



# Uniting Chapters in the Spirit of Coaching Core Values

When Marlene Thomas's phone rang one evening, she had no idea the war in Ukraine would be on the other end of the line.

Perhaps not exactly, but what was on the line was a fellow coach who had a special understanding and compassion for the humanity of individuals living through a tragedy most could barely comprehend.

That coach was Larysa Homans, former president of the Ukraine Chapter of the International Coaching Federation (ICF). Though she now lived in Virginia, she had an acute awareness that her fellow Ukrainian coaches were in deep turmoil. Their homes were being invaded, their families were being separated, and every person's life in their country was at risk. Even those lucky enough to avoid the greatest risks were still faced with losing their income and access to credit. Life as they once knew it was being turned on its head.

That one short phone call led to a global partnership that went far beyond coaching. Larysa and Marlene joined forces and recruited the help of the ICF Metro DC Chapter's Pro Bono Program Director, Kenny Leahman,

to leverage every resource available to support their colleagues in Ukraine who were navigating a crisis no amount of preparation could have anticipated. They weren't immediately sure what that support would look like, but they were committed to doing all they could.

Such commitment aligned well with the Metro DC Chapter's adoption of environmental, social and governance policies. The Chapter had long cultivated a dynamic and dedicated membership which demonstrated a determined willingness to put in the time needed to create real change and social impact. The Metro DC Chapter jumped in immediately to create a path of assistance and support.

## The Origin Story

As coaches, Larysa, Marlene and Kenny knew that when someone is faced with trauma, they may feel as if they are getting back on their feet, when in fact, long-term impacts persist.

As the coaches in Ukraine began to navigate their new “normal,” more challenges continued to arise — from losing access to credit, to realizing they may never be able to restart their coaching practices in their former capacity. For them, it seemed that as soon as one challenge was managed, another arose.

The most instantaneous way for the Metro DC Chapter to offer support to their Ukrainian colleagues was through pro bono peer-to-peer coaching in English, given the number of Ukrainian coaches who speak English, often as one of multiple language proficiencies. Marlene and Kenny sent a call to action to all Metro DC Chapter members on social media and put some budget behind an ad for the post to ensure it would be seen by the most members possible. In response, they received interest from more than 65 coaches volunteering their services.

“Through the inpouring of volunteers, we were able to hand-pick those with experience coaching through traumatic experiences, as well as those with at least an ICF Professional Certified Coach (PCC) credential,” added Kenny. “It really allowed for a unique opportunity to use coaching to directly support social impact in a way that extended far beyond the meaning that we all find in the coaching we do day to day.”

It then became a “boots on the ground” effort to offer support to the Ukrainian coaches in a way that had true meaning and, in turn, impact.



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— *Kenny Leahman*

This first phase of the program matched 13 Ukrainian coaches with peers in the Metro DC Chapter. Among them, Larysa, though now

based in the U.S., was paired with Kenny’s coach for support as she worked to get her own and others’ coaching practices back on track in the wake of the trauma.

After hearing the positive success stories of the partnership with the Metro DC Chapter from Larysa and his own chapter members, current ICF Ukraine Chapter President Oleksandr Zeleniuk reached out to Kenny asking, “Can I please have a coach, too?”

At this moment, Larysa, Marlene and Kenny saw firsthand the value of the work they were doing. The President of an ICF Chapter, amidst the harshest and most painful time in his life, was asking to be a participant in this coaching initiative.

Once activated, the program included 13 participants in the one-to-one coaching, and three additional participants coached in English in a small group, all free for participants. And the program did not stop there.

## **Unexpected Growth**

After witnessing the success of the initial peer-to-peer coaching program, Larysa, Marlene and Kenny were determined to provide even more support to the Ukrainian coaches. This time, they created a small group coaching format that would allow them to reach even more coaches in Ukraine.

“Larysa helped us form a deeper understanding of what the requirements were for the Ukrainian coaches seeking support,” said Kenny. “Neither Marlene nor I could even begin to presume what they were experiencing, and we needed the kind of clear awareness that Larysa was able to provide. In that way, along with many others, she was the most valuable piece of this puzzle.”

As they entered this next phase of program development, the time investment grew, the

attention to detail strengthened, and each move was executed with care and deliberation.

The final phase of the program expanded to offer pro bono group coaching in Ukrainian, with English language translation provided by Ukraine Chapter volunteers, enabling the Metro DC Chapter to support 19 additional Ukrainian coaches in their native language.

## Lessons Learned

Tetiana Lepekha, an ICF-Credentialed coach based in Kyiv, Ukraine, and one of the ICF Ukraine Chapter founders, was among those whose lives were upended by the Russian invasion. When the hostilities first began, the sounds of bombs exploding and fire outside her window woke Tetiana in the middle of the night. She didn't know what was happening — all she knew was her family and friends living elsewhere were calling her frantically.

Less than three weeks later, as the war in Ukraine continued, Tetiana made the difficult choice to shutter her coaching practice. Life as she knew it was gone, and she simply couldn't concentrate on coaching while she was thinking about how to get through the day. She had witnessed the building of one of her organizational clients, a car dealership, decimated by a bomb. Many of her colleagues with children chose to leave Ukraine for safety, as the risk of making the wrong choice could cost them and their families their lives. Those who continued working felt extremely conflicted.

When Tetiana heard about the partnership with the Metro DC Chapter, she signed up right away. She knew this was a crucial time to use her ability to speak multiple languages to act as a translator for group coaching sessions.

"The real partnership that this collaboration created was through the groups in the group coaching sessions," shared Tetiana. "Their ability to share their experience led to a true shift in their capability of coping with the current circumstances."

Tetiana has found a temporary home in Riga, Latvia, as her safety in Ukraine is not yet guaranteed. She remains hopeful she will be able to return soon. While she began working again in April 2022, her coaching practice has not yet recovered to its original state. Coaching has picked up again, but the time dedicated to it and the hours requested by clients still are depressed as a result of the conflict.

Tetiana reports that the partnership created here will live on indefinitely. With this as an example, she is hopeful that similar collaborations will occur between other ICF Chapters. Such coaching partnerships create a real sense of community, led by mutual core values and a focus on humanity. By using these aligning values to drive coaching activity, it is apparent why many members choose to be part of the ICF community — they have the opportunity to live the values they affirm every day.

## Paving the Way Forward

"I think there will be a lot of opportunity for this program to expand in the future," Marlene said. "For instance, International Coaching Week occurs each year in May, and this year we had Larysa as a speaker on our panel about pro bono coaching. Looking to next year, we're already considering how we can reach out to the Ukraine Chapter to partner in different ways. This partnership truly is a two-way street providing support to fellow coaches."

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— Marlene Thomas



This is not just a success story. This is a call to action for coaches around the world. "It truly takes a village," added Marlene. "As long as an ICF Chapter has the passion to help drive social impact, this beautiful partnership can be replicated around the world. It starts with



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Altogether, 19 Metro DC Chapter coach volunteers have donated 190 hours of pro bono coaching to support 35 Ukrainian coaches which, in the DC region, equates to approximately \$76K USD in paid coaching hours.

the chapter’s board of directors. You’ve got to have a board that wants to roll up their sleeves, get involved in the community, and really commit to the work that it takes to make this change.” In the Metro DC Chapter, every board member is a volunteer coach in at least one pro bono program.

“I love ICF, but I never expected to see two chapters work together so seamlessly,” said Kenny. “There’s no blurring anymore. We’re just two entities that are working together beautifully and have three coaching programs in place for any Ukrainian chapter member who wants or needs the support.”

Kenny added, “This will not be a one-and-done. We are going to continue this work with the pro bono committee so long as I am on the board.”

## **The Measurable Value of Collaboration**

From hard times came hope. From ruins came resourcefulness.

“To me, this was proof of the power of manifestation in coaching,” said Tetiana. “Every participating coach, whether Ukrainian or American, experienced a true change in their emotional state, due to the power of the coaching practice.”

The collaboration between the Metro DC and Ukraine Chapters of ICF led them to become close-knit and highly integrated, redefining the way chapters can work together to achieve greater successes.

If great things can be achieved through collaboration, it derives from a truly proactive board of directors — one in which every single member volunteers their time and services. In this case, with the support of the ICF Metro DC Chapter’s Board, Larysa’s idea became a reality.

Now, it’s up to other ICF Chapters to discover where else this thriving initiative can be activated throughout the world.

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*The International Coaching Federation (ICF) is the world’s largest organization leading the global advancement of the coaching profession and fostering coaching’s role as an integral part of a thriving society. Founded in 1995, its 50,000-plus members located in more than 140 countries and territories work toward common goals of enhancing awareness of coaching and upholding the integrity of the profession through lifelong learning and upholding the highest ethical standards. Through the work of its six unique family organizations, ICF empowers professional coaches, coaching clients, organizations, communities, and the world through coaching. Visit [coachingfederation.org](http://coachingfederation.org) for more information.*



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