



Standard 8 – Case Study

Title: Remain Alert for a Shift in Value

Background

The ICF Professional should be willing to recuse themselves in and whenever their coaching services do not benefit the client and/or appear to go against the clients or sponsors interest. The ICF Professional should always remain alert to any shift in value that is being received from the coaching relationship. Do you have a list of other coaches whom you would want to encourage a client to look into if needed? What about therapists, psychologists, etc?

Case study

Bonnie had started a coaching agreement with Samson because he had wanted to work on his leadership skills. The agreement stated that Samson would meet with Bonnie twice a month for 6 months. They both agreed to that time frame and Samson had no issues signing off that he was committed to the work.

The first two times that Bonnie met with Samson, she wasn't feeling the connection like she had expected when they first talked through their coaching agreement. Bonnie decided that she would ask Samson how he was feeling so far with their relationship at the next meeting. When Samson arrived at the following meeting, Bonnie went ahead and asked him. He seemed genuinely content with his progression on developing a stronger leadership style.

By the 3rd month, Bonnie was sure that Samson was not feeling the connection. Every conversation was a strain and Samson had become stale in his progress. Bonnie decided to reach out through email to Samson, but he never responded. On their next call, she brought up her concerns and Samson admitted that he was feeling discouraged about the lack of progress he was feeling with his leadership. He explained that he had failed at a couple of attempts at his work and it was making him question his ability as a leader. Bonnie asked him if he would like to continue their work together and Samson agreed that he did not want to give up.

During the final month that Samson and Bonnie were meeting, she was dreading the call and was just ready for the agreement to be over. Samson was moving backwards in his progress, and they could not figure out why this was happening. Separately, both Bonnie and Samson were feeling like failures in their own way. After the last session, Bonnie told Samson that she was going to send him a survey so that he could provide feedback.

When she reviewed his feedback she was very frustrated. He reacted negatively to their entire relationship. Why had he not just ended the relationship if he felt that strongly about it? Bonnie started to consider what she should have done differently. When she first realized the disconnect, should she have just ended the relationship immediately? Was there someone she knew who could have been a better coach for Samson and his needs? Could this open slot had allowed for a more productive relationship to come along instead?

Implications for Coaching

- ICF Professionals are expected to establish a customer orientated review process with the client and the sponsor (if involved) which helps determine the value of the coaching relationship. If a shift occurs, the ICF Professional is expected to find out what is driving the shift and sometimes that means directing them to a different coach. **ICF Code of Ethics (2020) Section 1, Standard 8 (Coachingfederation.org)**
- A clear coaching termination clause in the agreement should clarify that either or both parties may cancel the agreement at any time for any reason. A coach must be aware of any indications or signs that a client is not receiving the benefits of coaching. Sometimes they may be more obvious than other times and determining a clear refund policy is highly encouraged. **ICF Code of Ethics (2020) Section 1, Standard 9 (Coachingfederation.org)**
- If the ICF Professional ever refers a client to a 3rd party – another ICF Professional, therapist, etc – the ICF Professional should disclose that information up front. It could appear that the ICF Professional is referring their client to others on purpose in order to gain compensation. **ICF Code of Ethics (2020) Section 1, Standard 12 (Coachingfederation.org)**

Possible outcomes or next steps

- **Seek outside support.** A coach in any ethical conundrum may choose to turn to their coach, mentor coach, coach supervisor, training program, or coaching organization for support in navigating ethically confusing situations.
- **Be up front with the client.** A coach may choose to bring their concerns to the client directly. This allows both parties to discuss and determine the best path forward in a collaborative manner.

Discussion Points

- Have you ever been in a coaching position where you determined it was best to end the relationship early?
- If you were this coach's coach, mentor, or supervisor, how would you support the coach?
- What refund policy do you have that could of helped in this situation?

Reference

ICF Code of Ethics (2020), <https://coachingfederation.org/ethics/code-of-ethics>