



Do the Right Thing: Ethics for Coaches

Class #1. IAC Code of Ethics

This is an introduction to the Ethical Principles, Code and the Member Pledge that all IAC members must take when they join the organization. We'll discuss what is meant by these ethics and how they may impact you, as a professional.

This mini-module has a number of purposes:

- To inform you of the professional standards that are expected of a coach, so that you can plan and conduct your business accordingly
- To help you understand the ethics pledge that you will be required to make when you join the IAC (a requirement of applying for their certification)
- To help you pass the Ethics Section of the IAC Online Exam (Step 1)

We'll confine our focus to issues that pertain to professional coaches, not to coach trainers and researchers. Please read the Code, itself, for further details. All text in this guide is based on the IAC Code of Ethics. Text in blue is from the IAC Member Pledge at www.certifiedcoach.org.

IAC Ethics Pledge that all IAC members agree to:

Competence

Coaches will maintain high standards of competence in their work.

Integrity

Coaches will represent themselves in an honest and fair manner, being cognizant of their particular competencies and limitations.

Coaches strive to be aware of their own belief systems, values, needs, and limitations and the effect of these on their work. To the extent feasible, they attempt to clarify for relevant parties the roles they are performing and to function appropriately in accordance with those roles.

Professional Responsibility

Coaches will uphold standards of ethical conduct that reflect well on the individual coach as well as the profession at large.

Respect for People's Rights and Dignity

Coaches will treat clients with dignity and respect being aware of cultural differences, and the client's right to autonomy, privacy, and confidentiality.

Coaches accord appropriate respect to the fundamental rights, dignity, and worth of all people. They respect the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality, self-determination, and autonomy, mindful that legal and other obligations may lead to inconsistency and conflict with the exercise of these rights. Coaches are aware of cultural, individual, and role differences, including those due to age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status.

Coaches try to eliminate the effect on their work of biases based on those factors, and they do not knowingly participate in or condone unfair discriminatory practices.

Here are more details about each of these statements:

Competence

Coaches will maintain high standards of competence in their work.

- Coaches must always exercise competence in their skills.
- Coaches must not claim levels of competence that they don't have
- Coaches provide services only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, or appropriate professional experience.
- Coaches should only accept work as they believe they are competent to perform.
- Coaches maintain competence in the skills they use and keep themselves educated about current levels of coaching skill and business practices.
- Coaches keep themselves informed of new technologies, practices, legal requirements and standards as are relevant to the coaching profession.

Integrity

Coaches will represent themselves in an honest and fair manner, being cognizant of their particular competencies and limitations.

Coaches strive to be aware of their own belief systems, values, needs, and limitations and the effect of these on their work. To the extent feasible, they attempt to clarify for relevant parties the roles they are performing and to function appropriately in accordance with those roles.

- Coaches agree not to make any public statements that are false, under any circumstance
- Coaches take responsibility and credit only for their own work in articles, on web sites, etc.
- Coaches share their own biases with their clients, if they get in the way of their coaching and either work that out with the client or decline to coach the client

Professional Responsibility

Coaches will uphold standards of ethical conduct that reflect well on the individual coach as well as the profession at large.

- Coaches ensure that any personal problems of their own do not exert an adverse effect upon their clients
- Coaches have an obligation to be alert to signs of, and to obtain assistance for, their personal problems at an early stage, in order to prevent impaired coaching performance.

In other words, as a professional coach, you have a profession obligation to take care of your own problems before they impact your clients in any way.

- When coaches become aware of personal problems that may interfere with their performing coaching-related duties adequately, they take appropriate measures, such as obtaining professional consultation or assistance, and determine whether they should limit, suspend, or terminate their current coaching activity.
- Coaches take reasonable steps to ensure that clients make progress as a result of coaching. If not, the coach needs to take reasonable steps or terminate the coaching
- Because coaches' professional judgments and actions may affect the lives of others, avoid offering advice on personal, financial, social, organizational, unless you are professionally qualified to do so
- Coaches refrain from taking on professional obligations when preexisting relationships would create a risk of conflict of interest.
- Coaches create, maintain, disseminate, store, retain, and dispose of records and data relating to their practice, and other work in accordance with the law of the country in which they practice
- Coaches are recommended to appropriately document their work in order to facilitate provision of services later by them or by other professionals, to ensure accountability, and to meet other legal requirements of their Country.
- As early as is feasible in a professional relationship, the coach and the client, or other appropriate recipient of coaching services reach an agreement specifying the compensation and the billing arrangements.
- Coaches do not misrepresent their fees.
- Coaches explain their fee structure prior to the first paid coaching session with a client
- In their reports to payers for services, coaches accurately and clearly state the nature of the service provided, the fees and/or all other charges.
- Coaches inform their clients if they receive financial compensation (Affiliate referral fees) in exchange for making referrals
- Coaches agree to refer clients to other professionals when relevant
- Coaches will refer a client to a counselor, therapist, or psychiatrist as soon as possible if they see or hear a problem that may necessitate mental health treatment
- Coaches must not attempt to diagnose or assess any mental health issue or specific problem where clients may put themselves or others at risk, but must act solely out of their personal experience, as coaches are not trained or licensed to make such diagnoses or assessments
- Coaches will make reasonable efforts to make other arrangements for any interruption of coaching services. For longer-term interruptions (longer than 1 month), the coach is encouraged to refer clients to other coaches until they are able to resume coaching.
- The discussion of confidentiality occurs at the beginning of the professional relationship
- In their dealings with the public and media (including professional presentations, and writing) coaches will be careful to guard the confidentiality of their clients
- Coaches maintain confidentiality when creating, storing, accessing, transferring, and disposing of records
- Coaches take precautions to ensure and maintain the confidentiality of personal and identity information communicated through the use of telephone, voice mail, computers, email, instant messaging, facsimile machines, and other information technology sources.

(Make use of firewalls, corded phones, locked cabinets etc. when handling credit card and other sensitive info.)

Respect for People's Rights and Dignity

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- Coaches do not knowingly engage in behavior that is harassing or demeaning to anyone
- Coaches do not engage in sexual harassment, defined as sexual solicitation, physical advances, or verbal or nonverbal conduct that is sexual in nature
- Coaches do not exploit anyone.
- Coaches respect the client's right to privacy.
- Respect for the individual is a cornerstone of coaching relationship
- Coaches respect the rights of others to hold values, attitudes, and opinions that differ from their own.
- In their work-related activities, coaches do not engage in unfair discrimination based on any basis whatsoever.

Resources:

<http://www.certifiedcoach.org/ethics/principles.html>

<http://www.certifiedcoach.org/ethics/ethics.html>