

# Case Studies and Questions to Ask Yourself

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## CASE STUDY: THE NEW COACH\*

You are a relatively new coach who for the past year has regularly taken free online courses that claim to address professional coaching skills and provide participant group discussions about how best to coach clients. You have completed college, having earned a degree in English with a minor in television and film. You were drawn to coaching because of your fascination with people and what makes them tick. You began actually coaching people in a one-to-one format about six months ago, and you started to charge money for your services last month. Other than service work as a restaurant host (you tallied the nightly dinner cash receipts and distributed the pool of tips to the other service staff) you have no other business experience.

You keep handwritten notes of your client sessions in a spiral-bound notebook that you keep in the bookshelf behind your desk for easy access. As you have gained more clients, you've begun noticing how hard it is to keep straight what each client expects to accomplish. On occasion, you've even accidentally written notes about one client in the section reserved for someone else.

1. At first glance, what concerns you and/or about what do you need more information?
2. What guidelines from a recognizable Coaching code *of Ethics* might apply?
3. Imagine that this new coach under the described circumstances has approached you. What recommendations would you make to assist him or her in becoming a more competent, ethical coach?

## **CASE STUDY: PRESSURE FROM ABOVE\***

The owner of a local company has engaged you to coach a new manager, Manager A. Manager A, while a very talented and effective individual contributor, has found the transition to management quite difficult at times. The owner believes that with some coaching, Manager A will make a fine leader.

The owner makes it clear to you that she expects regular updates on how Manager A's coaching is going, and how he is responding to the coaching. You have noticed that during the last two update sessions with the company owner, she has started pressing you for details regarding what Manager A has disclosed during your coaching sessions, stating that, "I just want to help. How can I help him if I don't know what his issues are?"

Up until now, you've managed to successfully deflect her most pointed questions, but in today's session, she told you point blank that she wants you to give Manager A "a Myers-Briggs test so that I can get a handle on this guy." She makes it clear that she expects you to share the results of the test with her, stating, "I'm paying, so I'm playing!"

While somewhat familiar with it, you are not trained to administer the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator; what's more, you're not sure you will be able to avoid the owner's pointed requests for details of your coaching sessions much longer.

1. How would you handle this situation?
2. What parts of the any recognized code of ethics covers this type of issue?
3. What obligations of confidentiality are owed, and to whom?

## **CASE STUDY: LAYERS OF THE ONION\***

The CEO of a large corporation has retained you to enhance the performance of Senior VP, or SVP. Up until now, she has risen meteorically through the organization, and came to the company with a demonstrated track record of incredible success elsewhere. The CEO has noticed that her authoritarian management style, lack of

empathy for other members of the organization, and lack of self-awareness have created havoc on the leadership team. He expects you to give him regular updates on how the coaching is going, as well as your periodic assessment of how SVP is responding to the coaching.

During your most recent coaching session with SVP, she has shared with you that her marriage is foundering, and she feels an enormous sense of guilt that she spends very little time with her two young children. In essence, the nanny knows her children better than she does. You also have begun to sense that she may have some issues with depression and anxiety, caused not only by her personal issues, but also by concerns she has voiced about being able to hit this quarter's sales goals. Not only that, but she has also confided that, to help cope, she has begun drinking more than she used to, including at lunch and behind closed doors in her office.

### **ETHICAL HOT WATER OR NOT DILEMMA**

[Courtesy of Lynn Meinke, Institute for Life Coach Training Faculty]

Sharon hires Mark as her coach. She would like to move forward on her career path that's more exciting and create a life of balance and fulfillment and build a career that's more exciting.

As she creates balance in her life she becomes more energetic, more creative and experiences life as a wonderful adventure, she's able to move along her career path from Managing Consultant to Director of Professional Services which better meets her personal values. She begins to realize that she is not only positively impacting her customers but her companies' bottom line as well.

During Sharon's time coaching with Mark she realizes she is attracted to him. One day in coaching she brings up this topic and he realizes he is attracted to her as well. Since Sharon had achieved what she wanted in her coaching, she decides to end her coaching with Mark. They decide to begin dating and become sexually intimate.

Is this ethical in the coaching profession according to the any recognizable Code of Ethics?

Directions:

1. What statements make your ethical intuition speak?
2. Which ethical standards may be relevant?
3. What is your course of action as a coach?
4. If another coach shared this with you, what would you do?

## **REFLECTIONS ON CYBER SHARING AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN COACHING**

All coaches and professionals who also engage in the coaching process should be aware of the pitfalls of online/internet communication. For example, when I contract with corporate or government employees, I always ask what email they prefer me to use and which phone number as well. And of course our email communication is minimal unless the client has agreed on receiving a report or data that he/she may share with superiors as necessary or appropriate. But what about with private clients, who contract with you and pay with their own money? Both types of contracted clients needs to know the safe and secure ways to communicate as email is not always safe, and some other methods, such as Skype, linked In and others should be used cautiously. There is a source for learning more detail at <http://onlinetherapyinstitute.com/ethical-framework-for-the-use-of-technology-in-coaching/> where they discuss, encryption, firewalls, when and how to communicate in an online environment and much more. Created by Kate Anthony (England) and DeeAnna Nagel (USA), a comprehensive site for ethical decision-making and awareness related to the online/virtual environment of client services.

## **SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION DILEMMA**

Thank-you to ICF Ethics & Standard Education Committee for this dilemma

Your coaching business has been growing steadily but the administration of your business is taking up too much time and energy from what you really love to do – which is coach.

One day at the car wash, you see a business card for a virtual assistant (VA) and decide to try it out. You contact the VA who tells you how it works, what the fee is and promises to send you a contract. She never mentions confidentiality and you never ask. You sign and mail the contract and once you start working with the VA you notice an immediate improvement to your business. It's hard to believe how much more focused you are now that you don't have to spend your time and effort on the administrative part of your business, which drove you crazy!

A couple of months later, while trying to close a contract with a new sponsor company, the VP of HR discusses the company's confidentiality policy regarding coaching and asks you what your policy is.

She states that she's extra aware now because her sister in law, who's a VA in your state, has shared some client stories and mentioned names that the VP recognized as their competitor's CFO and product manager.

You explain your confidentiality policy and promise that nothing like that would ever happen with you. You add that as a member of the ICF you uphold the highest ethical standards in coaching and that probably the other coach did not have as much experience as yourself in the business.

Out of curiosity you casually ask who the VA is and to your horror, she mentions the name of your VA as well as the competitor's names of the CFO and product manager, both of whom are your clients.

Directions:

1. Identify concern (s) – where your intuition is speaking

2. Identify relevant ICF standard(s) that come to play
3. Identify relevant CCE standard(s) that come to play
4. Identify possible course correction

## **A POTENTIALLY SIMPLE AND USEFUL VIEW OF ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING**

### Ethics and Good Business Practice: A Lesson from Rotary

When we think of Ethics in a profession, we may get lost in legalistic discussions of rules, rubrics, and detailed guidelines of how professionals should behave. Simplifying that to a common-sense approach (which maybe is not so common) may help make the application more simple, clear, and practical.

The first ethical standard embraced by the ICF is,

“I will conduct myself in a manner that reflects well on coaching as a profession and I will refrain from doing anything that harms the public’s understanding or acceptance of coaching as a profession.”

This standard and those that follow it should really be common sense, but as busy and distracted humans, reminders can help.

Since 1932, Rotary International has utilized a Four Way Test as its hallmark to guide member conduct. Its simple steps may assist t] the coaching community to understand and implement the ICF Standards of Ethical Conduct. The Four Way Test provides a concise and easy reminder of the intent of all the ethical guidelines of our profession.

The **Four Way Test** of the things we say and do (Rotary International):

- I. Is it the **TRUTH**?
- II. Is it **FAIR** to all concerned?
- III. Will it build **GOOD WILL** and **BETTER FRIENDSHIPS**?

IV. Will it be **BENEFICIAL** to all concerned?

Like many things in life, we sometimes complicate the original intent. Of course we need ethical standards and systematized procedures for our profession of coaching. And yet, using the **Four Way Test** provides a great shortcut and reminder that can help all of us avoid most ethical dilemmas.

Another Rotary principle is to “encourage and foster the ideal of service as a basis of worthy enterprise.” Once again, this reflects what we do as coaches. We are in the business of serving ... serving our clients’ greater good and more purposeful living, and serving the larger ideal of a more purposeful and loving world. That is ethical and professional behavior!

The wisdom of this 100-year-old service club with millions of members worldwide is worth considering and embodying in your life and your business as a coach. (If you want to read more about the Four Way Test go to <http://www.rotary.org/newsandinfo/downloadcenter/pdfs/502en.pdf>.)

Here is a coaching scenario that exemplifies the ethical standard described above, and that also applies to the **Four Way Test** of Rotary.

Coach Carl has been coaching Client Carol for 3 months, when Carol asks Carl if he has experience with reviewing business and marketing plans. She is at the point of her business that she feels she needs a coach/consultant to assist in the method and details required of such a formalized document. Carl is a fine life coach and has helped Carol immensely in designing her life and business to be more fulfilling, to have more balance over her time and to delegate more in her business. However, Carl really has neither formal experience nor training in designing business/marketing plans.

As an ethical coach, Carl tells Carol the *truth* that while he can help her get clearer on her vision and long term desired outcomes for the business she is in, he would refer her

to a business advisor or consultant who specializes in the drafting business plans. He tells her that he can give her couple of names and encourages her to ask around in her community. Carl honestly tells her that even if she needs to stop the coaching relationship for a time, so that she can focus her time and resources with a new consultant, it would be ok with him. His *fair* approach is to add that if she can afford the time and money for both him and a business consultant, then that is her decision. But, he says his goal for her is to get what she wants and he does not have the specific expertise for what she is requesting. Carol thanks him and asks for a couple of names and says she will also ask around in her local group. (This approach by Carl is also a clear example of several other ICF ethical standards regarding being honest about his level of competence and not implying outcomes that he cannot guarantee.) Carl's actions create more *good will* and more *friendly* relations with Carol; and they are *beneficial* not only to her, but to his reputation as a coach.

In the coming weeks, write the **Four Way Test** on a note card and place it near your phone or computer (along with a copy of one of the ethical standards of Coaching.) Observe how these simple criteria assist in the application of coaching ethics and can greatly affect your coaching.

\*Adapted from: Williams, P. & Anderson, Sharon K. (2006). *Law and Ethics in Coaching: How to Solve and Avoid Difficult Problems in Your Practice*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons

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Institute for Global Ethics, [www.gloablethics.org](http://www.gloablethics.org). The Institutes' Web site contains many resources on ethical issues and challenges.