

ICF Core Competency Model¹

Updated October 2019

Each competency has a definition and related behaviors. Some of these behaviors are present and visible in any coaching interaction, while others are only called for in certain coaching situations and therefore not always visible in every coaching interaction.

Note about updates

This competency model, updated by ICF in October 2019, is based on evidence collected from more than 1,300 coaches across the world, including both ICF Members and non-members and representing a diverse range of coaching disciplines, training backgrounds, coaching styles, and experience levels. This large-scale research initiative validated that much of the existing ICF Core Competency Model, developed nearly 25 years ago, remains critically important to the practice of coaching today.

“ COACHES NEED TO BE EXPERTS AT THE PROCESS OF COACHING BUT RECOGNIZE THEIR CLIENTS ARE THE EXPERTS ON THE CONTENT OF THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE.”

- DIANNE R. STOBER
Evidence Based Coaching Handbook

Some new elements and themes that emerged from the data have also been integrated into the model. These include a paramount emphasis on *ethical behavior and confidentiality*, the importance of a *coaching mindset* and *ongoing reflective practice*, the critical distinctions between *various levels of coaching agreements*, the criticality of *partnership* between coach and client, and the importance of *cultural, systemic, and contextual awareness*. These foundational components, combined with emerging themes, reflect the key elements of coaching practice today and will serve as stronger, more comprehensive coaching standards for the future.

A. Foundation

Demonstrates Ethical Practice

Definition: Understands and consistently applies coaching ethics and standards of coaching.

- Demonstrates personal integrity and honesty in interactions with clients, sponsors, and relevant stakeholders
- Is sensitive to clients' identity, environment, experiences, values, and beliefs
- Uses language appropriate and respectful to clients, sponsors, and relevant stakeholders
- Abides by the ICF Code of Ethics and upholds the Core Values
- Maintains confidentiality with client information per stakeholder agreements and pertinent laws
- Maintains the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy, and other support professions
- Refers clients to other support professionals, as appropriate

Embodies a Coaching Mindset

Definition: Develops and maintains a mindset that is open, curious, flexible, and client-centered.

- Acknowledges that clients are responsible for their own choices
- Engages in ongoing learning and development as a coach
- Develops an ongoing reflective practice to enhance one's coaching
- Remains aware of and open to the influence of context and culture on self and others
- Uses awareness of self and one's intuition to benefit clients
- Develops and maintains the ability to regulate one's emotions
- Mentally and emotionally prepares for sessions
- Seeks help from outside sources when necessary

B. Co-Creating the Relationship*Establishes and Maintains Agreements*

Definition: Partners with the client and relevant stakeholders to create clear agreements about the coaching relationship, process, plans, and goals. Establishes agreements for the overall coaching engagement as well as those for each coaching session.

- Explains what coaching is and is not and describes the process to the client and relevant stakeholders
- Reaches agreement about what is and is not appropriate in the relationship, what is and is not being offered, and the responsibilities of the client and relevant stakeholders
- Reaches agreement about the guidelines and specific parameters of the coaching relationship such as logistics, fees, scheduling, duration, termination, confidentiality, and inclusion of others
- Partners with the client and relevant stakeholders to establish an overall coaching plan and goals
- Partners with the client to determine client-coach compatibility
- Partners with the client to identify or reconfirm what they want to accomplish in the session
- Partners with the client to define what the client believes they need to address or resolve to achieve what they want to accomplish in the session
- Partners with the client to define or reconfirm measures of success for what the client wants to accomplish in the coaching engagement or individual session
- Partners with the client to manage the time and focus of the session
- Continues coaching in the direction of the client's desired outcome unless the client indicates otherwise
- Partners with the client to end the coaching relationship in a way that honors the experience

Cultivates Trust and Safety

Definition: Partners with the client to create a safe, supportive environment that allows the client to share freely. Maintains a relationship of mutual respect and trust.

- Seeks to understand the client within their context which may include their identity, environment, experiences, values, and beliefs
- Demonstrates respect for the client's identity, perceptions, style, and language and adapts one's coaching to the client
- Acknowledges and respects the client's unique talents, insights, and work in the coaching process
- Shows support, empathy and concern for the client
- Acknowledges and supports the client's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs, and suggestions
- Demonstrates openness and transparency as a way to display vulnerability and build trust with the client

Maintains Presence

Definition: Is fully conscious and present with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible, grounded, and confident.

- Remains focused, observant, empathetic, and responsive to the client
- Demonstrates curiosity during the coaching process
- Manages one's emotions to stay present with the client
- Demonstrates confidence in working with strong client emotions during the coaching process
- Is comfortable working in a space of not knowing
- Creates or allows space for silence, pause, or reflection

C. Communicating Effectively*Listens Actively*

Definition: Focuses on what the client is and is not saying to fully understand what is being communicated in the context of the client systems and to support client self-expression.

- Considers the client's context, identity, environment, experiences, values, and beliefs to enhance understanding of what the client is communicating
- Reflects or summarizes what the client communicated to ensure clarity and understanding
- Recognizes and inquires when there is more to what the client is communicating
- Notices, acknowledges and explores the client's emotions, energy shifts, non-verbal cues, or other behaviors
- Integrates the client's words, tone of voice, and body language to determine the full meaning of what is being communicated
- Notices trends in the client's behaviors and emotions across sessions to discern themes and patterns

Evokes Awareness

Definition: Facilitates client insight and learning by using tools and techniques such as powerful questioning, silence, metaphor, or analogy.

- Considers client experience when deciding what might be most useful
- Challenges the client as a way to evoke awareness or insight
- Asks questions about the client, such as their way of thinking, values, needs, wants, and beliefs
- Asks questions that help the client explore beyond current thinking
- Invites the client to share more about their experience in the moment
- Notices what is working to enhance client progress
- Adjusts the coaching approach in response to the client's needs
- Helps the client identify factors that influence current and future patterns of behavior, thinking or emotion
- Invites the client to generate ideas about how they can move forward and what they are willing or able to do
- Supports the client in reframing perspectives
- Shares observations, insights and feelings, without attachment, that have the potential to create new learning for the client

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COACHING IS,
ABOVE ALL, ABOUT
HUMAN GROWTH
AND CHANGE.

- **DIANNE R. STOBER**
*Evidence Based Coaching
Handbook*

D. Cultivating Learning and Growth*Facilitates Client Growth*

Definition: Partners with the client to transform learning and insight into action. Promotes client autonomy in the coaching process.

- Works with the client to integrate new awareness, insight, or learning into their worldview and behaviors
- Partners with the client to design goals, actions, and accountability measures that integrate and expand new learning
- Acknowledges and supports client autonomy in the design of goals, actions, and methods of accountability
- Supports the client in identifying potential results or learning from identified action steps
- Invites the client to consider how to move forward, including resources, support, and potential barriers
- Partners with the client to summarize learning and insight within or between sessions
- Celebrates the client's progress and successes
- Partners with the client to close the session

¹ <https://coachfederation.org/core-competencies>