

Competencies and Ethics Case Study

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According to Judge and Cowell (1997; as cited in Boysen-Rotelli, 2018), executive coaching became more utilized and evident in organizations and parties as early as the 1990s. As a result, several coaching organizations have been established to regulate and accredit coaches; the organizations have developed a standardized competency framework that applies to all coaching professions. (Jordan et al., 2015; Mittelman, 2015). However, these organizations do not consider the differences in the expertise required amongst the various coaching professions, such as sports and business coaching, life coaching, and other disciplines.

There is a need for a robust effort to develop core competencies, and ethical standards where they come into play. The International Coaching Federation (ICF) has outlined these requirements to provide for a common-sense pathway toward accreditation and accountability. This paper will examine and evaluate four of the core competencies and five of the ethical standards. Next, this author will discuss how these should be implemented in coaching practice and avoid violating any of these principles. Lastly, these principles will be addressed in a real-world, practical application related to executive and career transition coaching currently practiced in an organization based in Alaska.

Setting the Foundation

One of the core competencies outlined in the ICF has to do with establishing a coaching agreement that allows the coach and the coachee to agree to the coaching process and relationship. For example, a coach can provide a proposal that outlines the terms and agreement of how the relationship will work. This document will communicate effectively for the delivery of the coaching services (Singh et al., 2020). By providing a clear outline of the expectations of

the relationship, it can provide both the coach and coachee with an overview of what to expect from the relationship and what is included and what is not.

Establishing Trust

One of the core tenants of a coaching relationship is establishing trust and co-creating an affiliation with the client. This core competency outlined by the ICF allows for the ability to create a safe and supportive environment that produces ongoing mutual respect and shows a genuine concern for the client's welfare and future. Boysen-Rotelli, (2018) posits that a trusting collaboration between the client and the practitioner allows for conversations that drive outcomes. This author is currently involved in a coaching agreement as a client, and they stress this trust-building component from the beginning of the relationship. For example, their terms and conditions document states they will deliver what is in the agreement, and the client will be satisfied.

Communicating Effectively

One of the most important tenants of a coaching practitioner is communicating effectively with their clients. A core competency of this communication paradigm is active listening. This is the ability to focus entirely on what the client is saying and not saying and to understate the meaning of what is said in the context of the clients' desires (International Coaching Federation, n.d.). This competency allows the coach to distinguish between words, tone of voice, and body language. Singh's (2020) research found that this competency includes skills that include listening, questioning, motivating, and encouraging the client providing support and feedback, and having regular follow up with the client to monitor their progress.

Designing Actions

The last core competency that will be evaluated is the ability for a practitioner to create with the client opportunities for ongoing learning and take new actions that will most effectively lead to agreed upon coaching results (International Coaching Federation, n.d.). Boysen-Rotelli, (2018) describes this as facilitating learning and creating awareness. The coaching relationship this author is involved in includes twice-monthly brainstorming sessions, status updates, review of performance, and deciding on optimizations. It would be easy to see how a coaching relationship could be violated if a practitioner were to insist on having the client follow an agenda that is not agreed upon at the outset. Coaching should not be a processes where practitioners attempt to influence the client's goals and objectives, but rather, provide a blueprint to work toward achieving milestones laid out in the service agreement.

Responsibility to Clients

A competent practitioner will conduct themselves in an ethical manner when involved in a coaching relationship with a client. The ICF code of ethics is based on the organization's core values and competencies and flows from them. The first ethical standard for review is the responsibility to clients. Amongst other things, it is the coach's responsibility to ensure that the client understands the value and nature of the coaching relationship and the limits of confidentiality, financial arrangements, and any other terms of the coaching agreement (International Coaching Federation, n.d.). Boysen-Rotelli (2018) stresses meeting ethical guidelines and professional standards and outlining these in the coaching agreement. This ethical commitment is why there is a need for an overseeing organization that can ensure standards are followed within the industry.

Confidentiality and Information Exchange

In the era of social media and sharing everything online, a practitioner needs to follow the ethical guidelines of confidentiality and information exchange. These two ethical standards highlight the need for the coach to understand that the trusting relationship that they develop with their clients is paramount to the client's success. Therefore, an ethical coach will maintain the strictest levels of confidentiality with all parties as agreed upon. The coach will agree to comply with all applicable laws about data and communication (International Coaching Federation, n.d.). This confidentiality also clarifies how information is exchanged among parties involved during all coaching interaction. A couple of examples of how these standards can be are as follows: 1. The coach agrees that the client's email and other personal data will not be used for promotional purposes (e.g., website testimonials, social media stories) without their permission; 2. Regarding information exchange, if a coach needs to consult with another coach in their organization about their client, a signed agreement is obtained first before the consult. This will ensure a transparent and ethical information exchange.

Maintaining Records and Conflicts of Interest

Two necessary ethical standards in the coaching practice are the importance of maintaining good records and managing conflicts of interest. First, a competent coach will store and dispose of any documents, including communications during professional interactions, in a manner that promotes confidentiality and privacy (International Coaching Federation, n.d.). Secondly, a coach will manage conflicts of interest through coaching agreements and ongoing dialogue. Ethical issues should address organizational roles, responsibilities, relationships, records, and other reporting requirements (International Coaching Federation, n.d.). In the current coaching agreement with a practitioner, this author can quickly see how a professional

coaching firm utilizes these ethical standards in its practice. A line item in their agreement explicitly says, “we will do our best to keep your interests at the forefront. If we see a conflict, we will address it and deal with it accordingly.” While all coaching organizations are different, this author has hired one direct and to the point. A relationship that can be admired as we move through the coaching program.

Practical Application Conclusions

So, what does this all mean? As Boysen-Rotelli, (2018) and Singh (2020) posit, executive coaching is still novel. It is up to the coaching practitioner to decide if they want to choose the path of certification and affiliation. The International Coaching Federation represents its member coaches and aims to advance the profession by offering credentialing approaches and guidelines for self-governance. ICF defines eleven core competencies and ethical standards critical to the practice of professional coaching, including a cluster of competencies that facilitate learning and results (Singh et al., 2020). In this paper, four competencies were identified and how they can be used or violated in a coaching practice. Five ethical standards were also evaluated, and the competencies can pave the way for training programs explicitly tailored toward executive coaches. Following these standards will improve the outcomes for coaching clients and provide insight for this author as he develops a coaching practice in a new organization, he is developing called Peak Experience.

Peak Experience is unique in the coaching and training industry and is the catalyst for a brief case study and research inquiry for this paper. It brings together professionals with vast experience in academia, business, recreational therapy, and coaching and provides programming for Alaska and Pacific Northwest organizations. The research for this paper has provided tremendous insight into how we should incorporate these core competencies and ethical

standards in our business moving forward. Much like Proverbs 3:13 (NIV), a coaching practitioner needs to be a lifelong learner to see success. Therefore, savvy Christian leaders will constantly improve and increase their wisdom about running a business.

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