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The Profession of Coaching

Its Emergence and Intersection with Ethics and Law

Patrick Williams

Introduction

Although coaching is the latest and hottest trend to invade the workplace and the landscape of personal development, it is not really new. Coaching is a derivative of the best thinking in self-improvement since the turn of the twentieth century. The coaching profession found its place in history—and most recently in the business world—when it exploded into the corporate environment in the 1990s. Today, workplace coaching has dozens of specialty fields for every kind of business concern. Among coaching specialties are personal career coaching, transitions and mergers coaching, start-up venture and entrepreneurial coaching, executive leader coaching, team coaching, and what many call life coaching.

We believe that life coaching is the crucible that contains all coaching, since all coaching is best when it is a whole person approach. You might think of life coaching as the *operating system* much like

Windows XP is for a personal computer. It is always there in the background running all other systems. So whether you are an executive coach, a business coach, a leadership coach, relationship coach, parent coach, teen coach, or any other specialist, if you are coaching a living, breathing human being, you are using life coaching.

In addition, coaching exists for every type and size of business, from one-on-one services for the self-employed sole proprietor to large-scale organizational coaching programs within the top Fortune 500 companies. Boeing International even has a coaching department, and IBM has created an initiative to make coaching available to every one of its many thousands of employees, using credentialed coaches certified by the International Coach Federation. Coaching has proven a worthy investment during its short but remarkable history.

> *"Coaching is the latest and most pervasive evolution in the self-improvement industry."*
>
> —Career Confidential

The Roots of Coaching

Coaching evolved from three main streams that have flowed together in modern times:

1. The helping professions, such as psychotherapy and counseling.
2. Business consulting and organizational development.
3. Personal development training, such as Erhard Seminars Training (EST), the Landmark Forum, Tony Robbins and Franklin Covey seminars, and others.

One could argue that Socrates is the earliest recorded model of life and business coaching through his process of inquiry. But then he was killed as a result of the disruptiveness that his persistent and challenging questioning caused. It is, however, the many psychological theorists and practitioners from the early 1900s onward who have significantly influenced the development of the business coaching field. For example, the work by William James, father of psychological theory in America, proposed that people often mask or bury their brilliance. The job of coaches is to help clients discover their brilliance by consciously designing their lives and work. In addition to William James, Carl Jung and Alfred Adler have influenced modern-day coaching. Jung believed in a "future orientation," or teleological belief that we can create our futures through visioning and purposeful living. Adler saw individuals as the creators and artists of their lives, and he frequently involved his clients in goal setting, life planning, and inventing their personal futures—all tenets and approaches in today's coaching. In 1951, during the human-potential movement, Carl Rogers wrote his monumental book *Client-Centered Therapy*, which shifted counseling and therapy to a relationship in which the client was assumed to have the ability to change and grow. This shift in perspective was a significant precursor to what today is called coaching.

Abraham Maslow, the father of humanistic and transpersonal psychology, researched, questioned, and observed people who were living with a sense of vitality and purpose, and who were constantly seeking to grow psychologically and achieve more of their human potential. As earlier psychologists did, Maslow spoke of needs and motivations, but with the view that humans are naturally health-seeking creatures who, if obstacles to personal growth are removed, will naturally pursue self-actualization, playfulness, curiosity, and creativity. This perspective is the foundation of coaching today. Maslow's

treatise *Toward a Psychology of Being* (1968) set the framework that allowed coaching to emerge explosively in the 1990s as an outgrowth and application of the human-potential movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

Other theorists such as Roberto Assagioli (psychosynthesis), Fritz Perls (Gestalt theory), and Virginia Satir (family therapy), and many of the solution-focused therapists (e.g., Bill O'Hanlon and Steve DeShazer) also created a bridge from a diagnose-and-treat philosophy to a solution-and future-oriented approach to assisting clients. Most recently, the influence of Martin Seligman and the field of positive psychology offer much research into positive change and its application to the paradigm of personal and business coaching.

The Coaching Advantage in Both Work and Personal Life

The following description of applied coaching illuminates how it is a powerful service for both work and personal life:

> Whether coaching is beneficial at a personal life level, or in the workplace, the value of coaching in helping people reach desired goals cannot be overstated. Bob Nardelli, the CEO of Home Depot, has said, "Without a coach, people will *never* reach their maximum capabilities." This perspective may or may not be true, but the statement is a powerful testimony to the advantage of coaching. Boardrooms across the globe are sitting up and taking notice, especially when the return on the investment of coaching is measurable, and even significant. (McGovern et al., 2001)

Coaching in the workplace can take a variety of forms. A coach can be contracted to provide individual leader or team/group coaching

within an organization, while some organizations hire or train their own full-time coaches as permanent employees. There are advantages to both approaches, and which is used depends on the company and the situation. Also, many workplaces are realizing the value of training their leaders and managers to be coaches themselves, so they can employ the successful tenets of coaching in their management and leadership roles. Leaders are learning to be less command and control and more coachlike (Goldsmith, Lyons, & Freas, 2000; the chapters by Kouzes and Posner, and Crane are particularly informative about leaders as coaches). The results of applied coaching in the workplace have been remarkable.

> *"I never cease to be amazed at the power of the coaching process to draw out the skills or talent that was previously hidden within an individual, and which invariably finds a way to solve a problem previously thought unsolvable."*
>
> —John Russell, Managing Director,
> Harley-Davidson Europe Ltd.

Organizations are also adopting coaching as a way to turn problems into possibilities. This coaching culture causes a paradigm shift in the workplace. At a typical business you can find employees complaining around the watercooler (or wherever else they gather today!). But where the culture of coaching is present, complaints are often replaced with comments such as "I could sure use some coaching in . . ." or "That sounds like you should call your coach." Although coaching is a burgeoning profession, it can be a powerful culture once adopted in the workplace and fueled by internal sponsorship, training, and encouragement; and organizations can choose to be comprehensively coached at all levels of the workforce.

When coaching skills are taught to managers, they will then assume the role of coach on occasion. However, because they are not assuming the job of professional coach but are just using some coaching techniques, they are not required to follow the ethical principles of the profession of coaching. It is a wise company that teaches its managers not only the skills and tools of coaching, but the ethical guidelines as well.

Coaching Tools and Their Ethical Application

In the modern-day workplace, coaching utilizes theories and practices that have been around quite a while. These tools, an important part of coaching resources, include Group Dynamics, Johari Window, and 360 Feedback assessments that allow clients to recognize blind spots—those Achilles' heels of behavioral tendencies that block effectiveness—and hidden strengths that could be used more effectively. Style assessments or inventories (such as FIRO-B, Myers-Briggs, Peoplemap, Personal Style Indicator, and DISC) help people learn how to relate to others most effectively. (You can read more about the ethical application of assessments in coaching in Chapter 7.)

For example, Daniel Goleman's model of emotional intelligence (EQ) is very popular, especially because it reinforces what everyone always knew but did not want to admit—that relationships within the workplace are important to the overall success of the organization. Businesses improve (and show healthier bottom lines) if their employees are happier and communicate and function as a team that works well together and resolves conflict early (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999).

Clients in individual coaching obtain results from these assessment tools and make discoveries about themselves; working with a coach

Carol came to me for executive coaching to improve her role as vice president of a department in a major international bank. Carol was generally very happy with her work, but she was having difficulty with her team. Specifically, team members often saw her as an aloof tyrant, which was not her intention. Carol sought coaching to learn how to be a better manager. What she learned, however, was that a better manager is really a coach, rather than a supervisor. A good manager brings out the best in team members, ensuring that the team works efficiently and smoothly. Carol had already completed both the Myers-Briggs assessment and 360 Feedback with her staff. I introduced her to Peoplemap (which contains only 14 questions), and she was amazed at the report her answers generated. Carol's profile showed her general tendencies to be Leader-Task, the most common combination for managers. I coached her using the strengths and blind spots of her personality type, which correlated perfectly with what both the Myers-Briggs and 360 Feedback assessments revealed. Carol learned how to communicate more effectively with the other personality types on her team and to appreciate each person's unique contributions, as well as to anticipate potential conflicts. During coaching, Carol also discovered that she needed to delegate more responsibility to her staff, coach her team rather than manage it, and find opportunities to have more fun while maintaining vision for both herself and the team.

Carol realized that an effective team is like a family, and that relationships can sometimes manifest personality conflicts. Learning the concepts of emotional intelligence helped Carol understand that each team member also has emotional needs in the workplace. Carol administered Peoplemap with the members of her team, and she held two follow-up conferences with them to review the results. Everyone felt acknowledged and empowered to work more effectively as a team, and all members appreciated Carol's openness and willingness to change. She became a model for her team as she also became a coach herself.

helps them understand the information derived from the assessments, determine what changes they want to make, and plan the strategy to reach their desired goals. The coach elicits ideas for how clients can change behaviors. A coach does not *tell* the person, but instead helps the client arrive at a strategy for change. Coaching involves motivational interviewing, directed questioning for discovery, intentional listening, appreciative inquiry, empowerment, consistency, and accountability. *Law and Ethics in Coaching* covers the ethical aspects of the coaching relationship, and the case studies included illustrate the concepts throughout (for example, the proper use of assessments, corporate coaching, and personal or life coaching).

Important Distinctions

Coaching borrows from many fields and applies the innovative thinking of their great pioneers. However, it is important to recognize the major distinctions between coaching and other disciplines such as therapy, mentoring, and consulting. Table 1.1 summarizes some of these distinctions in the context of each discipline's focus, the professional–client relationship, the role of emotions, and the fundamental process each discipline follows.

> *"Part therapist, part consultant, part motivational expert, part professional organizer, part friend, part nag—the personal coach seeks to do for your life what a personal trainer does for your body."*
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> —Kim Palmer, Minneapolis–St. Paul Star Tribune, 1998

With coaching, minimal attention is given to the past; rather, the focus is on developing the person's future. This philosophical shift

Table 1.1 Distinctions between Coaching and Other Disciplines

	Therapy	Mentoring	Consulting	Coaching
Focus of work	Deals mostly with a person's past and trauma, and seeks healing.	Deals mostly with succession training, and seeks to help the one being mentored to do as the mentor does.	Deals mostly with problems, and seeks to provide information *(expertise, strategy, structures, methodologies)* to solve the problems.	Deals mostly with a client's present, and seeks to guide the client into a more desirable future.
Relationship	Doctor-patient relationship *(therapist has the answers).*	Older/wiser-younger/less experienced relationship *(mentor has the answers).*	Expert-person with problem relationship *(consultant has the answers).*	Co-creative equal partnership *(coach helps client discover own answers).*
Emotions	Assumes emotions are a symptom of something wrong.	Is limited to emotional response of the mentoring parameters (succession, etc.).	Does not normally address or deal with emotions (informational only).	Assumes emotions are natural, and normalizes them.
Process	The therapist diagnoses, and then provides professional expertise and guidelines to give the client a path to healing.	The mentor allows student to observe mentor's behavior, expertise; answers questions; provides guidance and wisdom for the stated purpose of the mentoring.	The consultant stands back, evaluates a situation, and then tells client the problem and how to fix it.	The coach stands with the client, and helps the client identify the challenges. Then they work together to turn challenges into victories. The client is held accountable to reach his or her desired goals.

has taken root in a generation that rejects the idea of sickness and seeks instead wellness, wholeness, and purposeful living—both personally and professionally. The coaching relationship allows the client to explore blocks to great success and to unlock dreams and desires. The shift from seeing clients as ill or suffering a pathology, toward viewing them as well, whole, and seeking a richer life, is paramount to understanding the work of coaching. Therapy is about uncovering and recovering, while coaching is about discovering.

Ethics in Coaching

To become a recognized profession, coaching must have professional standards, definitions, ethical guidelines, ongoing research, and credentialing. Beginning in the early 1990s, the coaching phenomenon intensified with the creation of several coach training schools and two major professional associations. In 1996, the Professional Coaches & Mentors Association (PCMA) merged with the International Coaching Federation (ICF), and the ICF led the way as the most recognized international association representing the coaching profession. Standards of practice, credentialing, and ethical guidelines were soon established.

In 2004, the ICF's regulatory committee wrote the following self-governance model:

> The standards and structures built by the ICF over the past decade, which support the emergence of coaching as a valued profession, also provide a solid foundation for the self-governance of our profession. In addition, our rigorous adherence as professionals to these standards and practices provides the necessary assurance that the public is protected from potential harm. ICF's self-governance foundation is comprised of and depends upon

each of the following standards and practices, supported by the efforts of the ICF Board, committees, global representatives, credentialed and member coaches.

- *Core Competencies* that define the required skill set of a professional coach and establish the foundation for the professional credentialing examination and accreditation for coach training programs.
- *A Code of Ethics* to which ICF Members and ICF Credentialed Coaches pledge commitment and accountability to standards of professional conduct.
- *Professional Oversight* through an Ethical Conduct Review process for ICF Members and ICF Credentialed Coaches, which allows the public to report concerns and to be confident of objective investigation, follow-up, and disciplinary action.
- *Professional Coach Credentialing*, entailing a stringent examination and review process through which coaches must demonstrate their skills, proficiency, and documented experience in application of coaching core competencies. Credentialing includes Continuing Coach Education requirements for periodic renewal of coaching credentials to ensure continued professional growth and development.
- *Professional Coach Training Accreditation* by which coach training programs submit to review and continuing oversight to demonstrate their commitment to the highest standards for curricula aligned with defined core competencies, faculty, structure, proficiency, and ethics to support excellence in the training of coaches.
- *Ongoing Self-Regulatory Oversight* initiatives to track the needs and concerns of individual and organizational clients on an

> international basis, and to demonstrate an active commitment to meaningful professional self-governance.[1]

A second major organization is the International Association of Coaches (IAC), which was officially launched on March 11, 2003, as a nonprofit entity in the state of New Mexico. The stated mission of the IAC is to "further the interests of coaching clients worldwide."

Why is this statement critical? Furthering the interests of clients, rather than focusing solely on the coaching industry, prevents a myopic viewpoint. Why is this commitment radical? Simply because it reorients the entire coaching profession.

This mission allows us to stay ahead of and anticipate evolving trends in client needs, help our members better serve clients, evolve coaching as an industry, and elevate the profession. This radical mission statement underscores the belief that a focus on what is best for the client serves the interests of the profession as well.

Additionally, if coaches focus on forwarding the best interests of their clients, the coaches will naturally evolve and innovate, because those interests will inevitably change. An orientation toward the client helps keep the work of coaching agenda-free.

Finally, this mission statement's focus on the client may be a first for *any* professional association (from www.certifiedcoach.org). As both the ICF and the IAC continue to act as major players in bringing high-quality coaching and professional standards to the field, the effects of their distinct efforts over time will be interesting to observe.

In addition to ethical guidelines, professional competencies, and certification, the coaching profession recently witnessed a tremendous surge of interest in academic research and graduate studies. This

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[1]From *Coaching Professionalism, the ICF, and You*, written by the 2004 Regulatory Committee of the ICF, co-chairs Diane Brennan and Patrick Williams. Copyright, 2005

attention is a critical step in the further evolution of the profession, and such research and training are necessary for developing a field of knowledge, theoretical orientations, and efficacy studies. Research on the effectiveness of and distinctions among skill sets, competencies, and standardization of education and training is tantamount to any profession finding its place of acceptance in the private and corporate culture.

The historical perspective previously delineated reveals that professional coaching emerged from other major professions (e.g., psychology, counseling, consulting). These professions have written codes of ethics and professional standards. In addition, they typically are regulated by state licensing boards (at least in the United States) and other government oversight entities. These government regulations usually determine requirements for training, maintaining a license, and practice laws.

At this time, coaching is not regulated or monitored by a state agency or regulatory board. It is the current belief that the profession should monitor itself. However, some state mental-health regulatory boards think differently, as the following scenario demonstrates.

The Colorado Case and the Threat to Practicing Coaches

In June 2001, the administrator of the Colorado Mental Health Board, Amos Martinez, wrote an opinion piece in the board newsletter entitled "Coaching: Is This Psychotherapy?" In this article, Martinez contends that coaching, especially personal coaching, meets the very broad definition of psychotherapy in the state of Colorado. Because of that interpretation, word began to spread that coaches in Colorado had to register as unlicensed psychotherapists and follow the regulations in the state's Mental Health Act that pertain to those individuals.

Immediately after reading that newsletter, Lloyd Thomas and I,

both of us licensed psychologists and practicing coaches, drove to Denver and met with Amos Martinez to discuss the work of professional coaching, the ICF, its standards of ethics, and so on. Although the meeting was cordial, nothing changed in the next several months. The rumor began to spread across the globe that Colorado was going after coaches, and that the profession was in danger of being lumped together with psychotherapy, a distinction most coaches were trying to clarify.

A Colorado Coach and the State Mental Health Board

In 2003, a case against a Colorado coach brought this whole discussion and the legal issue to a head. An ICF master certified coach who lived and worked in Colorado (although all of her clients lived out of the state) was charged with practicing psychotherapy without a license by the Department of Regulatory Agencies in Colorado. Although the charge was dropped as frivolous, Colorado still demanded that the coach register as an unlicensed therapist, which she refused to do. She was forced to close her practice because she could not afford to hire an attorney to pursue the defense of her position.

That case led to a focused effort by the Colorado Coalition of Coaches to pursue changing the law, and the group hired a lobbyist to help with the effort. After 18 months of hard work by the Colorado Coalition, lobbyists, as well as grassroots support and donations by individual coaches, the International Coach Federation, the International Association of Coaches, the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches, and the Association of Coach Training Organizations, the legislature agreed and approved an amendment to the Mental Health Act that exempted coaching from the legislature's oversight. Details of action taken by the ICF's regulatory committee and information gathered in the United States follow. Because coaching is an international profession, the ICF also began conversations

about and research on regulatory concerns and issues in other countries, but those concerns and issues have not warranted the same worldwide attention that matters in the United States have. One reason is that the proliferation of government licensing and regulation of various professions are unique to the United States.

All this is not to say that the coaching profession devalues standards and guidelines for professional behavior. In fact, some coaching associations (e.g., the ICF) have worked hard to delineate professional norms through ethics codes. Such standards have been formulated, amended, tested, and applied within many coaching organizations during the field's evolution.

ICF Regulatory History

The ICF Board of Directors chartered a regulatory committee in the summer of 2002 with the goal of researching, monitoring, evaluating, and proactively contributing to government and regulatory bodies in order to educate, articulate, and develop coaching as a self-regulated profession. As a group and via email, the committee researched and discussed the regulatory activity related to coaching within the United States. The committee chair also held discussions with representatives from CoachVille and the IAC. In addition, the group was in dialogue with a key individual within the field of mediation, and with professionals in financial planning and executive management.

During the committee's initial months, the ICF implemented an ethical conduct review process, a solid step in the process of self-regulation. In addition, the ICF provided the opportunity for members to participate in a conference call with the ICF attorney as Colorado coaches encountered mixed messages about the coaching case and regulation in their state.

The 40-page regulatory report published in March 2003 compiles

the statutes, interpretations, notes, and articles related to the key states identified in the ICF regulatory committee's purpose and charter. Colorado, Minnesota, Florida, Washington, and California are states in which coaching was rumored to be considered part of the mental-health field and, as such, states that raised concern that coaches might be required to register as unlicensed counselors. It was not the committee's intent to focus only on coaching versus counseling; however, that was the primary area of concern coaches faced in the key states investigated. The regulatory committee expanded to include a liaison group with members appointed by ICF chapter leaders. In early 2004, these individuals continued the review of all U.S. states and Canada. Currently, there are no requirements for coaches to register or be licensed in any state in the United States or in Canada. New mental-health/behavioral-health laws went into effect in New York, Arizona, and Minnesota in 2003 and 2004. The persons responsible for the implementation of these laws have stated that the intent is to tighten up regulation of those performing counseling and therapy services within the respective states. These laws were not intended to, nor should they, include coaches. However, if an individual practices counseling or therapy without meeting the proper state licensing requirements and also engages in coaching, that individual would be in violation of the state requirement as well as the coaching profession's standards.

The Colorado Mental Health Law was up for sunset review in 2004; the law would either stay the same, dissolve, or undergo revision. The Colorado coaches formed the Colorado Coalition of Coaches in late 2003 and began work to propose legislation to revise the statute.[2] In spring 2004, the governor of Colorado signed into law the bill that contains the legislation proposed by the coalition. Specifically, the new clause within Colorado's mental health statutes

[2]See www.coloradocoaches.com for more information about the coalition.

states that "The provisions of this article shall not apply to professional coaches who have had coach-specific training and who serve clients exclusively in the capacity of coaches."

More recently, a concern arose in Ohio, where an aspiring coach contacted the state's Mental Health Board to find out whether there were licensure requirements for coaches. I called and spoke with the representative at the Ohio Mental Health board, and he was relieved to learn that the ICF and coaching standards existed. The official seemed satisfied that coaches properly trained would not be infringing on the profession of psychotherapy and expressed gratitude for the information. As stated previously, there are no licensing requirements for coaches at this time. Coaching does not fall within the mental-health/behavioral-health realm. Distinctions between coaching and therapy or counseling are delineated on the ICF website (www.coachfederation.org/eweb/). Additional documents available from the site include:

- "Top Ten Indicators to Refer to a Mental Health Professional"
- "Professional Coaching Language for Greater Public Understanding"
- "Sample Coaching Agreement"

The ICF is committed to maintaining coaching as a distinct profession, and to strengthening coaching's self-governance model. Interested members are welcome to participate as ICF chapter regulatory liaisons. You may send questions or comments via email to regulatory@coachfederation.org.

Law and Ethics in Coaching is intended to increase awareness of legal and ethical issues in coaching, and to provide information specifically for those who are entering the coaching profession, or who are teaching about or offering consultations about coaching. In the pages

that follow, as the authors set forth various aspects of ethical and legal issues related to coaching, keep in mind that this is a work in progress. While we can share certain rubrics with other human service professions, the creation of case law, response to ethical complaints, and training in ethics for coaches will be paramount as the profession continues to evolve and create a knowledge base and best-practices mandates in the years to come.

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