes, the Action model was derived to focus on the development of the decision-making framework which could provide aid to individual coaches in their work. This model consists of six stages of ethical decision-making.



Awareness:

This stage consists of awareness of one's own beliefs and values. It also involves the awareness of the coach's position and the ethical code of the professional body of affiliation.



Classification:

Identification of issues as it emerges in the practice and the ability to classify the issue as a dilemma.



Time for support advice and reflection:

This stage involves the time a coach takes to personally reflect using a combination of experience and supporting networks.



Initiation:

Once a coach starts to build a number of solutions for the ethical dilemma, he should take full time in exploring all the options available.



Option evaluation:

After the coach has explored all the options available he must give time and space to each of these options generated initially. This should include checking with ethical codes and reflecting on how the decision fits with his own values.



Novate:

Finally when the decision has been made by the coach he must incorporate this in his experience list and it should be shared among his network and other coaching bodies so that others can benefit from this situation too.

WHY DO WE NEED ETHICAL CODE IN COACHING?

In order to support clients, coaches operate with niche specializations. Coaches are trained in coaching at a school or by a mentor coach. They use and incorporate their own life experiences in their work. The use of long term strategies and goals are made suitable to clients. Since most coaching relationships are personal, this Ethics Code offers the structure and principles that professional coaches use to direct their work.

The purposes of this Code are threefold.

For starters, it sets out the broad concepts and values that coaches adhere to.

Confidentiality and absolute respect for the client's well-being and progress are among them. Second, it offers rules for coaches to use in many of the unique scenarios that they can face. Finally, this Code is intended to act as a foundation for coaches' ethical and moral values. Although the coach agrees to follow this Code, they are encouraged to supplement and add to it over time in order to develop a lifelong commitment to an ethical workplace and career.

Coaching ethics are the responsibility of the coach, not the client or sponsor. Setting personal ethical standards that are much stronger than what the profession needs, and committing to doing whatever

is in the client's best interests, is one way to do this. The best way to learn this is to train ourselves to be coaches by discussing various possibilities and how to best deal with them professionally and personally with integrity, responsibility, and sincerity.



ETHICAL STANDARDS BY ICF

The ICF Code of Ethics is based on the ICF Core Values and the actions that flow from them. All values are equally important and support one another. These values are aspirational and should be used as a way to understand and interpret the standards. All ICF Professionals are expected to showcase and propagate these Values in all their interactions.

The following ethical standards are applied to the professional activities of ICF Professionals:

Section I—Responsibility to Clients

Section I of ICF standards for a coach discusses the responsibility towards the clients. The clients should be informed about the nature and the value of coaching along with all the terms of the agreement. Coaches should create an agreement and maintain a strict level of confidentiality while disclosing all the conditions under which the information is not confidential. They should maintain, store and dispose of all the records and remain alert to the indications that might be a shift in the value received from the coaching relationship. There should be respect and sensitivity at all times. There should be a complete disclosure of the potential receipt of compensation to the clients and ensure that there is consistent quality in the coaching process regardless of the amount of compensation.



Section II—Responsibility to Practice and Performance

Section II states a coach's responsibility to practice and performance. Coaches should adhere to the ICF code of ethics, they should be aware of the possible breaches and should report any unethical behaviour. They should Commit to excellence through continued personal, professional, and ethical development and recognize personal limitations or circumstances that may impair, conflict with or interfere with the coaching performance. They should resolve any conflict of interest by working through the issue with the relevant parties and maintain the privacy of ICF members.



Section III—Responsibility to Professionalism

Section III of ethical standards by ICF deals with the responsibility to professionalism. A coach needs to identify his coaching qualification and clearly define in a verbal and written statement his level of coaching competency and what he has to offer as an ICF professional. He should communicate and create awareness of the ethical responsibilities. He should be aware of creating appropriate and culturally sensitive boundaries and should not participate in any romantic engagement with the clients or the sponsors.



Section IV—Responsibility to Society

Section IV of the ethical standards by ICF comprises of the responsibilities to the society. One should avoid discrimination and maintain fairness and equality in all activities and operations with respect to local rules and cultural practices. He should recognize and honor the contribution and the intellectual property of others and only claim ownership of his own materials. He should be honest and work within the specified standard and the guidelines. And for the most important part, he should be aware of his and his client's impact on society and he should live by the verses of 'doing good'.



ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR COACHES

The ICF Code of Ethics is made up of four fundamental responsibilities. They are as follows:

1. Responsibility to Clients

This part consists of the preliminary principle of coaching. A coach must ensure that clients and sponsors understand the value of coaching. This includes:

- » Confidentiality
- » Limits
- » Financial agreement
- » Handling all documents
- » Managing potential conflicts

Confidentiality should be maintained at all times by a coach. Prior to the start of services, he must create an agreement outlining the roles, responsibilities, and rights of all parties involved.

2. Responsibility to Professionalism

This section states that a coach should practice the ICF Code of Ethics in all interactions. A coach must ensure to commit excellence through continuous professional, personal, and ethical development. Coaches should follow ethical principles that reflect well on both the individual coach and the profession as a whole.

3. Responsibility to Practice and Performance

Responsibility towards practice and performance means that a coach should precisely identify their:

- » Coaching qualifications
- » Level of coaching competency
- » Training and experience
- » Certifications and ICF credentials

A coach should make accurate verbal statements about what they can offer. The client-coach relationship must be strictly professional. Any discrepancies in any term will render the coach incompetent.

4. Responsibility to Society

A coach isn't just for the client. Coaches also have a responsibility to add value to society. They should be impartial and avoid discrimination. Any contribution and intellectual property should be honored. In order to meet the Code of Ethics, a coach should remain honest and work with recognized scientific standards.

If as a coach you find yourself thinking about practical choices you need to make in your practice as a professional, this is usually a positive thing. A balanced level of concern demonstrates the dedication to the customers and the desire to provide them with services that are correct and suitable for them.

ETHICAL COMPONENTS EVERY COACH NEEDS TO FOLLOW

When a professional is faced with an ethical situation or issue, multiple factors affect an individual's recognition and knowledge of the situation. The character of the individual, and his/her propensity towards virtue ethics, professional ethical identity, and ethics training all have an effect on the process. To make a profound decision, one needs to switch to the bottom circle, "Components of Ethical Conduct."

Ethical Sensitivity

The first component-ethical sensitivity raises coaches' awareness that their choices affect others positively or negatively. This includes their awareness, their obligation to the client, their intuitive feeling of right and wrong, the issues related to diversity, and their point of privilege affecting their sensitivity to this issue.

Ethical Thought Process

The second component-ethical thought process highlights Kitchener's decision-making model (2000): This model includes the know-hows of a situations existence, the necessity of a sense of ethical dilemma, the guidelines of the ethical code, the minimum expectations of the professional realm a coach and an understanding of the options available in terms of the professional bodies, authorities, and resources that can provide guidance when problematic ethical dilemmas arise.

Ethical Motivation and Competing Values

This component searches the heart of the matter, the values conflicts within the coach like which core values are being stretched or strengthened, How does my client win or lose, depending on the course of action? Or Who benefits from which course of action?

Ethical Follow-Through

This component prompts the implementation of the choices like the accountability, the encouragement or core values that a coach needs to draw upon. It also includes the dilemma of a coach to know what he wants to share with his clients.

The streamlined process of "**Ethical Components**" provides a discussion and model that indicates a coach's decision-making process is not confined to a single moment or circumstance. Several other factors affect the process, including the coach's character, the creation of virtue ethics, ethics training, and professional ethical identity, which arises from acculturation to the coaching profession. Finally, it is the coach who goes through a more deliberate process to make an ethical decision.

ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF A COACH

A code of ethics is a tool that establishes minimum standards. It sets a code of conduct for the coaches as they advance in their careers. It's a tool that inspires coaches to share shared beliefs and do their best work. Here are the 4 ethical principles that each and every coach follows:

Competence

Ethical competence is the pursuit of information and action that distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable actions. Coaches must follow high ethical competence in their practice and maintain transparency and consistency about the services provided.

Integrity

The second ethical responsibility of a coach is to display integrity. Representing themselves in a truthful and equitable manner helps coaches in recognizing their own competencies and weaknesses. They should be trustworthy, genuine, and honorable in their interactions with others. Coaches with a high level of self-awareness and the ability to objectively focus on how their experiences affect their relationships with others are best positioned to act on these beliefs.

Professional Responsibility

Coaches should follow ethical principles that reflect well on both the individual coach and the profession as a whole. Coaches have a special responsibility to obey and promote the interests of individuals who are disadvantaged or dependent and unable to defend their own rights. They should communicate with others in such a way that their clients' reputation is maintained, and they should cultivate mutual support among fellow coaches, officials, and clients.

Respect for People's Rights and Dignity

Coaches should treat clients with dignity and respect, taking into account cultural nuances, their own cultural context, and prejudices, as well as the client's right to autonomy, privacy, and confidentiality.

Coaches are solely responsible for their own ethical conduct. In all facets of their personal and professional lives, ethical dilemmas – or “ethical moments of decision” – will eventually occur. When approached correctly, ethical dilemmas will help develop personally and professionally. This is because they make them conscious of what is morally correct or incorrect.

CONCLUSION

Ethics are guides that provide us a path towards our actions. They may be difficult to abide by at times but they enhance both our understanding of the dilemmas and ethical challenges. Thus to bring a conclusion to all the topics covered, coaches should remember the pledge of ethics by ICF and follow them at all times.

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





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