



Standard 3.7 – Case Study

Multiple Professional Roles

Background

As an ICF Professional, I understand that ICF professionals often serve in multiple professional roles based on prior training and/or experience (i.e. mentor, therapist, HR specialist, assessor), and it is my responsibility to disclose to the client when I am acting in a capacity other than the role of an ICF professional. It can be easy at times for professional lines to be blurred when consulting, training, counseling, coaching, etc. And what may be possible for one ICF Professional, does not mean it would work for another. It is important to understand the distinctions and then make it clear to your client(s) if you are ever switching roles.

Case Study

Philip has been working for X Coaching ICF Level 1 accredited organization for six months as an assessor. He had been looking to expand his coaching reach and this had been the perfect solution for him and the organization. Not only had this put him in contact with more established coaches, but even those who were brand new to the coaching world. He had a background in therapy but had retired from it and coaching and assessing just made sense for him.

Paulette had graduated from X Coaching and had asked Philip to be a coach mentor because one day she hoped to go for her PCC. They had a great working relationship, and the mentoring had gone very well.

A month later, Paulette told Philip she needed to pause the mentoring because her father had just passed away. She expressed that she was going to take some time off to help her mother sort everything out and help her move closer to Paulette. Philip understood and told Paulette to return when she was ready.

Several months went by and one day Philip saw that Paulette had booked a mentoring session with him on his calendar. He was eager to see how she was doing. Philip connected with Paulette the next day and as they were catching up, Paulette started to express that a lot of bitterness had been brewing for her as she had been working through her feelings around her dad passing away. She realized that she had been stuffing a lot of hurt down and she had never realized how much it was still affecting her. Philip listened to Paulette and then when she was done, he told her he was putting on his therapist hat for a few minutes. He explained the difference between coaching and therapy and asked Paulette if he could make a recommendation for a therapist who would be better suited to support her revisiting her past relationship with her father. She agreed to counseling, and he was able to refer her to a therapist. And Philip put his mentor hat back on and they continued their session preparing her for the PCC.

Implications for Coaching

- Because Philip already had a background in therapy, he understood instantly that Paulette was unpacking her past hurt feelings. Philip's and Paulette's relationship was around her preparing for the PCC and reviewing past hurts from her dad is not a partnership. He was careful to draw the distinction and was caring enough to refer her to someone who could help her review the past. (ICF Code of Ethics, Standards 1.1, 3.1, 3.7, 3.8, 4.2 and 4.3)
- Common mental health issues that a coach could recognize when their client needs therapy would be anxiety, depression, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse or addiction, suicidal ideation or thought disorders. (Referring a Client to Therapy, A Set of Guidelines)

Possible Outcomes or Next Steps

- **Clear about what he offers.** Philip has made it very clear to Paulette what he can offer her and what he cannot offer her. He was able to listen to her situation, but then offers up a solution that is good for Paulette. Even though he had a past in therapy, he had retired from that profession and was working as a coach, mentor, and assessor.
- **Possible shift in value.** There is a chance that Paulette has a shift in value because her focus becomes working out her feelings around her relationship with her dad. She may decide that this requires her full attention. Philip had faced that change with Paulette and helped her to move forward in the best way possible.

Discussion Points

- Talk about Philip's decisions.
- What, if anything, would you have done differently?
- If you were Philip's coach supervisor, how would you support him?

Reference

ICF Code of Ethics (2025)