

## Read your ICF Code of Ethics Lately?

There is a new version of the ICF Code of Ethics approved by the Board in December 2008. It has come to my attention that few of my coaching colleagues are aware of it and the significant changes that have been made.

Note: My comments here are my opinion and my interpretation of our discussions regarding the ICF Code Revision. My statements do not reflect the official position of the ICF nor the ICF Ethics and Standards Committee. My attempt here is to educate and share background information.

I have served on the Ethics and Standards committee of the ICF from 2003 through the end of 2008. During my tenure, we had three revisions to the code -each one with growing pains and learning experiences attached. This round I served on the revision sub-committee acting in part as holder of history and as scribe. After a year of research and international input we submitted our proposed changes to the entire committee. There I conducted the entire Ethics and Standards Teams' line by line review, debate, and refinement of the code. You should be very proud of the work that literally hundreds of people put into this project. Thoughtful, impassioned, critical and coach like debates were had by all. I believe you can be proud to sign onto this new code of ethics and claim it as your own.

So here we go.

A little more background:

Three years in the making with involvement and input from hundreds of people, teams & special interest groups (ie internal coaching SIG & credentialing team) we have a stronger, more robust code that addresses most of the concerns for international viability and applicability. We had input from around the world on wording and cultural viability.

At the St. Louis ICF Conference in 2006 several key issues concerning the ICF code of ethics were brought to our attention. I'll highlight the top three concerns that arose from our international research.

Top of the list was the ethical role divisions when dealing with internal coaching, contract coaching, affiliate coaching, and brokered coaching arrangements. Where did confidentiality for example begin and end. The new code breaks the coaching relationship into three distinct units - the coach, the client, and the sponsor along with their respective roles.

Another issue of great concern, which has had several intense discussions on this network was the inferred mandated reporting clause in the last code of ethics. That line of code has been stricken for many considered reasons from training

concerns to international viability.

The third key issue brought to our attention was the length and meandering nature of the old ICF definition of coaching. In our research we found no less than SEVEN distinctly different definitions on the ICF website alone and none of them were less than a paragraph long. As a result we set out to hone the best examples from across the globe and create a one sentence definition. We ended up with three definitions - Coaching, professional coaching relationship, and ICF professional coach. Why? because the ICF speaks for the professional as a whole; defining the signatory distinction between professional coaching and coaching (formal agreement); and what makes a professional coach an ICF Professional Coach.

- Every line of the code has been massaged, simplified, clarified, and vetted by an international panel of ICF coaches.
- Every attempt was made to remove vague language unless legally required. (Some things should not and/or can not be mandated) Between Section 1 & Section 2 is now a Preamble that embodies most of this.
- The business of coaching plays a larger role in this code, however understand that state and local laws take precedent and should be consulted.
- Every line of code was reviewed for its sponsor/client implications
- Additional codes were added to address employees or subcontracted work with respect to confidentiality.
- There are now at least seven references to contracts and/or agreements - Though not mandated, absence of them leave professional coaches vulnerable to ethical and legal situations.

For a complete update of the code visit the ICF Website at

<http://www.coachfederation.com/about-icf/ethics-&-regulation/icf-code-of-ethics/>

Below is Part 1 of the new ICF Code of Ethics

Sincerely,

Matthew Rochte

Coach for Seasoned Coaches

ICF Code of Ethics  
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.