

What is the soul of the ICF?

Jay Perry

"I believe the soul of the ICF is love and wonder. The ICF has the opportunity to represent the best of humanity: coaching as loving, caring conversations that support more wonderful lives and a more wonderful world. We created the ICF as an organization that could win respect for the profession and this kind of wonder-based relationship. And to a great extent it has been successful. But, like any creation, it has had its shadow side. The founding essence of love, wonder, and respect quickly gained form and the form hardened into structure. There's nothing wrong with that unless the form and structure overwhelm the soul. Then the structure can become a prison. Today I think we find ourselves wrestling with the dilemma of how to have supportive structures that integrate well with the essence of coaching.

How do you see ICF today? I'm hopeful that within the organization there are people who are willing to push back, to ask questions, to challenge the status quo. As we created the profession we also created a whole bunch of things that went with it. Just like the accounting profession has a stake in complex tax codes and attorneys have a stake in maintaining the mumbo jumbo of legalese we have created coach training, qualifications, credentials, executive coaching, mentor coaching and supervision. We've created a mini economy with lots of people who have a stake in continuing a certain level of complexity. At a time when coaching can be a powerful tool throughout the world, we run the danger of coaching becoming over complicated, overly expensive, and only available to the elite on the planet.

How do you see the future of the ICF? I hope it continually reinvents itself as a democratic organization. It is really the people who are in it, and their voices that are important. Coaching is not going away. The need for loving conversations, the need for people who have great and generous listening to hear the souls, hopes, and challenges of people. The promise that the coaching relationship could be a wonderful model for how all people can relate in the world.

Remember that coaching is not a service profession – but rather a modeling profession. My first job is to be the person that I want to be, to have a great life, to be a model for the people I work with. So it is a great challenge for coaches and the ICF alike to maintain their soul while constantly reinventing ourselves.