



Standard 10 – Case Study

Title: Multiple contracts or relationships with the same client

Background

In every situation of the coaching process, it is necessary to ensure that the ICF Professionals' current role is unambiguous and that it is recognizable from which contract they are acting. This could be in a role where an ICF Professional does team coaching and one-on-one coaching, individual coaching and consulting, or trainer relationship and coaching. Separate contracts should be issued to avoid any confusion on what role the ICF Professional is acting in if there are multiple relationships with one client. When is it not OK to have multiple relationships with one client? How does a small training provider offer unbiased training, observing, mentoring and assessing using one or two ICF Professionals?

Case study

Camille had started her career in the world of Education. She had been a professor at the local University in her town and had several adjunct professor opportunities with esteemed University's such as Harvard, Oxford, and Toronto. Even though she had loved her career, she had felt a need for change and investigated coaching. After taking several life coaching courses, Camille was hooked.

Through her website, she was able to connect with a potential client named Mathilde. Mathilde participated in Education as well at the same local University that Camille had dedicated her career to for so many years. Camille and Mathilde decided that a coach/client relationship would be the right step for them both.

Camille noticed that Mathilde was on the quiet side. She was more reserved than Camille and it would typically take Mathilde at least 30 minutes to warm up to Camille during each session. Once Mathilde warmed up, she was very pleasant, and Camille could see why the University had hired her. The dedication she had for her students was admirable.

One day, Mathilde mentioned a delicate situation within the Education department. Camille knew exactly what the situation was about and was familiar with the history. Camille could feel her blood pressure rising as Mathilde talked more about it. Once Mathilde finished the details, it was all Camille could do not to burst out and tell her exactly what to do. In the back of her mind, Camille understood that this was really Mathilde's decision, but she also wanted what was best for the University.

Camille was torn. On the one hand, she could work with Mathilde to see what was so clearly obvious to Camille. But on the other hand, she could reach out to her former colleague, who she was still close to,

and see if it came up naturally. Camille wanted both Mathilde and the University to benefit, but this meant she would not be able to control the situation as much as she wanted.

Implications for Coaching

- Actively manage any power or status differences—the coach should be able to create equality and partnership with their client. The coach is not a superior and the client should feel like an equal in the coaching relationship. **ICF Code of Ethics (2020) Section 1, Standard 11 (Coachingfederation.org)**
- Commitment to excellence—the coach should always be professional and always learning. It is important to understand their own strengths and areas for development to see where they can grow. An ICF Professional should understand who they are and any conscious or unconscious bias they may hold. And lastly, they should know their own personal history and how these could affect the way they could coach. **ICF Code of Ethics (2020) Section 2, Standard 16 (Coachingfederation.org)**
- Recognize personal limitations that could interfere with coaching performance—the coach should be mindful of any personal or professional bias that could impede performance as a coach. And they should be mindful if these biases cause judgement or strong emotions that may cause them to lose presence. There may be times where a coach will need to seek out advice from a trusted party or even remove themselves from the coaching engagement. **ICF Code of Ethics (2020) Section 2, Standard 17 (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. This process will include much reflection and thought on the coach's side. In addition, the coach may choose to utilize outside support after a coaching engagement ends (or is cancelled) to fully learn from the experience.
- **End the coaching engagement.** If it is determined that the coaching engagement should end, the coach should support the client as they transition to another coach and/or allow for the cancellation of the coaching arrangement.

Discussion Points

- What boundaries can a coach put into place to avoid this kind of situation?
- If you were this coach's coach, mentor, or supervisor, how would you support the coach?
- Have you ever found yourself in a coaching relationship where a bias has come up?

Reference

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

