



Inspiring Change:

*A Guide to Becoming a
Professional Coach*



In today's professional climate, many are reassessing their lives and careers, and pursuing new paths. There is a trend toward seeking careers that not only sustain a person financially, but also offer flexibility and fulfillment.

You can find these qualities through a career in coaching. It is a rapidly growing profession in high demand around the world that offers a wide range of opportunities including the chance to change lives for the better. A coach who pursues quality education as they work toward a credential gains a competitive edge in this exciting field.

Ready to become a coach?

At the International Coaching Federation (ICF), we believe that coaching can change lives, communities, and the world — one person at a time.

There are approximately **77,000 professional coach practitioners worldwide**, an increase of 36% over the last study in 2015, according to the *2020 ICF Global Coaching Study (GCS)*. Nearly two-thirds of these practitioners are members of ICF.



What is Professional Coaching?

We all have goals we wish to reach, challenges we are striving to overcome, and times when we feel stuck. Coaching helps people aspire to new heights in pursuit of their passions.

ICF defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. The process of coaching often unlocks previously untapped sources of imagination, productivity, and leadership.

A coach is typically engaged as people pursue career goals, launch businesses, or forge new paths.

The Coaching Continuum: What Kind of Coaching Suits Your Strengths and Passions?

As the industry has grown and evolved, coaching has come to support many different aspects of our lives. This means the kinds of roles available to coaches have expanded to include:

- Life coach.
- Career coach.
- Team coach.
- Relationship coach.
- Retirement coach.

The Key Skills of a Great Coach

As in any profession, professional coaching has foundational skills that a coach must have to succeed. These include the ability to foster curiosity, engage in active listening, build trust, and evoke heightened awareness.

Coaching is ...

Partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.

Coaching is not ...

- **Mentoring.** A mentor advises a less experienced professional drawing from the mentor's personal experience. Instead, coaching taps into the inner wisdom of the client to set their own path.
- **Therapy.** While therapy addresses mental illness or explores issues from a patient's past, coaching is solutions-oriented with a focus on the future.
- **Consulting.** A consultant advises a person or organization on a strategic approach driven by expertise in a field, whereas a coach is a partner in heightening awareness and clarity to help a client find their own solutions.

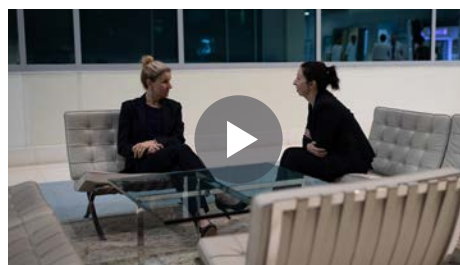
Coaches Empower Change and Transform Lives

“The relationship between a coach and a client is really a partnership where we are co-creating possibilities; different solutions and outcomes that the client wouldn’t necessarily come up with on their own.”

— Jenn Wicks, PCC, ICF Credentialed Coach (Canada)

Jenn is a leadership and executive coach based in Newfoundland, Canada. She worked with client Shawna Garrett in finding ways Shawna could empower key members of her team and build a new leadership structure.

[Watch Shawna’s testimonial.](#)



“The good news is that the client has all the answers. As a coach, our work is to ask questions that will direct the client to a solution that they desire for themselves.”

— Decimar Ogutu, ACC, ICF Credentialed Coach (Kenya)



Decimar is a life, executive, and career coach based in Nairobi, Kenya. She partnered with client Dorothy Matheka, who wanted to revive her creative side and rediscover what she wants out of life.

[Watch Dorothy’s testimonial.](#)

“Coaching is about igniting and bringing out the best within someone ... We allow a client to go deep within themselves and find those answers from their internal wisdom.”

—Yan Maschke, PCC, ICF Credentialed Coach (United States)

Yan is an executive and leadership coach based in Cleveland, Ohio, USA. She worked with her client, Kenneth Buzek, as he transitioned into retirement, working to establish a new set of goals to get the most out of this next phase of life.

[Watch Kenneth’s testimonial.](#)





How to Become a Professional Coach

A bright professional coaching career begins with exceptional education

While anyone could call themselves a coach, there are best practices, core competencies and ethical standards for the profession. Learning about these concepts from an ICF accredited provider will set you up for success. Graduating or receiving credit from an ICF accredited coaching education provider gives you a competitive edge by demonstrating your expertise and professionalism to prospective clients.

Finding the right coaching education provider for you

ICF accredits education organizations that meet the gold standard of coaching education. Accreditation levels correspond with student contact hours and complexity of curriculum.

To explore ICF accredited coaching education providers and find the right one for you, visit the [Education Search Service](#) on the ICF website.

Using the ICF Education Search Service

The [Education Search Service](#) can help you find a coaching education provider that aligns with your interests, region, experience, and more. Focus on your preferences using the search customization options.

“Being a coach is so rewarding and so critical with all that’s going on in the world.”

— Julie Cookson, ACC, ICF Credentialed Coach (United States)

Levels of ICF Accredited Coaching Education*

Level 1 (formerly ACSTH)

- Offers 60+ hours of education.
- Designated as a pathway to the Associate Certified Coach (ACC) credential for new coaches.

Level 2 (formerly ACTP)

- Offers 125+ hours of education.
- Designated as a pathway to the Professional Certified Coach (PCC) credential for mid-career coaches.

Level 3

- Offers 75+ hours of education.
- Designated as a pathway to the Master Certified Coach (MCC) credential for experienced coaches.

Continuing Coaching Education (CCE)

- CCE is considered supplemental and continuing education for those wishing to acquire new learning, professional development and/or those who are renewing their ICF credential.

**ICF's accreditation levels are currently in transition. To learn more about the changes and how they affect your path to an ICF credential, visit the [credential updates page](#).*

Should I select general coaching education or a specialty/niche program?

A uniform set of core competencies (the ICF Core Competencies) forms the foundation for coaching, and a general education program equips coaches with the skillsets they need no matter where their careers may take them. If you plan to have a specialization for your coaching career, selecting a program that focuses in this area may help you connect more effectively with a specific audience of potential clients.

Many coaches opt not to specialize and have successful careers with a diverse range of clients. If you do wish to specialize, selecting a niche can be most advantageous for more established coaches who have already worked with a wide range of clients and have a desire to focus on one client segment.

Popular Niches for Coaching

- ADHD
- Business/Organizations
- Career Development & Transitions
- Creativity
- Leadership
- Life Vision & Enhancement
- Relationship
- Spirituality



Building Your Professional Coaching Career

An ICF credential is a professional certification indicating that you have met specific standards and requirements designed to develop and refine your coaching skills. It is an indication that you are dedicated to upholding strong principles of ethical behavior in coaching. An ICF credential shows your clients and peers that you are committed to the coaching industry and to developing yourself as a coaching professional.

Holding a credential — especially an ICF credential — is extremely important to today's coaching clients. It provides you with instant credibility and increased visibility to prospective clients.

As an ICF credential-holder, you will join an elite group of professional coaches who have pursued the most rigorous education and practice requirements, and who have demonstrated a commitment to the highest ethical standards of the profession.

85% of coaching clients say it's important or very important that their coach holds a certification or credential (GCAS 2022).

Almost 8 in 10 (78%) respondents who were aware of coaching agreed that it would be important (44%) or very important (34%) for their coach to hold a certification/credential (GCAS 2022).

Almost two-thirds (65%) of those who had previously participated in a coaching relationship said their coach held a certification/credential from a membership organization. A little over half (53%) said their coach was a member of a professional organization (GCAS 2022).

ICF Offers 3 Credentials

Associate Certified Coach (ACC)

This credential corresponds with Level 1* accredited coaching education. It requires:

- 60 hours coach-specific education.
- 100 hours client coaching experience.

Professional Certified Coach (PCC)

This credential corresponds with Level 2* accredited coaching education. It requires:

- 125 hours coach-specific education.
- 500 hours client coaching experience.

Master Certified Coach (MCC)

This is the most advanced credential a professional coach can achieve with ICF. It corresponds with Level 3* accredited coaching education. It requires that you hold a PCC credential, as well as have:

- 200 hours coach-specific education.
- 2,500 hours client coaching experience.

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74%

of coaches surveyed identified themselves as an ICF member in a global study (GCS 2020).

Join a global community of your coaching peers

ICF is the world's largest community of professionally trained coaches, and the internationally recognized gold standard of the industry. Being an ICF member gives you a competitive advantage and the opportunity to advance your coaching career through our reputation, community and resources.

More importantly, coaches in the ICF member community are part of a global network of colleagues committed to shared ethics and best practices for the profession. They also benefit from ICF's support and resources to build their coaching skills and establish their coaching business.

To become an ICF member, you must complete at least 60 hours of coach-specific education that meets ICF standards. The best way to accomplish this is by enrolling in [coaching education accredited by ICF](#).

Gain the resources for a thriving career

ICF members gain access to career-transforming resources including continuing education for professional development, a robust library of original industry research, cutting-edge business development and marketing education, and top-tier events for professional development and networking.

Represent the highest ethical standard of the industry

The ICF Code of Ethics upholds the integrity of coaching by setting standards of conduct consistent with the ICF Core Values and ethical principles that are driven by reflection, education, and decision-making. These are adjudicated and preserved through the ICF Ethical Conduct Review process and provide the basis for ICF ethics training in ICF accredited programs.

These principles of self-regulation set ICF coaches apart from their coaching peers.

ICF is the leading global organization for coaches and coaching, dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high standards, providing independent certification, and building a worldwide network of trained coaching professionals.

More than half (55%) of respondents who said their coach had a credential or certification said they were very satisfied with their experience, compared to barely more than 1 in 4 (27%) whose coach did not have certification (GCAS 2022).

With a career in coaching, you will:

- Meet exciting people and equip them to tackle their passions and achieve their goals.
- Make a positive difference in people's lives that will pass forward to others around them — family, colleagues, community.
- Join a rapidly growing profession with ever-expanding opportunities.
- Take control of your career path with a flexible, self-driven role.

“The ICF framework provides a baseline structure for any coach to begin their journey irrespective of their chosen domain.”

—Geetika Agarwal, ACC, ICF Credentialed Coach (Singapore)



Take Your Coaching Career to the Next Level

Whether you're just starting to explore the possibilities of coaching or are already established in the profession, ICF can offer resources and support. Join today!

coachingfederation.org/professional-coaches