

Ethics and the Professional Coach: Challenges, and Practices (chapter from Professional Coaching: Principles and Practice)

In order to write a chapter for coaching and ethics in the global environment, one must be both generic and specific. There are principles of personal and professional ethics driven by common historical standards and ideals, and others specifically created for the profession of coaching. Ethics will be explored in both the historical context generally and in the professional context specifically. References will be cited that speak to professional ethics in general and specific references that speak to ethics in coaching and how they are the same or different in scope and practice.

My chapter will review the common ethical principles and guidelines across several professional coaching organizations, as well as comment on the inherent cultural differences that may occur in ethical behavior and practices of coaches with such a global reach. There will also be content that speaks to the crucial ethics of Internet or cyber communication and client privacy. I will summarize the historical contributions and challenges faced by the major coaching associations as they seek to uphold ethical practices for their members and the broader profession.

When I co-edited **Law & Ethics of Coaching: How to Solve and Avoid Difficult Problems in Your Practice** in 2006 there were no other books on ethics in coaching. Now the profession has dozens of resources that are giving useful information on ethics to those who coach or train coaches. These resources are also important for the processes of association ethical review boards when potential ethical breeches by members (brought by consumers or colleagues) are being considered.

Evolution of a Profession: Competencies, Credentialing, and Ethics

As the profession of coaching has grown globally, its evolution must contain a body of knowledge of evidence based competencies and ethical standards. These are necessary ingredients for a profession to be accepted and achieve its place as a true profession.

Coaching is not a licensed profession, although there have been a few jurisdictions that have tried to make it so. Therefore, it is true that anyone may call himself or herself a coach; it is not a protected title. But that is also true for being a speaker, or consultant, or trainer.

The International Coach Federation is the largest association for coaches and offers membership, conferences, ethical review, and credentialing of certified coaches as well as accrediting training organizations and schools. This chapter, however, will reference ethical guidelines and expectations more broadly than any one organization..

One must be aware that joining the ICF (or any other established organization around the globe) is by choice , and serve as a place of community for its members. They also serve the role of creating the standards of competency and mastery as well as forming ethical guidelines and ethical review procedures.

The most visible coaching organizations worldwide, who do have ethical conduct standards are:

International Coach Federation (ICF)

European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC)

Association for Coaching (AC)

International Association of Coaching (IAC)

Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC)

Association for Professional Executive Coaching and Supervision (APECS)

Center for Credentialing and Education (CCE)

But of course, if a coach is not a member, there exists little or no recourse for any discipline or ethical mentoring or training and the public may be confused as to who is a qualified coach and who is not. In fact, with professional membership organizations also connecting certification to the membership, that service of certification becomes monetized in a revenue stream for the organization, creating its own potential conflict of interest. I believe that, if coaching is to be a *profession and not an industry*, it might be better served to have certification of coaches done by a separate body from the membership organization. The dilemma in keeping coaching as an unlicensed profession is the fact that there exist no legal limits as to who can call himself or herself a coach. And yet, as previously stated, that is also true of being a consultant, a professional speaker, or trainer. Ideally the buying public will become aware of what credentials and ethical practices to seek in someone they hire.

There is a more recent player in the field that shows promise in creating a credential and a review process that is objective, and solely involved in assessment of competencies with a testing and credentialing procedure as other professions have. The Center for Credentialing and Education created the Board-Certified Coach credential in 2010 and will continue to row in refining testing procedures and minimal standards of competency for the profession of coaching. T Also

enhancing the body of knowledge, evidence, and credibility of this evolving profession are dozens of graduate schools that offer degrees or certificates in coaching as well as the growth of coach specific research, r. Some recent studies are evaluating the executive coach and ethical decision-making.

All of this bodes well for a strong global profession to be highly regarded and self-regulated, and coaching will, of course, develop case law and references from the small percentage that will be sued or challenged in court for unethical behavior. That is how all professions evolve and distinguish professionals from unscrupulous opportunists. The decisions of ethical review boards will also add to this body of knowledge.

Not everyone reviewed by Ethical Boards will be found in breach of ethics but there must be a process to review any customer complaints. Most organizations noted in this chapter have an Independent Ethical Review Board process if one of their members has a complaint filed against them. Being reviewed or interviewed does not mean there has been an ethical breach rather this is sometimes a process for educating, clarifying, and informing both the coach and the complainant.

Ethics, in fact, is usually a case of critical and informed thinking, but there will always be gray areas, and the more case studies available as examples the more helpful. Competency training, peer consultation and case reviews also help but in the end, the profession will possibly gain the most credibility from coaches academically trained in both the art and science of coaching

Ethics in a Historical View

We can look back to the early theories of ethics from Socrates and later Kant and others having to do with general moral and ethical behaviors for humans. And then as business and professions began to evolve there was reference to the ethical practice of trades, and of professional societies as they developed (accountants, lawyers, etc.). Indeed, much of coaching today has borrowed from the concept of Socratic dialogue, but remember, he was sentenced to death by poison essentially for upsetting the community by teaching young persons to ask a lot of questions of themselves and their parents.

Nevertheless, we can look to Socrates as an early coach of sorts and later on Aristotle as well. Both men set the stage for ethical guidelines that evolved in professions over centuries (Carroll and Shaw, 2013)

Five Sources of Ethical Standards

The Utilitarian Approach

Some ethicists emphasize that the ethical action is the one that provides the most good or does the least harm, or, to put it another way, produces the greatest balance of good over harm. The ethical corporate action, then, is the one that produces the greatest good and does the least harm for all who are affected-customers, employees, shareholders, the community, and the environment. The utilitarian approach deals with consequences; it tries both to increase the good done and to reduce the harm done.

The Rights Approach

Other philosophers and ethicists suggest that the ethical action is the one that best protects and respects the moral rights of those affected. This approach starts from the belief that humans have

a dignity based on their human nature per se or on their ability to choose freely what they do with their lives. On the basis of such dignity, they have a right to be treated as ends and not merely as means to other ends. Also, it is often said that rights imply duties-in particular, the duty to respect others' rights.

The Fairness or Justice Approach

Aristotle and other Greek philosophers have contributed the idea that all equals should be treated equally. Today we use this idea to say that ethical actions treat all human beings equally-or if unequally, then fairly based on some standard that is defensible. We pay people more based on their harder work or the greater amount that they contribute to an organization, and say that is fair. But there is a debate over CEO salaries that are hundreds of times larger than the pay of others; many ask whether the huge disparity it is the result of an imbalance of power and hence is unfair.

The Common Good Approach

The Greek philosophers have also contributed the notion that life in community is a good in itself and our actions should contribute to that life. This approach suggests that the interlocking relationships of society are the basis of ethical reasoning and that respect and compassion for all others-especially the vulnerable-are requirements of such reasoning. This approach also calls attention to the common conditions that are important to the welfare of everyone.

The Virtue Approach

A very ancient approach to ethics is that ethical actions ought to be consistent with certain ideal virtues that provide for the full development of our humanity. These virtues are dispositions and habits that enable us to act according to the highest potential of our character and on behalf of

values like truth and beauty. Honesty, courage, compassion, generosity, tolerance, love, fidelity, integrity, fairness, self-control, and prudence are all examples of virtues. Virtue ethics asks of any action, "What kind of person will I become if I do this?" or "Is this action consistent with my acting at my best?"

Putting the Approaches Together

Each of these approaches helps us determine what standards of behavior can be considered ethical. There are still problems to be solved, however.

For example we may not agree on the content of some of these specific approaches such as the same set of human and civil rights. We may not agree on what constitutes the common good. We may not even agree on what is a good and what is a harm.

Another problem is that different approaches may not all answer the question "What is ethical?" in the same way. Nonetheless, each approach gives us important information with which to determine what is ethical in a particular circumstance and more often than not, the different approaches do lead to similar answers.

Making Decisions

Making good ethical decisions requires a trained sensitivity to ethical issues and a practiced method for exploring the ethical aspects and weighing the considerations that should impact our choice of a course of action. Having a method for ethical decision making is absolutely essential. When practiced regularly, the method becomes so familiar that we work through it automatically without consulting the specific steps.

The more novel and difficult the ethical choice we face, the more we need to rely on discussion and dialogue with others about the dilemma. Only by careful exploration of the problem, aided by the insights and different perspectives of others, can we make good ethical choices in such situations.

I have found the following framework for ethical decision making a useful method for exploring ethical dilemmas and identifying ethical courses of action. *This framework for thinking ethically is the product of dialogue and debate at the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University. Primary contributors include Manuel Velasquez, Dennis Moberg, Michael J. Meyer, Thomas Shanks, Margaret R. McLean, David DeCosse, Claire André, and Kirk O. Hanson. It was last revised in May 2009.*

- See more at:

<http://www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/decision/framework.html#sthash.FaZevbeb.dpuf>

A Framework for Ethical Decision Making

Recognize an Ethical Issue

1. Could this decision or situation be damaging to someone or to some group? Does this decision involve a choice between a good and bad alternative, or perhaps between two "goods" or between two "bads"?
2. Is this issue about more than what is legal or what is most efficient? If so, how?

Get the Facts

3. What are the relevant facts of the case? What facts are not known? Can I learn more about the situation? Do I know enough to make a decision?
4. What individuals and groups have an important stake in the outcome? Are some concerns more important? Why?
5. What are the options for acting? Have all the relevant persons and groups been consulted? Have I identified creative options?

Evaluate Alternative Actions

6. Evaluate the options by asking the following questions:
 - Which option will produce the most good and do the least harm? (The Utilitarian Approach)
 - Which option best respects the rights of all who have a stake? (The Rights Approach)
 - Which option treats people equally or proportionately? (The Justice Approach)
 - Which option best serves the community as a whole, not just some members? (The Common Good Approach)
 - Which option leads me to act as the sort of person I want to be? (The Virtue Approach)

Make a Decision and Test It

7. Considering all these approaches, which option best addresses the situation?

8. If I told someone I respect-or told a television audience-which option I have chosen, what would they say?

Act and Reflect on the Outcome

9. How can my decision be implemented with the greatest care and attention to the concerns of all stakeholders?
10. How did my decision turn out and what have I learned from this specific situation?

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Critical History in the development of the Coaching Profession

To become a recognized profession, coaching must have professional standards, definitions, ethical guidelines, ongoing research, and credentialing. Beginning in the early 1990s, the coaching phenomenon saw the creation of several coach training schools and the creation of two major professional associations. In 1996, the Professional Coaching and Mentoring Association

merged with the International Coaching Federation (ICF), and the ICF led the way as the most recognized international association representing the coaching profession. Standards of practice, credentialing, and ethical guidelines were soon created.

Over the next few years, a Regulatory Committee was formed (this author Patrick Williams was the first co-chairman with Diane Brennan). The committee lay the groundwork for which the ICF built on from the early part of this century until now, and revisions are considered on a regular basis. The overall goal is/was to maintain the profession of coaching as self-regulated and not subject to professional licensing.

Other organizations outside North America made efforts to create a global conversation about what was needed to have Coaching be recognized as a profession with accepted standards of competencies, practice, and ethics.

Groups such as The Dublin Conference of 2008–Global Convention on Coaching began with the question: What’s possible for coaching? The goal since July 2007, was for the GCC participants to study, via an online forum, current realities in coaching and to look at what is possible for coaching in the future. The outcomes were never realized but it did begin a more global dialogue from Europe, Australasia, South and North America

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In addition to ethical guidelines, professional competencies, and certification, the coaching profession is witnessing a tremendous interest in academic research and graduate studies in coaching. This attention is a critical step in the further evolution of the profession, and the research and training are necessary for developing a field of knowledge, theoretical

orientations, and efficacy studies. Research on effectiveness and distinctions of skill sets, competencies, and standardization of education and training is tantamount to any profession finding its place of acceptance in the private and corporate culture.

The historical perspective delineated above reveals that professional coaching today has emerged from other major professions (psychology, counseling, consulting, and the like). These professions have written codes of ethics and professional standards. In addition, they typically are regulated by state licensing boards (at least in the United States) and government regulations. These government regulations usually deal with required training, practice laws, and legal requirements for maintaining a license.

At this time, coaching is not regulated or monitored by a state agency or regulatory board. It is the current belief that the profession in general must monitor itself. However, some state mental-health regulatory boards think differently, as the following scenario demonstrates.

The Colorado Case and the Threat to Practicing Coaches. In June 2001, the administrator of the Colorado Mental Health Board, Amos Martinez, wrote an opinion piece in the Board newsletter entitled “Coaching: Is This Psychotherapy?” In that article, Martinez raised the idea that coaching, especially personal coaching, met the very broad definition of psychotherapy in the state of Colorado. Because of that interpretation, word began to spread that coaches in Colorado had to register as “unlicensed psychotherapists” and follow the regulations in the state’s Mental Health Act that pertain to those individuals.

Immediately after reading that newsletter, Dr. Lloyd Thomas and I (Dr. Patrick Williams), both of us licensed psychologists and practicing coaches, drove to Denver and met with Dr. Martinez in an attempt to educate him and the Board about professional coaching, the ICF, standards of ethics, and so on. The meeting was cordial, and Dr. Martinez sounded

appreciative, but nothing changed in the next several months. The rumor began to spread across the globe that Colorado was going after coaches, and that the profession was in danger of being lumped together with psychotherapy, a distinction most coaches were trying to clarify.

A Colorado Coach and the State Mental Health Board.

In 2003, a case against a Colorado coach brought this whole discussion and the legal intrusion on the profession to a head. An ICF Master Certified Coach who lived and worked in Colorado (although all of her clients lived out of the state) was charged with practicing psychotherapy without a license by the Department of Regulatory Agencies in Colorado. Although the charge was dropped as frivolous, Colorado was still forcing the coach to register as an unlicensed therapist, which she refused to do. Hence, she closed her practice because she could not afford to hire an attorney to pursue the defense of her position.

That case led to a focused effort by the Colorado Coalition of Coaches to pursue changing the law, and the group hired a lobbyist to help with the effort. After 18 months of hard work by the Colorado Coalition and the lobbyist as well as grassroots support and donations by individual coaches, the International Coach Federation, the International Association of Coaches, the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches, and the Association of Coach Training Organizations, the legislature agreed and approved an amendment to the Mental Health Act which exempted coaching from the legislature's oversight. More details of the entire research and action steps by the ICF Regulatory Committee and information gathered in the United States follow. Because coaching is an international profession, the ICF also began conversations about and research on any regulatory concerns or issues in other countries, but those concerns and

issues have not warranted the worldwide attention that matters in the United States have. The proliferation of government licensing and regulation of various professions is unique to the United States.

It is important when cases like this may arise anywhere around the globe, that the ‘case history’ of other attempts to limit or regulate coaching by a state agency be looked at through the lens of professional self-regulation and ethics of professional membership in a coaching organization.

ICF Regulatory History

The ICF Board of Directors chartered the Regulatory Committee in the summer of 2002 with the goal to research, monitor, evaluate, and proactively contribute to government and regulatory bodies in order to educate, articulate, and develop our growing profession of coaching as a self-regulated profession. As a group and via email, the committee researched and discussed the regulatory activity related to coaching within the United States. In addition, the group was in dialogue with a key individual within the field of mediation, and with professionals in financial planning and executive management.

The ongoing challenge in the future will continue to be how to distinguish the various niches of coaching, especially life and wellness coaching or perhaps relationship coaching, and health coaching. These specializations, in my opinion would be best represented as sub specialties of general coaching parameters and definitions. And yet, we all know that professional coaching using some of the same skill sets, and tools, that arose from psychotherapy and counseling, but applied in a different context. Skills such as focused listening, rapport building, empathy, presence, evocative inquiry, and goal creation and planning are part of many other professions as well. Consultants, for example, are not licensed or regulated in most cases,

and yet that profession, albeit contextually different from coaching, does not seem to attract the same level of scrutiny as does coaching from the various government agencies that regulate mental health services and from the professions of therapy and counseling, who may feel territorially threatened.

You can find distinctions between coaching and therapy or counseling in this article <http://icfcolorado.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Critical-distinctions-between-coaching-and-psychotherapy.pdf>.

Given this case that is USA centric, I want to point out here the important of cultural sensitivity with regard to ethics. In reviewing the ethical guidelines of all the major professional bodies in ethics, noted in the beginning of this chapter, the standards are all remarkably similar (see Ethics in Coaching by Diane Brennan and Leni Wildflower in The Complete Handbook of Coaching (2nd Edition) editors, Cox E, Bachkirova, T, and Clutterbuck, D: London, Sage Publications

In conclusion, this chapter is intended to aid in the creation of increased and available knowledge for those who enter the coaching profession, or who teach or consult about coaching.

In my review of the current literature on Ethics and Coaching or other helping professions, there is wise guidance that ethical maturity and development comes from training, practice development, collegial consultation and support and learning continual critical thinking due to the individual uniqueness of what may arise in your role as a coach.

In Ethical Maturity in the Helping Professions: Making Difficult Life and Work Decisions by Carroll, M. and Shaw, E. (Jessica Kingsley Publishing, London 2013), the authors note strategies to save ourselves from being unethical, cited below from page 60.

- Do not think, *I*, think *we*.
- Consider issues of power, domination, privilege.
- Ask yourself if you would recommend what you are about to do.
- Try to look at the behavior, not the intention.
- Ask yourself how this might be perceived from the other's point of view

3. Appendix

Ethical Cases for Consideration: What to know and do to avoid 'Sticky Situations'.

CASE STUDY: THE NEW COACH*

You are a relatively new coach who for the past year has regularly taken free online courses that claim to address professional coaching skills and provide participant group discussions about how best to coach clients. You have completed college, having earned a degree in English with a minor in television and film. You were drawn to coaching because of your fascination with people and what makes them tick. You began actually coaching people in a one-to-one format about six months ago, and you started to charge money for your services last month.

You keep handwritten notes of your client sessions in a spiral-bound notebook that you keep in the bookshelf behind your desk for easy access. As you have gained more clients, you've begun noticing how hard it is to keep straight what each client expects to accomplish. On

occasion, you've even accidentally written notes about one client in the section reserved for someone else.

1. At first glance, what concerns you and/or about what do you need more information?
2. What guidelines from a recognizable Coaching code of Ethics might apply?
3. Imagine that this new coach under the described circumstances has approached you.
What recommendations would you make to assist him or her in becoming a more competent, ethical coach?

CASE STUDY: PRESSURE FROM ABOVE*

The owner of a local company has engaged you to coach a new manager, Manager A. A very talented and effective individual contributor, Manager A has found the transition to management quite difficult at times. The owner believes that with some coaching, Manager A will make a fine leader.

The owner makes it clear to you that she expects regular updates on how Manager A's coaching is going, and how he is responding to the coaching. You have noticed that during the last two update sessions with the company owner, she has started pressing you for details regarding what Manager A has disclosed during your coaching sessions, stating that, "I just want to help. How can I help him if I don't know what his issues are?"

Up until now, you've managed to successfully deflect her most pointed questions, but in today's session, she told you point blank that she wants you to give Manager A "a Myers-

Briggs test so that I can get a handle on this guy.” She makes it clear that she expects you to share the results of the test with her, stating, “I’m paying, so I’m playing!”

While somewhat familiar with it, you are not trained to administer the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator; what’s more, you’re not sure you will be able to avoid the owner’s pointed requests for details of your coaching sessions much longer.

1. How would you handle this situation?
2. What parts of the any recognized code of ethics covers this type of issue?
3. What obligations of confidentiality are owed, and to whom?

CASE STUDY: LAYERS OF THE ONION*

The CEO of a large corporation has retained you to enhance the performance of Senior VP. Up until now, she has risen quickly through the organization, and came to the company with a demonstrated track record of incredible success. The CEO has noticed that her authoritarian management style, lack of empathy for other members of the organization, and lack of self-awareness have created havoc on the leadership team. He expects you to give him regular updates on how the coaching is going, as well as your periodic assessment of how SVP is responding to the coaching.

During your most recent coaching session with SVP, she has shared with you that her marriage is floundering, and she feels an enormous sense of guilt that she spends very little time with her two young children. You also have begun to sense that she may have some issues with depression and anxiety, caused not only by her personal issues, but also

by concerns she has voiced about being able to hit this quarter's sales goals. Not only that, but she has also confided that, to help cope, she has begun drinking more than she used to, including at lunch and behind closed doors in her office.

*Adapted from: Williams, P. & Anderson, Sharon K. (2006). *Law and Ethics in Coaching: How to Solve and Avoid Difficult Problems in Your Practice*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons

Ethical Dilemma: Ethical Hot Water or Not

(Courtesy of Lynn Meinke, Institute for Life Coach Training Faculty)

Sharon hires Mark as her coach. She would like to move forward on her career path that's more exciting and create a life of balance and fulfillment and build a career that's more exciting.

As she creates balance in her life she becomes more energetic, more creative and experiences life as a wonderful adventure. She begins to realize that she is not only positively impacting her customers but her companies' bottom line as well.

During Sharon's time coaching with Mark she realizes she is attracted to him. One day in coaching she brings up this topic and he realizes he is attracted to her as well. Since Sharon had

achieved what she wanted in her coaching, she decides to end her coaching with Mark. They decide to begin dating and become sexually intimate.

Is this ethical in the coaching profession according to the any recognizable Code of Ethics?

Directions:

- 1 What statements make your ethical intuition speak?
- 2 Which ethical standards may be relevant?
- 3 What is your course of action as a coach?
- 4 If another coach shared this with you, what would you do?

Reflections on Cyber Sharing and Social Media in Coaching

All coaches and professionals who also engage in the coaching process should be aware of the pitfalls of online/internet communication. For example, when I contract with corporate or government employees, I always ask what email they prefer me to use and which phone number as well. And of course, our email communication is minimal unless the client has agreed on receiving a report or data that he/she may share with superiors as necessary or appropriate. But what about with private clients, who contract with you and pay with their own money? Both types of contracted clients' need to know the safe and secure ways to communicate as email is

not always safe, and some other methods, such as Skype, linked In and others should be used cautiously. There is a source for learning more detail at

<http://onlinetherapyinstitute.com/ethical-framework-for-the-use-of-technology-in-coaching/>

where they discuss, encryption, firewalls, when and how to communicate in an online environment and much more. Created by Kate Anthony (England) and DeeAnna Nagel (USA), a comprehensive site for ethical decision-making and awareness related to the online/virtual environment of client services.

Six Degrees of Separation Dilemma

(Thank-you to ICF Ethics & Standard Education Committee for this dilemma)

Your coaching business has been growing steadily but the administration of your business is taking up too much time and energy from what you really love to do – which is coach.

One day at the car wash, you see a business card for a virtual assistant (VA) and decide to try it out. You contact the VA who tells you how it works, what the fee is and promises to send you a contract. She never mentions confidentiality and you never ask.

You sign and mail the contract and once you start working with the VA you notice an immediate improvement to your business. It's hard to believe how much more focused you are now that you don't have to spend your time and effort on the administrative part of your business, which drove

you crazy!

A couple of months later, while trying to close a contract with a new sponsor company, the VP of HR discusses the company's confidentiality policy regarding coaching and asks you what your policy is.

She states that she's extra aware now because her sister in law, who's a VA in your state, has shared some client stories and mentioned names that the VP recognized as their competitor's CFO and product manager.

You explain your confidentiality policy and promise that nothing like that would ever happen with you. You add that as a member of the ICF you uphold the highest ethical standards in coaching and that probably the other coach did not have as much experience as yourself in the business.

Out of curiosity you casually ask who the VA is and to your horror, she mentions the name of your VA as well as the competitor's names of the CFO and product manager, both of whom are your clients.

Directions:

1. Identify concern (s) – where your intuition is speaking
2. Identify relevant ICF standard(s) that come to play
3. Identify relevant CCE standard(s) that come to play
4. Identify possible course correction

A potentially simple and useful view of ethical decision-making

Ethics and Good Business Practice: A Lesson from Rotary

When we think of Ethics in a profession, we may get lost in legalistic discussions of rules, rubrics, and detailed guidelines of how professionals should behave. Simplifying that to a common-sense approach (which maybe is not so common) may help make the application more simple, clear, and practical.

The first ethical standard embraced by the ICF is,

“I will conduct myself in a manner that reflects well on coaching as a profession and I will refrain from doing anything that harms the public’s understanding or acceptance of coaching as a profession.”

This standard and those that follow it should really be common sense, but as busy and distracted humans, reminders can help.

Since 1932, Rotary International has utilized a Four Way Test as its hallmark to guide member conduct. The guidelines may assist the coaching community to understand and implement the ICF Standards of Ethical Conduct. The Four Way Test provides a concise and easy reminder of the intent of all the ethical guidelines of our profession.

The **Four Way Test** of the things we say and do (Rotary International):

- I. Is it the **TRUTH**?
- II. Is it **FAIR** to all concerned?
- III. Will it build **GOOD WILL** and **BETTER FRIENDSHIPS**?
- IV. Will it be **BENEFICIAL** to all concerned?

Like many things in life, we sometimes complicate the original intent. Of course, we need ethical standards and systematized procedures for our profession of coaching. And yet, using the **Four Way Test** provides a great shortcut and reminder that can help all of us avoid most ethical dilemmas.

. (If you want to read more about the Four Way Test go to
<http://www.rotary.org/newsandinfo/downloadcenter/pdfs/502en.pdf>.)

Here is a coaching scenario that exemplifies the ethical standard described above, and that also applies to the **Four Way Test** of Rotary.

Coach Carl has been coaching Client Carol for 3 months, when Carol asks Carl if he has experience with reviewing business and marketing plans. She is at the point of her business that she feels she needs a coach/consultant to assist in the method and details required of such a formalized document. Carl is a fine life coach and has helped Carol immensely in designing her life and business to be more fulfilling, to have more balance over her time and to delegate more in her business. However, Carl really has neither formal experience nor training in designing business/marketing plans.

As an ethical coach, Carl tells Carol the *truth* that while he can help her get clearer on her vision and long term desired outcomes for the business she is in, he would refer her to a business advisor or consultant who specializes in the drafting business plans. He tells her that he can give her couple of names and encourages her to ask around in her community. Carl honestly tells her that even if she needs to stop the coaching relationship for a time, so that she can focus her time and resources with a new consultant, it would be ok with him. His *fair* approach is to add that if she can afford the time and money for both him and a business consultant, then that is her decision. But, he says his goal for her is to get what she wants and he does not have the specific expertise for what she is requesting. Carol thanks him and asks for a couple of names and says she will also ask around in her local group. (This approach by Carl is also a clear example of several other ICF ethical standards regarding being honest about his level of competence and not implying outcomes that he cannot guarantee.) Carl's actions create better *good will* and more *friendly* relations with Carol; and they are *beneficial* not only to her, but to his reputation as a coach.

In the coming weeks, write the **Four Way Test** on a note card and place it near your phone or computer (along with a copy of one of the ethical standards of Coaching.) Observe how these simple criteria assist in the application of coaching ethics and can greatly affect your coaching.

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