



Standard 4.3 – Case Study

Remain alert to a shift in the relationship

Background

As an ICF Professional, I remain alert to indications that there might be a shift in the value received from the coaching relationship and discuss this with the client. If appropriate, explore changes in the coaching relationship and/or the potential for a different coach, professional, or resource. Outside influences can change the coaching relationship in a minute. And sometimes no one can be prepared for what comes next in life. Not every response can look and feel the same, but see how you would handle the situation below.

Case Study

Kara had been coaching Mary for five months. Their coaching agreement had been set for a year of bi-monthly calls. Mary had made a lot of progress and was feeling great about their coaching relationship. Which is why when the following week Mary never showed up or sent an email to reschedule, Kara became concerned.

She reached out to Mary reminding her that she had missed their coaching session and that next time she would have to charge her the normal rate regardless. Mary responded a couple of days later saying that her son had caught the flu, and her mom had been put in hospice, so it had completely slipped her mind. She rescheduled her session for the following week.

This time Mary showed up but was 15 minutes late and was preoccupied. She didn't bring up anything about her mom being in hospice and hadn't been herself. Two weeks later, they had their normally scheduled coaching session and again Mary did not show up. Kara had confirmed with Mary that she understood the payment agreement and that she would be charged next time she just didn't show up or reschedule ahead of time. Kara sent her an invoice and waited to see what would happen.

Implications for Coaching

- There are limitations to coaching. Sometimes that just means it's not the right timing, the right fit or the right answer. This could be on the client's or coach's side and the coach is responsible for their limitations. (ICF Code of Ethics, Standards 1.1, 1.2, 4.2, and 4.3)
- What are the right questions to ask Mary? Is it best for her to continue or to pause her coaching? How is she showing up in life? What does she need to do for herself to be present for her family? (ICF Code of Ethics, Standards 4.3 and 5.3)

Possible Outcomes or Next Steps

- **Remain alert to shifts within the coaching relationship.** This may be the time that Mary needs a coach the most or she may need the space to mentally handle what is going on in her personal life. Either way, a conversation may be needed to better determine what Mary needs from Kara.

Discussion Points

- If you were in Kara's position, would you have sent Mary an invoice even though she did not show up? Why or why not?
- If you were Kara's coach supervisor, how would you support her?
- What does your refund policy say in your agreement?

Reference

ICF Code of Ethics (2025)