Coaching World

ICF International Coach Federation

Advancing the Art, Science and Practice of Professional Coaching

Special Issue Special Issue Special Issue Special Issue Special Issue

Coaching and Ethics

New document addresses frequently asked questions



"The release of this document to members is only possible due to an incredible amount of dedicated work by our Ethics and Standards Committee. It provides high quality practical information and support for many common challenges facing our members."



Karen Tweedie, PCC
2009 ICF President

Welcome to this special ethics issue of *Coaching World*.

Coaches who adhere to the ICF Code of Ethics set themselves apart from those who simply call themselves coaches.

In order for coaches to better understand and apply the Code to their coaching, a listing of frequently asked questions (FAQs) was compiled into a FAQ document by the ICF Ethics and Standards Committee.

This special edition of *Coaching World* provides the FAQ document in its entirety (beginning on page 4), guiding coaches through the various components of the Code, and is bursting with questions and answers to various ethical situations professional coaches are faced with on a regular basis.

In addition, this special issue contains various quotes and observations from the members of the ICF Ethics and Standards Committee and other ethics-related news.

Table of Contents

Submit your own ethics related questions.....2
Coach-to-Coach Code of Conduct in the works..... 2
Promote your use of ICF Code of Ethics/ECR..... 2
An introduction to Ethics FAQs.....3
FAQ document.....4

Coach-to-Coach Code of Conduct in the works

Member feedback on draft requested

The global ICF Ethics and Standards Committee Members are currently in the creative stages of the new Coach-to-Coach Code of Conduct. This Code will pertain to how we, as coaches, interact with and treat each other.

The Committee Members would really like to get YOUR feedback.

Looking at the draft below, what two or three additional items would you suggest? Responses and feedback may be sent to: icfethics@coachfederation.org.

Following is a DRAFT of the Coach-to-Coach Code of Conduct:

1. Treat fellow coaches the way you want fellow coaches to treat you.
2. Model the behaviors you wish to instill in your coaching clients by your relationships with fellow coaches.
3. Do not take advantage of fellow coaches for your own financial gain.
4. When working with fellow coaches, have clear written agreements. This can be as simple as an e-mail.
5. Be very clear when asking for the assistance of fellow coaches: What is the nature of the help that you require?
6. Hold confidences. When confidential information is shared, keep it confidential.
7. What goes around, comes around. Remember that what you put out, has a tendency to come back.
8. (Your suggestion here.)
9. (Your suggestion here.)
10. (Your suggestion here.)

Promote your use of ICF Code of Ethics/ECR.

Clients want to ensure their coaches follow professional guidelines. In fact, 83 percent of clients feel that it is *very important* that coaching be done in accordance with a formal code of ethics, according to the 2009 *ICF Global Coaching Client Study*.

Consider using your compliance with the ICF Code of Ethics as a marketing tool: proudly display a copy of it in your office; list the code in your coaching contract; give a copy to your client; or link to the official ICF Code of Ethics on your Web site.

In addition to the Code of Ethics, tell your clients that as a member of the ICF, you have agreed to the ICF Ethical Conduct Review process. This ensures clients they have a course of recourse, and gives them added security in the coaching partnership and process.

The ICF Code of Ethics can be found on Coachfederation.org.

Connect with ICF members:

Be a fan on Facebook.

Follow us on Twitter.

Connect on the ICF Blog.

Watch us on YouTube.

Submit your own ethics-related questions

Submitted questions will be answered through an ethics column to appear in *Coaching World*. All questions will be answered by members of the ICF Ethics and Standards Committee. This interactive dialogue will be an opportunity to further explore the complex issues that arise in our profession.

Questions can be submitted to: icfethics@coachfederation.org.

2009 ICF Ethics & Standards Committee

Chair—Jeanne Erikson, PCC (USA)
Vice Chair—Sally Rhys, ACC (USA)

Teri-E Belf, MCC (USA)
Hazel Brief (Israel)
Vicki Escude, MCC (USA)
Gregory Gillis, PCC (USA)
Lynn Grodzki, MCC (USA)
Judith Holder-Cooper, ACC, Ph.D. (USA)
Jytte Larsen, ACC (Denmark)
Sam Nassif, PCC (Monaco)
Terry Ramsey, MCC (Canada)
Liora Rosen (USA)
Neil Scotton, ACC (UK)
Vanessa Shaw (France)

An introduction to Ethics FAQs

Interview with ICF Ethics and Standards Committee members

Why was the FAQ document created? What is its purpose?



Chair: Jeanne Erikson, PCC

"The revision of the ethics code in 2008 has created changes in expectations for coaches related to confidentiality, separation of sponsors and clients, and treatment of initial agreements. The Ethics Committee spent several years reviewing and debating ethical scenarios coaches encounter to develop this code. We hope sharing concrete examples will clarify how to apply the Code."
Jeanne Erikson, PCC (USA)
Chair, Ethics & Standards Committee



Vice Chair: Sally Rhys, ACC

"We've added some samples regarding specific situations to this FAQ document. The document's purpose is to clarify the intentions of the ICF Code of Ethics and help coaches learn how to apply the code to their professional lives."
Sally Rhys, ACC (USA)
Vice Chair, Ethics & Standards Committee



Teri-E Belf, MCC

"The purpose of the FAQ document is to clarify the Code of Standards and Ethics with examples from the collective and worldwide coaching experience of Committee members. Coaches thrive on clarity. This makes the gray area of ethics even less gray...As a member of the ICF Ethics Committee, I saw the opportunity to generate answers to expected questions, some of which we asked ourselves in clarifying the Code."
Teri-E Belf, MCC (USA)



Vicki Escude, MCC

"The purpose of the FAQs is to help members more easily interpret and use the new ICF Code of Ethics. Being on the small sub-committee to create the FAQs, three of us took each item in the Code and brainstormed questions someone might have. We then proposed answers to the questions. Once the proposed FAQ was created, each question and answer was meticulously examined and discussed by the whole Ethics Committee, and suggestions and changes were made. In some instances the ICF legal counsel was consulted."
Vicki Escude, MCC (USA)



Sam Nassif, PCC

"The FAQ document was mainly created:
1) To illustrate with practical examples how to apply the "ICF Code of Ethics;"
2) To facilitate its comprehension;
3) To encourage coach members to ask further questions in the future on very specific cases that are not covered by the present FAQ."
Sam Nassif, PCC (Monaco)



Hazel Brief

"My understanding is that one of the reasons was to clarify, clarify, clarify, what our ethical responsibility is to ourselves, our clients, and our profession. The Code of Ethics is the document that details our collective commitment to professional coaching. However, just like any document, sometimes there needs to be concrete, practical, everyday examples of what the Code means so that everyone is able to use the Code for reference in their daily work as a coach."
Hazel Brief (Israel)



Vanessa Shaw

"Ultimately, the Code of Ethics supported by the FAQ document helps to define acceptable behaviours, promote the highest standards of practice and provides a good benchmarking system against which coaches can self-evaluate. The Code of Ethics and FAQs serve to protect and minimise the risks for both coaches and their clients. We hope that the FAQ will raise ethical questions that coaches haven't previously considered and this will provide an opportunity for strengthening professional conduct and raising the bar within our profession.
Vanessa Shaw (France)

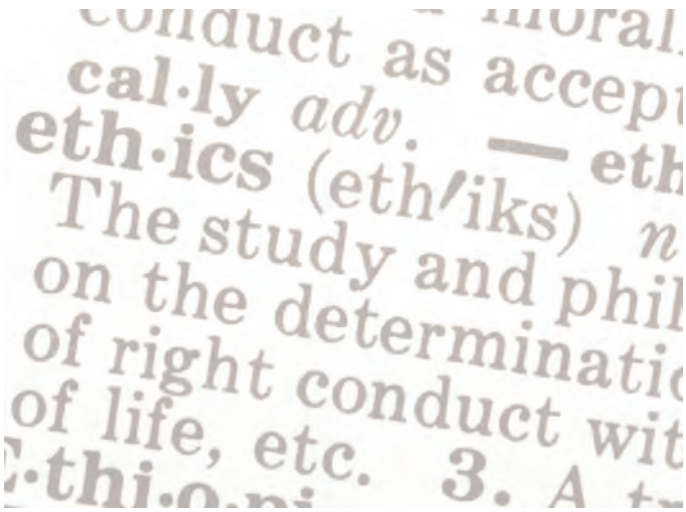


Liora Rosen

"To my recollection, the FAQs arose from a discussion we had that there should be an Ethics column in each issue of *Coaching World* in order to make it more accessible to all coaches. The discussion then evolved into starting it with a FAQs column, asking for reader feedback or input (or more questions) and then hopefully developing that further so that in each issue we delve into a particular topic or question in more detail, starting with our FAQs then continuing with reader's questions or issues."
Liora Rosen (USA)

See more comments from ICF Ethics and Standards Committee members on pages 4-11.





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.

Q: *I coach my staff periodically. Do I need an agreement with them?*
A: If coaching is mentioned in your job description such that it clarifies roles and responsibilities when you are coaching, in contrast to the roles and responsibilities when you are managing, then no more is necessary. However, if it is not mentioned in your job description, you do need to define your role and responsibilities to your staff/employees or other business fellows before you begin coaching them. There is a distinction between professional coaching, and simply using coaching skills. If the executive is simply using coaching skills, no formal agreement is necessary.

Q: *The definition of a professional coaching relationship does not include when I spontaneously coach friends when they need it. I am being professional. Is this not coaching?*
A: You may use coaching competencies when coaching friends and you may be acting professionally when you do so. However, this is not considered a professional coaching relationship because no agreement exists. Confidentiality should still be respected, however, as a courtesy.

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.

Q: *Can you give me an example of a sponsor?*
A: A sponsor might be a parent, an agency who contracts out coaches, or a business hiring coaches for its employees.

Questions regarding the ICF Code of Ethics FAQ document can be submitted to: icfethics@coachfederation.org.

"It is the committee's intent that the content of the FAQ document will be discussed at all levels of ICF membership, particularly at the chapter level. When the committee was piecing this document together, several areas generated a lot of discussion. It is our hope the same will happen at the ICF Chapter level. Likewise, there are potential surprises over what was added—some responses provided may even be news to some people. Overall, we intend for this document to assist coaches in reviewing their own marketing materials and agreements."
Sally Rhys, ACC (USA)
Vice Chair, Ethics & Standards Committee

"Our world is more complex and our workplace more electronic than at the time of the last Code update. The FAQs try to address some of these complex scenarios. Members should read it carefully, as it may contain some surprises. A positive way to use it is to review your own client agreements, marketing materials, Web site, and records storage systems to make sure they are compliant."
Jeanne Erikson, PCC (USA)
Chair, Ethics & Standards Committee

Q: *Must the coaching relationship last over a certain amount of time to be considered professional?*
A: The coaching process does take time. Using coaching competencies once or twice with someone does not necessarily constitute a coaching relationship. The criterion to use is whether there are coachable results, and an agreement that spells out roles and responsibilities of the coach and the client.

Q: *What kinds of coaching relationships are there other than professional?*
A: You might use coaching competencies in coaching your child and there is no agreement. You are in a relationship and you might be using coaching competencies, yet that does not mean it is a professional coaching relationship.

Q: *The ICF PCC designation stands for Professional Certified Coach? If so, when you speak of the ICF Professional Coach in the section entitled ICF Ethics Code definitions, are you referring to the PCC only?*
A: The definition of Professional Coaching refers to coaches with all ICF Credentials, ACC, PCC, and MCC and others that may be developed in the future.

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.
Q: *I have a Master's Degree in Communication, is it OK for me to put that on my coaching Web site and just say I have a Master's Degree?*
A: Whatever degrees and credentials you choose to put on your site should clearly state which degree goes with which profession so that the information presented is not misleading. For example, a Master's Degree in Communication is clearly stated whereas a Master's Degree by itself might mislead the reader to think that it is in coaching.

2) I will accurately identify my coaching qualifications, expertise, experience, certifications and ICF Credentials.
Q: *I have coached two executives, is it OK to say I'm an experienced executive coach?*
A: This could be misleading. Perhaps saying "I have coached executives" would be appropriate. However, someone who has coached two executives for a length of time through a lot of issues might be experienced. It seems to be a personal judgment call.

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.
Q: *I have worked with a business partner in the past and now I am on my own. Can I use the tools and documents that we created when we were together?*
A: The correct answer is whatever you and your former business partner had agreed to. If there was no specific agreement, discuss it before doing it to avoid an unnecessary conflict. Our ethics code applies to coach–client and coach–sponsor relationships only. ICF Committees are developing guidelines for business standards.

Q: *I found an excellent 20 item questionnaire used to attract clients on another coach's Web site. May I use some of the questions on my Web site without getting permission?*
A: No, you may not use them without obtaining permission.

Q: *I wish to provide documentation of the effectiveness of coaching to a company who might buy my services. I have two articles that make my points about the great ROI coaching can bring. Do I need to contact the author or publisher to use some of the points to make a PowerPoint presentation for my marketing pitch?*
A: Yes.

"The point [of the FAQs] is to highlight the new Code and help coaches become more knowledgeable and comfortable with it.

With that in mind, we thought that the best way to bring that across is through some examples and with a frequently asked questions. The FAQs are there to highlight information that many of us assume we know the answer to, and the answer might be tricky."
Liora Rosen (USA)



ICF Code of Ethics

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).

***Q**: I am coaching Jane, and a peer of hers, Alice, requests me to be her coach. Do I need to let the Alice know I am already coaching Jane?*
A: No you do not need to. Unless you have Alice's consent, you may not even mention it. Be aware, however, that this could present conflicts with confidentiality. Potential general conflicts should be clarified with each party.

5) I will conduct myself in accordance with the ICF Code of Ethics in all coach training, coach mentoring, and coach supervisory activities.
Q: *I work for an organization and supervise coach training, am I bound by the ICF Code of Ethics?*
A: Yes, indeed.

Q. *Does this mean that practice–coach sessions during training are confidential?*
A. Each program is encouraged to set up written standards for what will be confidential during training. Some programs feel student–teacher conversations or practice coaching conversations need be public so they can be observed and critiqued.

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.
Q: *What are "applicable subject guidelines?"*
A: Some universities have human subject guidelines when their students, employees, or faculty become subjects of a study. University guidelines may also apply for a candidate for a degree planning research.



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.
Q. *Do I have to provide client records in case of subpoena or ethical complaint?*
A. This will vary by country and jurisdiction, but generally, yes. Consider carefully what you put in your records.

Q: *How long do I have to keep client records?*
A: There is no ICF guideline at this time. You should check your local and national laws and regulations for compliance guidelines. If you are audited for income taxes, be sure to protect confidentiality.

Q: *How should I dispose of records?*
A: To the best of your ability, you should delete all online and electronic records, as well as shred paper records.

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.
Q: *I found e-mail contact information in various places on the ICF Web site. May I send information about soliciting (asking without explicit invitation) my products to my colleagues who are members of ICF?*
A: No, You may not use the ICF Web site contact informa-

"The uses of the FAQs are many. Coaches who are joining ICF can understand more clearly the intent, breadth and depth of situations that the ICF Code covers. By understanding how the Code is applied, they can appreciate the professionalism that the ICF upholds. Secondly, the FAQs can be a springboard for discussion in ICF Chapter meetings, which will help to educate members on the new Code. Thirdly, Accredited Coach Training Organizations can use the FAQs in training new coaches, so they are familiar with the Code and understand and appreciate this foundational piece of our organization.**"**
Vicki Escude, MCC (USA)

tion to send, solicit clients or students, nor to advertise your product and services

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.
Q: *May I accept a contract for a corporate mid-level manager when I am already coaching his boss?*
A: You may accept this contract if you think that you can maintain an objective stance and confidentiality with both clients. You can discuss in general terms with the first client how he would feel about coaching someone else in the company. Be aware it could present a conflict of interest while coaching, however, in hiring and firing decisions, etc.

Conflict of Interest: A conflict of interest exists when you have an interest that interferes with your responsibilities as a coach or interferes with your ability to act in the best interest of the coaching profession.

A conflict of interest may arise when you use your role as a coach for inappropriate personal gain or when personal interests conflict with your coaching agreement. Examples of conflicts to avoid include accepting or offering payments outside the coaching agreement, or having a substantial investment or position in any business to which you are providing coaching services. Coaches should avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest.

"The Committee has found over time that most coaches believe they are acting in good faith, but make mistakes due to lack of information. Common examples are failing to have a written agreement, leaving important things out of an agreement, or handling of pre-paid coaching fees. We hope the FAQs can be used to prevent ethics complaints and the stress that goes with those for member coaches.**"**
Jeanne Erikson, ACC (USA)
Chair Ethics & Standards Committee

Q: *If I am an Internal Manager, should I coach someone if I also have input into the performance evaluation?*
A: This would appear to be a conflict of interest, and you should probably not coach this person. You may use coaching competencies at any time, such as Active Listening and Powerful Questioning, etc. However, because you are the manager, the fact that you are going to be evaluating your employee might inhibit openness and trust in the relationship.

"I believe that the FAQ will allow members the opportunity to look at real life examples to gain clarity, understanding, and maintain the highest of ethical standards. The document is easy to read and understand.**"**
Hazel Brief (Israel)

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.
Q: *I am coaching someone who needs a service. I know of a resource for him and I receive a referral fee from the resource. Do I have to disclose this to the client?*
A: Yes, you do.

Q: *I received a surprise gift of baseball tickets from my realtor after I referred my client to her. Must I tell my client I received these tickets?*
A: If the gift was not anticipated and happens after the referral is made, no disclosure is necessary.

11) I will only barter for services, goods or other non-monetary remuneration when it will not impair the coaching relationship.
Q: *My client says she does not have the money to pay for my coaching services and requests to barter. She believes she cannot make enough money to pay for the things she wants. Does her belief impair the coaching relationship?*
A: It might, so you would need to explore further before coming to a conclusion.

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.
Q: *If I have a multi–level marketing business, can I sell my product to my coaching clients?*
A: The coaching relationship might be impaired if you sell other products to the client, as the client might perceive undue pressure to purchase from you.

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.
Q: *I have been coaching for many years and collecting data about the success rate of my clients. May I share the results I have with prospective clients?*
A: It is okay to share data that is appropriate and accurate without enhancement or distortions, with no guarantees in any form. The prospective client can draw his/her own conclusions. Be sure to keep any data confidential as to client identification.



ICF Code of Ethics

Q: *My clients often ask how long coaching takes. Can I give an average time?*
A: You can say that many of your client's coach for X amount of sessions or months, but it varies by individual goals and ability to implement new skills.

14) I will not give my prospective clients or sponsors information or advice I know or believe to be misleading or false (self explanatory, so no questions are included).

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.
Q: *After several meetings with my client, he has begun to cancel appointments at the last minute. I think I should charge him, but my contract does not cover this. May I send him a bill for the missed meetings?*
A: If you have not contracted with the client to pay for missed meetings, you should honor your original agreement and may not charge for cancelled meetings. You may, however, attempt to re-contract.



Q: *When my client began coaching, I was charging a certain rate and the sponsor paid that amount. My client took a three–month leave of absence and during that time I raised my rates. I feel it is fair to ask the sponsor for my new fee.*
A: The original agreement is still in place and valid until changed. You may open conversations to begin a new agreement.

"The Code may look too prescriptive to some, but it is really intended to be support to being an ethical coach. It allows for best practice sharing and raising professionalism at any level."
Sally Rhys, ACC (USA)
Vice Chair, Ethics & Standards Committee

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.
Q: *When I coach within my own company, is this necessary?*
A: Yes; particularly in this case these need to be clarified both with the client and sponsor.

Q: *Must I have an agreement with pro bono clients who do not pay for my services?*
A: Yes because there is more to an agreement than just the fee. Responsibilities and expectations must be clearly defined in order for this to be a professional coaching relationship. For the agreement to be considered valid under the law in many jurisdictions, a nominal amount of money must be transferred from the one receiving the services to the one delivering the services, for example, $1 in the US and 1 Euro in Europe.

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.
Q: *Is it OK to give my clients a brief hug after our meetings?*
A: The coach is responsible for setting and respecting culturally appropriate physical boundaries, which includes sensitivity to the client's boundaries and expectations. If the client initiates, the coach may choose to reciprocate or not. The coach may not initiate the hug.

18) I will not become sexually intimate with any of my current clients or sponsors.
Q: *Does this mean I cannot coach my spouse, partner, or significant other?*
A: Whereas coaching your spouse may offer opportunities for conflicts of interest, as well as confidentiality problems, it is fine to do so if you have clear boundaries and clarify your relationship as a coach and client before you start. Whatever sexual activity exists before the relationship may continue.

A new level of intimacy may not be initiated during the coaching relationship. For example, the coaching relationship must end if you agree to date someone you are coaching in response to their request for the same.

Q: *If my client invites me out to a social engagement, may I accept?*
A: Accepting the engagement would be appropriate if the coach and client both think that the coaching relationship would not be impaired; if the coach can remain objective in the coaching meetings.

However, if the coach finds it difficult to maintain the boundaries of a coaching relationship with the client, then the coach has the option to terminate the relationship and refer the client to another coach. A good guideline is that whatever the nature of the relationship prior to beginning coaching is where it should remain throughout the duration of the coaching arrangement.

The ICF Code of Ethics is available online at Coachfederation.org.

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.
Q: *My client paid in full and we agreed to 10 coaching meetings. After six meetings, my client wants to stop. She says she wants her money back because she has not received the value she expected. Must I give it back?*
A: If you did not clarify what might happen under these circumstances then you must discuss this with your client. You may attempt to negotiate with the client to be paid for services rendered to date. It would be advisable to return either the amount beyond services rendered to date, the entire amount minus an administrative fee, or the entire amount. Use your best judgment and remember that how you handle this situation will craft your reputation.

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.
Q: *I know a lot about nutrition from dieting and taking vitamins and my client has a goal to know more about nutrition. May I share with her what I know?*
A: More appropriate than giving her information would be to encourage her to find an expert or consultant who is trained in that area. Recommending a professional nutritionist, Web sites, literature, and/or books would all be acceptable.
Q: *My client wants to explore how her past relationships have formed her beliefs about current relationships. I have a degree in psychology and learned a lot about that topic. Can I devote time to coaching her about this?*
A: If you are not a practicing psychologist or therapist, it is not appropriate to bring this information into the coaching relationship and you should encourage your client to find another professional to help.

If you are trained, you could consider creating a separate agreement to deal with this after your coaching relationship has ended. Whereas you might be clear enough in the role differentiation, likely it would be confusing to the client to have you as a therapist and coach at the same time.

21) I will suggest my client seek the services of other professionals when deemed necessary or appropriate.
Q: *How can I refer a client to a therapist, without implying that I am diagnosing?*
A: If the coach is also a licensed therapist or psychologist as well as a coach, then recognizing psychological issues are within the coach's skill set and the coach can suggest the client consider addressing those issues outside coaching. If the coach is not a licensed therapist, but thinks that the client might benefit from another professional or resource, options might be explored with the client.

"We tend to walk around knowing that basically we are ethical people and so seeking out additional information about ethical behavior or updates in the Code may not always hit the top of our priority or interest list. However, it is precisely because ethics is such an integral part of our behavior that we should seek additional information and updates regarding the code of conduct for our profession. At the speed of our profession's growth, it is more important to be aware of the changes so that we (coaches) maintain their professional integrity as well as the integrity of the profession.**"**
Liora Rosen (USA)

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.
Q: *Must I have a contract with a 9–year–old client?*
A: Depending on local laws, if the person is a minor, the contract should include the sponsor as well as the client.

Q: *During an interview for a research project (or journal article or media event) the interviewer asks me how many women executives I have coached, in what countries and what states, and may she have contact information to fol-*



ICF Code of Ethics

low-up. May I give her this information?
A: You may give information that may never be traceable back to the person, such as how many and in which county or state. This satisfies the principle of anonymity. You may not give contact information without the client's permission. If you include sharing of contact information in your initial agreement that is fine; otherwise you must contact your clients and/or their sponsors or former clients and/or their sponsors and ask permission.

Q: *My colleague asks me in which IT companies I have had as clients. May I tell him?*
Q. *May I mention companies on my Web site?*
A: This issue is very complex and besides the confidentiality it may have legal implications of copyright infringement. Your contract with both the client and the sponsor should be specific to whether you may use their name. Be aware that contracts of your client and/or sponsor may include language regarding this issue. The best practice to maintain good client relationships is to request client's and/or sponsor's permission to use their name and or/logo, if not explicitly stated in your contract.

Q: *Is it acceptable to keep my calendar that includes clients' appointment times visible on my desk or at the reception desk?*
A: No, because anyone walking by can read the names of your clients.

Q: *Can I use former clients as references for prospective clients?*
A: Yes, but only if you have their specific permission from the client or sponsor to do so. Provide the prospective client with the (specific) person's contact information.

Q: *My client asks if I know anyone working in retail management so he can contact them to make progress on his job search in that field. He wants contact information. Some of my former clients would be perfect for him. May I give him their names and contact information?*

"It was a pleasure to work with the Ethics Committee and FAQ subcommittee to create the FAQs for our organization. It is humbling to know there are so many passionate, professional Committee members dedicated to upholding the standards of coaching, working behind the scenes in a spirit of true service, as so many ICF coaches around the world do.**"**
Vicki Escude, MCC (USA)

A: Not without permission from the former clients
.
Q: *Is verbal permission for release of confidentiality acceptable or must I obtain it in writing?*
A: It is more solid and irrefutable in writing.

"Time will tell if the FAQ will meet its objectives; whether the members will like it; how ICF is doing its best by taking into consideration the concerns of its members. More examples ("brief cases") will most probably be added as comments will arise from members.**"**
Sam Nassif, PCC (Monaco)

23) I will have a clear agreement upon how coaching information will be exchanged among coach, client, and sponsor.
Q: *The HR Department is paying for my coaching services for six clients and they signed the agreement as the sponsor. The Accounting Department needs information about how many meetings I anticipate so they can do budget projections for the upcoming year. May I give accounting this information?*
A: It is recommended that this information is obtained directly from the sponsor.

Q: *Next, accounting wants to know which departments my clients are in. May I give accounting this information?*
A: It is recommended that this information is obtained directly from the sponsor.

Q: *They now want the names of the clients as well. May I give accounting this information?*
A: It is recommended that this information is obtained directly from the sponsor. However, if not possible, you may give this information only with receiving the clients' and sponsor's permission.

Q: *A 360–degree assessment came back from an external vendor. I am hired to coach a team of managers using this data. The first step is to design a Developmental Plan for each member of the team and the team as a whole. HR wants to know the coaching objectives we developed for their internal productivity study. May I share the objectives I generate with my clients with HR?*
A: Ideally this should have been covered by the agreement when the coaching agreement was set up. If not, however, it can be provided with the client's and sponsor's permission.

Q: I am coaching a 12–year–old boy and his father calls me to ask how it is going. May I speak with him in generalities?

A: Only if your client agrees, or has agreed already in the contract that all three of you have signed.

Q: *The supervisor of my new client has a coaching outcome that he does not want the client to know about. I am being paid out of the supervisor's budget. May I keep this information from my client?*
A: This sets up an ethical conflict. How can you coach someone without having clarity and an agreement about what is being coached? Whatever you put in your agreement that all three sign is what is acceptable.

Q: *May I coach a business client who has some personal outcomes that are not shared with the sponsor?*
A: Coaching for personal outcomes is an integral part of all professional coaching. Whatever is stated in the contract or agreement will govern what can be shared.

24) When acting as a trainer of student coaches, I will clarify confidentiality policies with the students.
Q: *After triads of coaching students have practiced coaching, the entire group convenes to share experiences. One of the coaching students mentions personal information that was shared in the small group without having asked the other student if this was ok. Isn't this acceptable because this is just training and not real coaching with real clients?*
A: No, unless there have been confidentiality ground rules clarified in advance to permit this. Ground rules should be explicit about when, why and how confidential information can be shared. Ground rules have to also be specific about confidentiality and/or anonymity.

Q: *I share with my coach training colleague about a coaching incident in which I learned something that concerns me about the student's health. My colleague goes directly to the student and asks if she can help. Is this a violation of confidentiality?*
A: This depends on the confidentiality policy in place for the training. It must be shared with faculty and students. It may allow for collegial sharing for training purposes.

"I think of our Code as a Coaching GPS. Most of the time we basically know where we're going, but sometimes there are unexpected detours or we may be in unfamiliar territory; the code points us in the right direction. Like a GPS, it is extremely useful, but only if you know how to use it.**"**
Liora Rosen (USA)

"My personal hope is that each chapter that is not native English speaking will have [the FAQs] translated and available to all its local members. The Code of Ethics is what binds us together as a profession, across all cultural lines. Every ICF member should have a good understanding of this document and be able to use it when necessary.**"**
Hazel Brief (Israel)

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 Code of Ethics to the extent applicable.
Q: *I have a virtual assistant in another part of the country whom I have never met in person. I give her names of clients and contact information so she can confirm meetings and send e-mails. I don't need an agreement dealing with ICF Ethics with her, do I?*
A: Yes, you do.

Q: *My young daughter helps me with minor administrative office tasks such as filing clients' files and preparing personalized coaching packages. Do I need an agreement dealing with ICF Ethics with her?*
A: Yes, you do.

Q: *I subcontract with an OD Firm to do assessments with my coaching clients. Do I need to make this firm adhere to the ICF Code–Confidentiality/Privacy standards?*
A: Yes, you do.



Questions regarding the ICF Code of Ethics FAQ document, as well as general ethics questions, can be submitted to: icfethics@coachfederation.org.

The FAQ document is also available at Coachfederation.org.