

Ethical Framework for the Use of Technology in Coaching

A competent coach working online will always adhere to at least the following minimum standards and practices in order to be considered to be working in an ethical manner.

Coaches have a sufficient understanding of technology. Technology basics are required for coaches who choose to deliver coaching services via technology. Coaches will possess a basic understanding of technology as the technology relates to delivery of services

- Encryption: Coaches understand how to access encrypted services to store records and deliver communication. Records storage can be hosted on a secure server with a third-party, stored on the coach's hard drive utilizing encrypted folders or stored on an external drive that is safely stored.
- Backup Systems: Records and data that are stored on the coach's hard drive are backed up either to an external drive or remotely via the Internet.
- Password Protection: Coaches take further steps to ensure confidentiality of coaching communication and other materials by password protecting the computer, drives and stored files or communication websites.
- Firewalls: Coaches utilize firewall protection externally or through web-based programs.
- Virus Protection: Coaches protect work computers from viruses that can be received from or transmitted to others, including clients.
- Hardware: Coaches understand the basic running platform of the work computer and know whether or not a client's hardware/platform is compatible with any communication programs the coach uses.
- Software: Coaches know how to download and operate software and assist clients with the same when necessary to the delivery of services.
- Third-party services: Coaches utilize third-party services that offer an address and phone number so that contact is possible via means other than email. This offers a modicum of trust in the third-party utilized for such services as backup, storage, virus protection and communication.

Coaches work within their Scope of Practice. Scope of Practice indicates the specific area to which a coach may practice. Coaches also follow local and regional laws and codes of ethics as applicable.

- Coaches will accurately identify their coaching qualifications, expertise, experience, certifications and credentials.
- Coaches maintain a reasonable level of awareness of current best business practices and professional information in their fields of activity, and undertake ongoing efforts to maintain competence in the skills they use.
- Coaches understand and clearly communicate the distinction between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy and other support professionals.
- Coaches understand and adhere to responsibility to refer clients to other support professionals when needed.
- Coaches will encourage their clients or sponsors to make a change if the coach believes the client or sponsor would be better served by another coach or by another resource.
- Coaches do not attempt to maintain simultaneous counseling and coaching relationships with client even when properly qualified as a coach and licensed in another profession such as counseling.
- Coaches adhere to professional codes of conduct as published by internationally recognized professional coaching organizations.

- Coaches will recognize and honor the efforts and contributions of others and not misrepresent them as their own. Coaches understand that violating this standard may leave them subject to legal remedy by a third party
- Coaches respect the specific laws of a potential client's geographic location. While coaching may not be a regulated field where the coach is located, coaching may be (or become) regulated in other parts of the world.

Coaches seek out training, knowledge and supervision. Training, knowledge and supervision regarding coaching and technology are paramount to delivering a standard of care that is considered “best practice” within one's geographic region and within a global context. Coaches are encouraged to demonstrate proficiency and competency through formal specialist training for online work, books, peer-reviewed literature and popular media. Coach and/or peer supervision and support are mandated for coaches who cannot practice independently within a geographic region and is highly recommended for all coaches. Coaches keep themselves informed of new technologies, practices, legal requirements and standards as are relevant to the coaching profession.

- Example Topics of study related to Training, Knowledge and Supervision include but are not limited to :
 - Online Coaching
 - Online Coaching Supervision
 - Online Peer Supervision
 - Avatar Coaching
 - Cybercoaching
 - Text-based Coaching
 - Telehealth
 - Behavioral Telehealth
 - Social Media
 - Mixed Reality
 - Online Relationships
 - Second Life
 - Online Peer Support
 - SMS Text Messaging
 - Virtual Worlds
 - Virtual Reality
 - Coaching and Technology
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- Formal Training: Coaches seek out sufficient formal training whenever possible through college, university, accredited coaching institutes or private settings. Formal training is displayed on the coach's website.
- Informal Training: Coaches complete continuing education and professional development and conferences, conventions and workshops.
- Books: Coaches read professional books written by the general public and professionals credentialed in their field.
- Peer-reviewed Literature: Coaches read peer-reviewed literature that includes the latest theories and research.
- Popular Media: Coaches are informed through popular media such as magazines, newspapers, social networking sites, websites, television and movies and understand the impact of coaching and technology on the popular culture.

- **Coach/Peer Supervision:** Supervision is sought by all coaches who deliver services via technology. Coach and peer supervision is delivered either face-to-face or via encrypted methods.

Coaches display pertinent and necessary information on websites. Websites provide access to information for the general public, potential clients, clients and other professionals.

- **Crisis Intervention Information:** People may surf the Internet seeking immediate help and may misunderstand the kinds of services a coach provides. Coaches provide clear explanation as to the limitations of services provided and display crisis intervention information on the home page. Offering global resources such as Befriender's International or The Samaritans is the best course of action.
- **Coach Contact Information:** Coaches offer contact information that includes email, postal address and a telephone or VOIP number. While it is not recommended that postal addresses reflect the coach's home location, clients should have a postal address for formal correspondence related to redress, subpoenas or other mailings requiring a signature of receipt. Coaches state the amount of time an individual may wait for a reply to email or voice mail. Best practice indicates a maximum of two business days for inquiries.
- **Coach Education:** Coaches list degrees, licenses and/or certifications. Wherever possible, links supporting independent verification of certification and, or membership in a related professional organization should be provided. Coaches consider listing other formal education such as college or university courses, online continuing education and professional development courses, and conference/convention attendance directly related to coaching and technology.
- **Terms of Use and Privacy Policy:** The Terms of Use agreement and Privacy Policy documents are posted by the provider of the website and appear on websites used by the coach to promote and/or deliver coaching services. These documents outline what the user of the website and associated services may expect with respect to the availability of the website and related web services, and how private information is collected, stored and protected. Coaches using a web-based coaching platform (website) or web service provided by a third party provider will ensure that the Privacy Policy conforms to the privacy practices standards that the coach is held to by the governing agencies operating within the geographic region in which coaching services are provided.
 - The Terms of Use agreement often appears in the footer of a website's homepage and outlines the conditions under which the provider of the website makes the site, not professional coaching services, available. The agreement is between the provider of the website (which may not be the coach) and the users of the website. It specifies what is expected with respect to the web site provider's provision of website availability and security, and the web site user's use of the web site with respect to adherence to site policies regarding posting information and use of copyrighted or trademarked information and links to third party websites. It also often includes a warranty and disclaimer regarding availability of the website. Information concerning the nature of the professional coaching services provided by the coach to the client should be provided in a separate Informed Consent document which is then executed as a contract for coaching services. In addition, the Terms of Use agreement should reference an associated, yet separate, Privacy Policy to specify how personal information transmitted through the website is protected.
 - The Privacy Policy often appears in the footer of a website's homepage and outlines how the provider of the website and, the coach who may be using the website or web services to communicate with the client, collects and protects personal information. It defines what type of personal information is collected, how it is collected, what is done with the information, how it is protected (encrypted), how it is managed by all of those engaged by the provider of the website service, what the user of the website service can do to protect personal information and who to contact regarding concerns about personal information. It also addresses, if applicable, how payments are securely processed and it should

conform to the widely accepted standards that are in place within the geographic area where services are provided such as the Fair Information Practice Principles in the US and the Data Protection Act in the UK.

- Coaches must also be cognizant of laws regulating professional practices within their geographic jurisdiction, and in particular, the standards and practices governing how a record is maintained and what privacy and security rules may apply. In some instances coaches may also be a health care provider by way of employment, education, certification and/or licensure. A circumstance may arise in which a government regulated license or certification may supersede the role of coach, in effect, rendering the coach a health care provider. If that circumstance arises, the coach may need to follow pertinent laws and practice standards governing the use and disclosure of protected health information such as those applying to US health care providers under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) provisions as outlined by the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) act.
- **Informed Consent:** The informed consent process begins when the client contemplates accessing services. Therefore, clear and precise information concerning the nature of the coaching services proposed and how information is managed is accessible via an Informed Consent document posted on the coach's website. The information in the Informed Consent includes:
 - A clear description of the coaching that will be provided to the client.
 - How web-enabled and associated telephonic and face-to-face coaching services, as available, will be provided and supported.
 - An overview of the coach's professional qualifications, training and experience.
 - A review of the pros and cons of online coaching including such disadvantages as lack of visual and auditory cues and the limitations of confidentiality via technology, and advantages that include easy scheduling, time management and the absence of transportation costs.
 - How confidentiality is maintained and personal information is protected: Clear explanation is provided regarding the use and limits of technology with respect to secure (encrypted) and unsecure (unencrypted) communications such as text/mobile messaging. Guidance is provided on which type of technology should be used for secure communications and which may be used for administrative tasks such as scheduling.
 - The Informed Consent will also reference the aforementioned Privacy Policy outlining the standards and procedures that will be adhered to regarding data protection, storage, management, and transmission of protected health information. A statement identifying the coach as the owner of the coaching record including all transcripts, notes and emails, unless otherwise specified through law in the coach's geographic location, will also be provided. The client is informed that posting direct information about the coach or verbatim information from sessions is prohibited.
- How to proceed during a technology breakdown: The client is informed about how to proceed if a technology breakdown occurs during a session, e.g. "If we disconnect, try to reconnect within 10 minutes. If reconnection is not possible, email or call to reschedule an appointment."
- Who to contact in case of an emergency: Coaches offer specific information about who to contact in case of an emergency and set specific rules about emergency emails that the coach may not be privy to e.g. (suicidal emails in the middle of the night, threatening posts on a support forum). Coaches research local resources within the client's geographic area as emergency backup resources.
- How cultural specifics may impact treatment: Coaches discuss varying time zones, cultural differences and language barriers that may impact the delivery of services. Coaches should also ensure at or prior to the start of coaching, that the client's expectations of the service being offered (such as the meaning of

the term 'coaching' etc.) is sufficiently close to their own understanding and should take into account that different cultures around the world can have very different understandings of these matters.

- How professionalism will be maintained: Coaches discuss with clients the expected boundaries and expectations about forming relationships online. Coaches inform clients that any requests for "friendship," business contacts, direct or @replies, blog responses or requests for a blog response within social media sites will be ignored to preserve the integrity of the coaching relationship and protect confidentiality. If the client has not been formally informed of these boundaries prior to the coach receiving the request, the coach will ignore the request via the social media site and explain why in subsequent interaction with the client.
- Coaches will seek to avoid conflicts of interest and potential conflicts of interest and, if a conflict arises, openly disclose any such conflicts. Coaches will offer to remove themselves when such a conflict arises

Coaches conduct an initial interview and evaluate the client's ability to effectively engage in technology-enabled coaching. The initial interview and intake process begins with the potential client's first contact. The coach implements informal measures for screening a client's suitability for delivery of coaching services via technology.

- Client's Technology Skills: Coaches screen potential client's use of technology through questions at the outset. Questions include but are not limited to an inquiry about the client's experience with online culture e.g. email, chat rooms, forums, social networks, instant messaging, online purchasing, mobile texting, VOIP or telephones. Coaches ensure that the client's platform is compatible with the varying programs and platforms the coach may utilize during the course of coaching.
- Client's Language Skills: Coaches screen for language skills from the initial contact through the first few exchanges. Assessing for language barriers, reading and comprehension skills as well as cultural differences is part of the screening process. Text-based coaching may also involve screening for keyboarding proficiency.
- Client's Potential to Benefit from Coaching: Coach refers clients presenting with acute emotional distress and, or other symptoms of significant mental distress or disorder to appropriate mental health services.

Coaches enter into a contractual agreement with the client to provide coaching services. Coaches will carefully review the Informed Consent with the coaching client and will strive to ensure that, prior to, or at, the initial meeting, their coaching client and sponsors understand the nature of coaching, the nature and limits of confidentiality, financial arrangements, and any other terms of the coaching agreement including how coaching information will be exchanged among coach, client, and sponsor (the person contacting for and paying for coaching.) The coach or coaching organization will have the client sign the Informed Consent, the coaching contract, and thereby enter into an agreement for coaching.

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