JCI Code of Professional and Ethical Conduct for Coaches

# The Coaching Profession

In coaching, a trained professional creates a partnership with a client to empower the client to achieve positive change. While emphasizing practical results, coaching also facilitates the client’s self-awareness so that s/he can actualize his/her potential, in accordance with the client’s values and beliefs. This partnership is structured and time-limited, informed by the professional and ethical values outlined by this code.

# Professionalism

Coaches are trained professionals who conduct their professional relationships in a way that enhances respect -- for themselves as coaches, for the coaching relationship, and for the profession as a whole. Arriving on time to sessions, fully prepared and professionally attired, and interacting respectfully with clients and colleagues are examples of professional behavior. Additional examples will be discussed in this code.

# Ethics

Coaches conduct themselves in a manner that is morally upright and protective of the client’s best interests at all times. Respecting the client’s independence, refraining from harming the client, and serving the client honestly and truthfully are examples of ethical behavior. This code will discuss categories and specific standards for ethical conduct in the coaching relationship.

# Core Values

The following core values serve as the basis for all professional interactions in coaching. These values are all equally important and remind us of what we work to achieve as coaches when we implement specific professional and ethical standards.

***Curiosity***

Coaches remain open and curious about their clients’ experience and refrain from allowing preconceived notions to determine their views. Coaches also expand their own learning and growth throughout their careers in order to continually improve their service to their clients.

***Cultural Sensitivity***

Coaches conduct themselves in a way that respects clients’ diverse backgrounds and perspectives. They remain respectfully aware of differences that might arise due to a client’s age, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or socioeconomic status and work to eliminate the effects of any biases they might have based on these factors.

***Fairness***

Coaches provide their services in a way that respects all clients equally. They do not discriminate against particular clients on the basis of membership in a particular group or a central characteristic such as gender, color, religion, or sexual orientation.

***Humility***

Coaches respect clients as the experts on their own lives and refrain from imposing their own agenda on their clients. They accept responsibility for communicating clearly and honestly while leaving room for other perspectives, and model this communication style for their clients.

***Integrity***

Coaches practice honesty and transparency with regard to representing themselves and their work. They work to be aware of their own values and beliefs and how these values might affect their work. When conflicts arise between their personal and professional values, coaches strive to resolve these conflicts in an ethical way.

***Self-Awareness***

Coaches continually reflect on their work and strive to better serve their clients. They are honest with themselves about their strengths and weaknesses, and take a realistic approach to handling problems that may affect their coaching relationships.

# Standards of Conduct

## The Coaching Relationship: Professional and Ethical Standards

### **Professional Standards**

***Information Gathering:***

* + When conducting the intake and learning about the client, coaches consider the whole person.
  + The coach listens for problems, obstacles, and solutions that the client raises.

***Goal-Setting:***

* + The client’s goals are essential. The coach’s behavior is subject to the client’s goals.
  + The coach establishes criteria for performance together with the client.
  + The coach remains wholly focused on the client’s agenda; coaches make sure not to let their mental/emotional/religious orientations influence their work.

***Relationship Structure and Process:***

* + Before coaching begins, coaches explain their work style, rules, fee structures, and payment systems.
  + Coaches’ self-presentation and interactions with clients convey (and model) self-respect and respect for the coaching process. Dressing appropriately and starting and ending sessions on time are examples of this respectful stance.
  + Both client and coach are fully present during sessions. (No phones or other distractions.)
  + The coach works with the client’s potential, focusing on the client’s previous successes.
  + The coach creates an ESE (emotionally safe environment) for coaching.
  + Coaches are judicious about when, and how much, to disclose information about themselves to their clients. Self-disclosure by the coach should always be done to serve the client’s needs.
  + The coach engages the client in actions that contribute to the accomplishment of the client’s goals.
  + The coach tailors assignments to the client’s needs.
  + The coach makes himself/herself available for brief phone or e-mail check-ins between sessions.
  + Should the coach need to cancel a session with a client unexpectedly, the coach is responsible to make reasonable efforts to reschedule the missed session, preferably within a week. If the coach’s services to the client will be interrupted for an extended period, the coach is responsible to refer the client to a coach who can provide the client with consistent service.
  + Coaches do not diagnose or make psychological interpretations.
  + Coaches use systematic constructive/supportive/empowering questioning to guide the client toward solutions.
  + Coaching involves goal formulation, goal-oriented thinking, and goal-specific action.
  + Coaches recognize that their clients are multi-intelligent beings, and deal with ALL areas of intelligence.
  + The client is the CO-creator of the coaching process.
  + The client is a self-healing system, and has answers to his/her problems.
  + If the coach is unable to help the client, he/she needs to make that clear to the client and refer the client to someone better equipped to provide the client with what he/she needs.

### **Ethical Standards**

***Coaches’ Ethical and Legal Obligations:***

* + Coaches obey the law. If a legal requirement conflicts with a coach’s ethical requirement, the coach must first obey the law.
  + Although the law comes first, coaches remain responsible to practice ethically.

***Informed Consent:***

* + Before starting the coaching process coaches make sure that clients understand how coaching works.
  + Coaches and clients agree to the terms of their relationship, e.g., fee structure, confidentiality and its limits (see below), frequency and duration of sessions, guidelines for contact between sessions, etc.
  + It is recommended that coaches provide clients with a written coaching contract specifying the terms of the relationship. Coaches should give clients the opportunity to review this contract and ask any questions they might have about it. They should confirm that clients understand the contract and agree with the terms before coaching begins, and revisit the terms of the contract throughout the relationship as needed.

***Confidentiality:***

* + Coaches protect clients’ privacy and keep client information confidential unless there is a compelling professional reason not to do so. Examples of compelling professional reasons to break confidentiality include, but are not limited to, danger to a client or to a third party, referral to another professional who can best serve the client if they review the client’s records, request of the client’s records by the court for legal proceedings, a legal obligation to report information about a client to the authorities, supervision/consultation on how best to help the client, etc.
  + Even when there is a compelling professional reason to share a client’s confidential information, coaches first obtain written permission from their clients unless the situation demands otherwise (see below). They also discuss the disclosure and its possible ramifications with the client.
  + In cases of imminent or probable danger or situations where the coach is required by law to disclose client information, coaches may share confidential information without obtaining the client’s written permission.

***Competence:***

* + Coaches are responsible to provide services that are within their skill set. When a client wants or needs a service that is outside of the coach’s skill set, the coach is responsible to inform the client of this and suggest other options.
  + Coaches are responsible to be aware of developments in the field and make sure that they are current in their knowledge and skills.
  + Coaches are responsible to be self-aware and alert for signs that they might be developing personal problems which could impact their performance in the coaching relationship. When this happens, coaches are responsible to take appropriate steps to protect the best interests of their clients (e.g., consulting with a senior coach about whether they should limit the number of clients they take or take a break from coaching). If a coach’s personal problem necessitates a change to the coaching relationship, the coach needs to discuss this with the client and plan appropriate next steps.

***Misuse of Coaches’ Influence:***

* + Coaches are responsible to be aware of their potential influence on their clients, and to refrain from abusing this influence.

***Conflicts of Interest:***

* + Whenever possible, coaches don’t accept jobs or make commitments that might conflict with their obligation to serve their clients’ best interests.
  + If a coach discovers that a conflict of interest has come up in their work (e.g., they discover something that interferes with their ability to remain wholly focused on the client’s goals), they find an ethical way to resolve this conflict that protects the best interests of the client.

***Third Party Coaching Requests:***

* + When a third party requests coaching for a client, the coach needs to clarify his/her relationship with both the client and with the third party. All parties need to be in agreement with regards to their relationship with the coach. Of particular importance is deciding whose agenda will determine the goals and process of coaching, and what information about the coaching client – if any – will be shared with the third party.

***Coaching Clients in Therapy:***

* + If a coaching client is simultaneously receiving therapy, the coach is responsible to carefully consider whether coaching is appropriate for this client at this time. If the coach does decide to continue coaching the client, it’s important for everyone involved to be clear about the client’s relationship with each professional in order to prevent confusion or duplication of services.

***Multiple Relationships:***

* + Maintaining more than one relationship simultaneously with the same client, particularly if the non-coaching relationship is personal rather than professional, can create a conflict of interest and interfere with providing optimal coaching.
  + Coaches should think carefully before accepting a client with whom they have a preexisting relationship. While coaching casual acquaintances will likely not result in a conflict of interest, coaching close friends or family members is not recommended.
  + If a coach later discovers that they have an additional relationship with the client, the coach needs to consider whether coaching the client can ethically continue, and if not, how to resolve this in a way that serves the best interests of the client.
  + Coaches do not engage in romantic relationships with current clients.
  + Coaches who wish to engage in romantic relationships with former clients should consider this carefully. They need to be sure that their former client is making a fully informed, independent decision to date the coach as an equal rather than approaching the relationship from a place of vulnerability. It’s advisable to refrain from dating a former client if the coaching relationship took place recently and the client is likely in the “client” mindset rather than approaching the coach as an equal. Additionally, the client needs to be aware that if they date their former coach and need coaching in the future, they will need to find a new coach.

***Termination:***

* + Coaches respect clients’ rights to terminate the coaching relationship at any point for any reason.
  + Coaches stay alert to signs that the coaching relationship is not serving the client. In these cases, coaches explore options for either enhancing their services to better serve the client or terminating the relationship, providing a referral to another professional if appropriate.

## Ethical Business Practices

***Advertising:***

* + Advertising includes any publicly available written documents or oral statements about the coach’s practice (e.g., websites, brochures, commercials, etc.).
  + Coaches are responsible to make sure that they are described accurately.
  + While coaches may use testimonials from former clients in their advertising, requesting a testimonial from a current client is an abuse of the coach’s influence.

***Barter:***

* + In some cases, coaches may barter their services in exchange for goods or services provided by the client as long as the barter arrangement is not exploitative.
  + As with traditional payment, the terms of the barter agreement should be established before coaching begins.
  + Coaches entering into a barter arrangement must obey relevant state laws governing this arrangement (e.g., the requirement to pay VAT in Israel).
  + Barter arrangements should be carefully thought out in order to prevent later disappointments with the arrangement which could interfere with the coach’s relationship with the client. For example, coaches should be sure that they truly want the good or service that the client is exchanging for coaching, and that they feel the trade is equitable.
  + The client’s non-monetary payment should be provided immediately to the coach rather than delayed.

***Referral Fees:***

* + It is permissible for coaches to accept compensation for referring their clients to other professionals, or to compensate other professionals for referring clients to them.
  + It is recommended that coaches be transparent with their clients if they are being compensated by another professional for referring the client to that professional.

***Record-Keeping:***

* + Coaches keep records of all communications with clients and relevant parties, including session notes, phone calls, electronic messages, etc.
  + Coaches store these records in a way that protects clients’ confidentiality and conforms to legal requirements. When coaches need to provide these records to other parties (see above), they do so in a way that protects confidentiality. If coaches want to discard their records, they must do so in a way that is consistent with the law.

## Promoting the Field: Training, Supervision, and Research

***Training:***

* + Coaches training other coaches should provide training programs that are well-thought out and meet trainees’ needs.
  + Coaches training other coaches should be honest and transparent about the kind of training they offer.
  + Coaches training other coaches should ensure that their trainees are aware of their ethical obligations.
  + Coaches training other coaches should recognize their limitations. If they lack sufficient experience to train coaches in a particular area or technique, they should refer their trainees to another person or program for that training.

***Supervision:***

* + Coaches who are supervising less experienced coaches are responsible to do whatever they reasonably can to ensure that their supervisees are providing competent service.
  + If the supervising coach assigns clients to the coaches working under their supervision, the supervising coach needs to be mindful of the supervisees’ level of competence. The supervising coach should only assign cases that the supervisees can work with effectively, whether independently or with appropriate supervision (which the supervising coach is responsible to provide).

***Research:***

* + Coaching research should be designed and conducted according to accepted scientific standards.
  + Coaches conducting research should be competent to do so, or be supervised by competent professionals.
  + Research should be conducted in a way that complies with the law.
  + Coaches should obtain approval or consent from research participants or hosting organizations, except for cases where this is not required (e.g., naturalistic observation).
  + When applicable, coaches are responsible to protect research participants from any harm that may result from participating in the study, including potential consequences of leaving the study.
  + Inducements for participants to participate in research should not be excessive or inappropriate; participants should never feel unduly obligated to participate in or remain in a study if they would prefer not to do so.
  + Coaches should report research results truthfully and accurately. If errors are later discovered, the researchers are responsible to correct them.
  + Coaches only take credit for their own work. They do not plagiarize others’ data or writing.