

Ethics and REGULATORY ISSUES

The importance of self-governance as we move into the future of coaching.

By Patrick Williams, Ed.D., MCC

What makes a profession a profession? As coaching has grown and evolved in the last several years, it is more often being called a new profession. But is it? And is there a “field” of coaching like there is a “field” of psychology. Perhaps we can all agree that coaching has melded theory and techniques from many other professions and blended them into a new paradigm of relating. We call this coaching. But in order to maintain its place in the academic and popular descriptions of the profession, coaching needs the following.

1. Professional standards and credentials (this has been created by the International Coach Federation and other organizations in the last few years)
2. Ethical guidelines and a review process for conduct that may be in question.

3. Academic research and courses of study at the college level.
4. Outcome research and efficacy studies of coaching in the private and corporate sector.
5. Best practices models and systems for coaches new to the field, and for those seeking continuing education for re-certification.

The following summary has been created by the International Coach Federation (ICF) Regulatory Committee for distribution to its members and to the public, and is a crucial piece for the future of coaching.

The mission of the International Coach Federation is to be the global forum for the art and science of coaching, where we inspire transformational conversations, advocate excellence, and

THE ICF REGULATORY COMMITTEE

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expand awareness of the contribution coaching is to the future of humankind. The ICF's internationally recognized standards of excellence, professionalism and code of ethics establish a strong foundation for self-governance of the coaching profession.

However, only those coaches who are members of the ICF or credentialed by the ICF fall under this governance. This means those who are not ICF members or credentialed coaches, yet use the title of coach, are not subject to the same rigorous standards of professionalism.

Why is self-governance important?

During the past two years, we've seen increased questions by members and others about whether coaching is a profession that requires monitoring by a regulatory agency. For more detailed information on the regulatory history see www.coachfederation.org/abouticf/index.asp

As professionals we have a fundamental responsibility to ensure we are qualified to serve our clients. Professional responsibility extends beyond the choices we make for our individual practices and encompasses a responsibility to look beyond our personal preferences and biases to embrace what will best serve the coaching profession as a whole. Professional self-governance is the cornerstone of this professional responsibility.

The future we wish to design is clear: A world in which coaching is seen by all as a distinct profession with professional standards and competencies, a shared body of knowledge that represents the wisdom of the profession, training in that body of knowledge, credential standards, ethical guidelines and committed professionals participating in the process of continuing professional growth and development. Ignoring our professional responsibilities may leave coaching subject to the rules of others who do not fully understand our profession. It also diminishes the growth of coaching as a distinct, valued and enduring profession, by perpetuating the notion that anyone calling themselves a "coach," without benefit of training or credential, can deliver truly professional coaching services. For these reasons, ICF is taking a policy stand for professionalism and self-governance in coaching.

The ICF's self-governance model

The standards and structures built by the ICF over the past decade, which support the emergence of coaching as a valued profession, also provide a solid foundation for the self-governance of our profession. In addition, our rigorous adherence as professionals to these standards and practices provides the necessary assurance that the public is protected from potential harm. ICF's self-governance foundation is comprised of and depends upon each of the following standards and practices, supported by the efforts of the ICF Board, committees, global representatives, credentialed and member coaches.

- *Core Competencies that define the required skill set of a professional coach and establish the foundation for the professional credential examination and accreditation for coach training programs.*

- *A Code of Ethics to which ICF Members and ICF Credentialed Coaches pledge commitment and accountability to standards of professional conduct.*

- *Professional Oversight through an Ethical Conduct Review process for ICF Members and ICF Credentialed Coaches, which allows the public to report concerns and to be confident of objective investigation, follow-up and disciplinary action.*

- *Professional Coach credentialing entails a stringent examination and review process through which coaches must demonstrate their skills, proficiency and documented experi-*

ence in application of coaching core competencies. Credentials include Continuing Coach Education requirements for periodic renewal of coaching credentials, to ensure continued professional growth and development.

- Professional Coach Training Accreditation by which coach training programs submit to review and continuing oversight to demonstrate their commitment to the highest standards for curricula aligned with defined core competencies, faculty, structure, proficiency and ethics to support excellence in the training of coaches.

- Ongoing Self-Regulatory Oversight initiatives to track the needs and concerns of individual and organizational clients on an international basis, and to demonstrate an active commitment to meaningful professional self-governance.

What you can do

If you want to see coaching continue to develop as a respected and enduring profession, and desire to actively participate in that development, we recommend the following actions:

1. If you are not a member, join the ICF and participate locally and internationally.
2. If you are a member, review and ensure your compliance with the ICF Core Competencies and Code of Ethics. Stay informed—participate in your local ICF chapter or in one of the ICF Virtual Communities.
3. Take personal responsibility to make sure that you have the training and skills to do the high quality of work expected of true professionals.

of excellence, professionalism and self-governance, go to (www.coachfederation.org/brochure)

Increasingly consumers, corporations and government organizations are requiring ICF credentials as the standard for the profession:

4. If you are not an ICF credentialed coach, begin the process. You'll find the requirements and steps at <http://www.coachfederation.org/credential/index.asp>

5. If you are ICF credentialed, display your credential and promote it on your business card, brochure and website.

6. Be curious about your colleagues' backgrounds. Be willing to take a stand in support of coaches subscribing to the ICF standards. Actively encourage non-members to join the ICF and to commit themselves to the standards and ethics that preserve the integrity of the profession and protect coaching clients.

The ICF Regulatory Committee is committed to maintaining coaching as a distinct profession, and to strengthening our self-governance model. We welcome interested members to participate as ICF Chapter Regulatory Liaisons. Questions or comments may be sent via e-Email to regulatory@coachfederation.org

The above will be immensely important to the future of coaching as a few states such as Colorado, New York, Minnesota and Arizona have taken a hands off response to coaching, once they discovered the ICF and high standards were in place. Colorado even

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Add an ICF member or credentialed coach logo and the following language and link to your website to demonstrate to others your commitment to coaching professionalism:

The International Coach Federation (ICF) is the world's largest nonprofit professional association of coaches, with more than 7,500 members in more than 29 countries. Its purpose is to build, support and preserve the integrity of the coaching profession around the globe and ensure public confidence in the profession.

For more information about ICF members' and credentialed coaches' commitment to internationally recognized standards

passed an amended Mental Health Act which excluded professional coaching from the act so as no longer to be confused with mental health services. The future of our profession mandates that all coaches act professionally, ethically, and that they contribute to the body of knowledge and best practices models as we continue to move forward. •

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